

# PIPING TODAY

## Police Scotland Fife Pipe Band

*Establishing their place in the top six*

**Grey's Notes**  
by Michael Grey  
*Nice!*

## British Pipe Band Championships

*Inveraray have the winning Paisley pattern*

**Theory top-up**  
by Tim Cummings  
*Writing harmonies 'of thirds'*

## There's life in the old pipes yet

*A love story*

*A Lament for Lady Frances Minto*  
*A Jack MacArthur Serial – Part 3*

**Keep yourself pipe-fit for years to come**



**Youngstars**

NYPBoS newsletter No. 82

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Pipe major Dougie Murray of  
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Photo: John Slavin@designfolk.com

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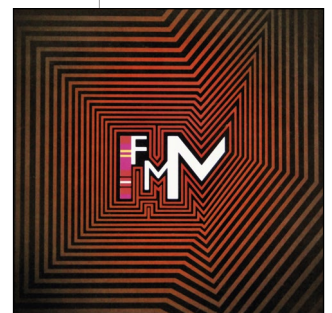
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ALBA | CHRUTHACHAIL

**I**T'S been a busy few months for me personally and for The National Piping Centre.

At the end of April, I had the privilege of playing at the Donald MacLeod MBE Memorial Piping Competition in Stornoway. The competition is run by the Lewis and Harris Piping Society with the strongest possible influence from Iain Morrison, who himself was one of Donald's students and is a custodian of Donald MacLeod's fantastic legacy of music.

The competition features eight invited players who have achieved competitive success through the previous year and each piper has to submit Donald MacLeod compositions for both Piobaireachd and Light Music. For me, there is hardly a more pleasurable way to pass the time than delving into the Donald MacLeod books and other sources where his music is published. It seems that each time I do, I find new gems. It would be hard to argue with any claim that holds Donald MacLeod up as our greatest composer of pipe music.

There is a wonderful atmosphere at the Donald MacLeod competition. It is warm and friendly and the audience shows an exuberance for music that spills over into the chorus of Gaelic song which can be heard to accompany pipers during tune-up sequences and at the post-competition ceilidh.

If you haven't been, then I urge you to take a trip to Stornoway. You will love the music, friendship and of course, the local gastronomic delicacy black pudding or "marag dhubh" if you want to practice a little Gaelic.

Mid-April we held our *Young Stars* spring piping school. This course is geared towards the 16 and under age group. In addition to group lessons from all of our teachers, the youngsters enjoyed workshops on a variety of topics, quizzes, DVDs and games designed to encourage confidence, teamwork and social interaction. I was really impressed with the standard and it was great to see all of the participants coming together on pipes for the final concert where they performed to a packed auditorium of family and friends. The *Young Stars* approach is definitely a winning formula and we look forward to our next event at the end of July.

This year, we reinstated our Italian Spring school partnership, working with the Italian Pipers Association. This was held from April 19-23 near the town of Porretta in the beautiful Emilia Romagna region of Italy. The course was limited to 22 students due to the constraints of the teaching and accommodation space and it was fully subscribed.

Teaching was provided by Wilson Brown, Alberto Massi and myself. Alberto has done so much for piping in Italy, travelling all over to reach his pupils and instil good habits into their playing. Standards are improving in Italy all the time and so it was a complete joy to be a part of this event. There is nothing quite like the Italian hospitality and the tremendous spirit of enthusiasm and fun which the students there bring to these events. The food, wine and beautiful scenery are, of course, worthy of great mention as the whole ambience just makes for a fantastic holistic musical experience. The Italian Gathering will be in September and plans are in progress for next year's spring school already.

Someone who has greatly enjoyed the Italian experience is Hamish Moore. It was at Italian Gatherings that Hamish, his son Fin and I were able to spend time together in the relaxed and fun atmosphere of these events. So, it was a pleasure to reconnect with Hamish at the Tradfest concert in Edinburgh that he organised at the end of April, entitled *Bagpipes Gu Leor*, loosely translated as many bagpipes. It was a concert designed to celebrate the diversity of instruments and styles within our bagpipe culture.

This was a great concert featuring pipers Allan MacDonald, Seonaidh MacIntyre, Angus MacKenzie, Fin Moore, Callum Armstrong, Brighde Chaimbeul and yours truly.

Congratulations to Hamish for assembling such a talented cast and for taking our music to a wider audience. It was a great success and you can hear it on the BBC Pipeline programme on catch-up.

Finally, we have been working like a very small army of ants here, putting in place the final preparations for *Piping Live!* This year's event was launched to the media on April 25. Every year we explore ideas which will get the attention of the media and this year we came up with the "Colossal Piper". At first, this sent shivers up my spine because I always remember with a good laugh the time I went to South Uist to do a piping recital. My auntie Joan from Benbecula came to the event and I had put on a few pounds in weight since she had last seen me. Her remarks which I remember with fondness were "God Roddy, you are colossal!" This didn't stop her trying to feed me up with more cakes and sandwiches on my visit. It still makes me smile.

Thankfully, the "Colossal Piper" was not a cruel image of me but a huge fabric image of a piper laid out on Glasgow Green and photographed and filmed from an aerial drone. It did the trick and we hit the press.

Tickets are already selling very well and can be bought from [www.pipinglive.co.uk](http://www.pipinglive.co.uk) where the event information is being added to daily. Should be another great year. ●

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



# Piping Live! is calling all pipers and drummers

**T**HE Glasgow International Piping Festival (August 7-13) is inviting you to take part in this year's *Piping Live! Big Band* – a spectacular parade to open this year's festival.

The *Piping Live!* Big Band will kick off at 11.30am on Monday, August 7, marching from Blythswood Square to George Square, playing a medley of some well-known traditional tunes and the performance will officially kick off *Piping Live!*

Last year's Big Band raised money for Asthma UK, to increase awareness of links between playing bagpipes and reducing symptoms of asthma.

And this year the band of 200 musicians will march in aid of the Glasgow Children's Hospital Charity, previously known as Yorkhill Hospital.

*Piping Live!* chose to support Glasgow Children's Hospital Charity to ensure that every young patient and their families have the best possible care and experience at the city's Royal Hospital for Children.

As the largest children's hospital in Scotland, 168,000 sick babies, children and young people from all over the country are treated at the hospital every year.

With the support of events like the *Piping Live!* Big Band, Glasgow Children's Hospital Charity are able to raise vital funds to provide enhanced medical equipment, family support services, innovative play sessions and groundbreaking research to help Scotland's children.

This year's Big Band chieftain will be Kami Bear – the official mascot of the charity – who will

be marching with the band as they make their way to George Square and take the salute.

*Piping Live!* is looking for players of all abilities – from beginner chanter players to world champions – as well as the general public to join forces and blow Glasgow away with an amazing performance while raising funds for the charity.

Pipers, snare, tenor, bass drummers and drum majors can register today to be part of the *Piping Live!* Big Band via [www.pipinglive.co.uk](http://www.pipinglive.co.uk).

There will be a £10 joining fee, with donations going to the Glasgow Children's Hospital Charity.

Roddy MacLeod, Festival Director of *Piping Live!*, said:

"Last year, the streets of Glasgow were filled with 100 bagpipers and drummers, piping up in aid of Asthma UK. The Big Band was a huge success and we raised over £500 for the charity.

"This year, we are going bigger and better with 200 marching in aid of Glasgow Children's Hospital Charity and we can't wait to see just as great a turnout for a very worthy cause.

"The work of everyone involved at the Glasgow Children's Hospital Charity is just incredible



**Glasgow Children's Hospital Charity**

Continuing the care of Yorkhill Children's Charity

and we're honoured to be able to contribute to their ongoing work."

*Piping Live!* Glasgow International Piping Festival is the biggest festival of its kind in the world and the week-long celebrations will see over 200 events take place in various venues across the city from August 7-13.

Its diverse programme is famed for bringing the best pipers and pipe bands in the world to Glasgow and 2017 is set to be outstanding, with acts including Peatbog Faeries, Battlefield Band and Tejedor topping the bill and many more to be announced in coming weeks.

The programme will also see performances by the very best international acts from countries such as Estonia, Argentina, Canada, Czech Republic, Northern Ireland, Australia and Italy, as well as numerous events including the fiercely contested Masters Solo, International Quartet and Pipe Idol competitions.

Tickets for *Piping Live!* are on sale now and available by logging on to [www.pipinglive.co.uk](http://www.pipinglive.co.uk)

Follow *Piping Live!* on Twitter: @GlasgowPiping or Facebook: PipingLiveFestival

# Atholl Gathering win for Angus

**A**NGUS MacColl had a successful debut at the Atholl Gathering on May 28 as he emerged as the overall winner, as well as winning the MSR and Hornpipe & Jig competitions. Full results below.

**Open Piobaireachd:** 1. David Wilton; 2. Angus MacColl; 3. Craig Sutherland; 4. Innes Smith; 5. Johnathan Greenlees.

**B Grade Piobaireachd:** 1. Charles MacDonald; 2. Calum Wynd; 3. John MacDonald; 4. Cameron MacDougall; 5. Eddie Gaul.

**C Grade Piobaireachd:** 1. Calum Brown; 2. Eireann Iannetta-MacKay; 3. John Cameron; 4. Dan Nevans; 5. William Waits.

**MSR:** 1. Angus D. MacColl; 2. Craig Sutherland; 3. David Wilton; 4. Graham Drummond; 5. Ben Duncan and Steven Leask.

**Hornpipe & Jig:** 1. Angus D. MacColl; 2. Steven Leask; 3. Graham Mullholland; 4. Craig Sutherland; 5. David Wilton.

**Overall Junior Winner:** Andrew Ferguson.

**Junior Piobaireachd:** 1. Andrew Ferguson; 2. Luke Kennedy; 3. Finlay Cameron; 4. John McLaren.

**Junior MSR:** 1. Brodie Watson-Massey; 2. Luke Kennedy; 3. Andrew Ferguson; 4. Douglas Mair.

**Junior Jig:** 1. Andrew Ferguson; 2. Brodie Watson-Massey; 3. Douglas Mair; 4. Luke Kennedy.



Photo: Derek Maxwell





# Police Scotland Fife

**T**HE Kingdom of Fife in the east of Scotland has long been home to some of the most celebrated names in pipe band history. Seventy years ago, Bowhill Colliery won the first Grade 1 Scottish Pipe Band Association World Championship, while Dysart & Dundonald won as much acclaim for their musical innovation under pipe major Bob Shepherd MBE as their back-to-back World titles in 1977-78.

Now in their tenth season of competition, the band closest to joining that elite club of winners is Police Scotland Fife, led by pipe major Douglas Murray and leading drummer Mick O'Neill. Prior to the band's formation in late 2007, Fife Constabulary was the only one of Scotland's formerly regional police services without its own pipe band, a situation then-Chief Constable Peter Wilson was keen to rectify.

At that time Douglas had just finished a three-year spell with Shotts & Dykehead Caledonia Pipe

Photo: John Stavrin@Designfolk Ltd



Band alongside his brother James and fellow front-rank piper Andrew Mathieson, having won the Worlds together in 2005. Chief Constable Wilson approached James and Andrew about forming a police band, which led to their appointment as pipe major and pipe sergeant respectively, with Douglas, Blair Porter and several other former Shotts players acting as a nucleus around which a new band could be built. Lee Innes took the helm of the drum corps.

While they initially planned to debut in Grade 2, it wasn't long before the Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association took the highly unusual step of putting the new band straight into Grade 1.

Douglas said: "We had played with Shotts and I had played with Dysart & Dundonald years ago, and we knew the standard it had to be to try and get into that top bracket. To take a collection of pipers and drummers from all different grades and bring them up and say this was the benchmark we had to get to was quite challenging, because we were

## *Establishing their place in the top six*

*'You never know how everyone's going to react in the competition scene. But we were really chuffed with the way it went, and the ball had started rolling*



Photo: Stuart Milne

Fife Constabulary Pipe Band, led by pipe major James Murray, in their very first outing at Dunbar in 2008

having to work a lot with players that hadn't experienced Grade 1 before. It was enjoyable as well, because you could see them progressing and getting better."

Fife Constabulary Pipe Band, as they were known until the amalgamation of Scotland's regional services into Police Scotland in 2013, competed for the first time on an uncharacteristically hot and sunny day at Dunbar on May 10, 2008, beating the Vale of Atholl to first prize.

Douglas said: "We came off after we had played and thought it had been pretty reasonable. You're always unsure how it's going to play out on the field, you never know how everyone's going to react in the competition scene. But we were really chuffed with the way it went, and the ball had started rolling."

Two weeks later the band came 11th out of 12 at the Scottish Championships in Dumbar-ton but earned sixth and eighth for piping. The drumming and ensemble results, the worst in the grade at the first major, began to improve ahead of the World Championships. First on in the morning qualifier ahead of Spirit of Scotland, which had coincidentally just formed as a Grade 1 band at about the same time, they played well enough to progress to the final, where a ninth in the Medley round helped them finish 12th out of 14 overall.

That achievement caught the attention of Mick O'Neill, then leading drummer of Clan Gregor Society Pipe Band, who that year finished two places above Fife in 10th.

Mick said: "James and I had become friendly some years before that at a judging thing over in Ireland. We got socialising together and found that we hit it off musically as much as anything



Mick O'Neill

Photo: John Stevin@Designfolk Ltd



Mick O'Neill with his drum corps at Dunbar Highland Games last month

*'...if the pipes are sounding good the drummers will get a better listen, that's just the way it is. There's no doubt that the pipers corps better, so it's easier for the drummers to tap along, as they say'*

else – we had a lot of the same musical ideas. We'd kept in contact ever since, and he approached me after the end of the first season of the band competing.

"They had done well because they qualified for the final of the World Championships at their first attempt, which was no mean feat at the time. It was a strong grade – there were a lot of very good bands missing out of that morning qualifier. It was obvious that there was a very good front end for sure. The back end was just coming together, but they'd got the band into the final as well, so all credit to Lee Innes and the guys that were there."

According to Douglas, James was attracted to something in Mick's drumming that reminded him of the brothers' earlier time with Dysart & Dundonald.

He said: "I think it was the style Mick was putting across, quite dynamic and effective, harking back to when we were in Dysart and James King and Willie Bell were the leading drummers – these guys were quite dynamic with their playing as well. I think there was a bit of that in the back of our minds that we saw in Mick and his corps."

Mick had helped Clan Gregor become an established force in Grade 1, qualifying for the Worlds Final every year following their promotion campaign in 2003 and breaking into the prize list at only their third major in the top flight. He had experience with other civilian bands including Newtongrange and Drambuie Kirkliston, but cut his teeth as a leading drummer in the Scots Guards. After training at the famous Guards Depot Piping School, he served in the 1st Battalion

alongside the likes of Brian Donaldson, Peter McInnes and former Johnstone pipe major Keith Bowes snr, competing in Grade 1 until leaving the army after eight years in 1993.

Mick said: "Any good pipe band has got to have discipline and regular continuity in the way that they work so that the people behind and under you know what to expect and that they're going to get regular consistent help with their playing, which is what makes organisational skills extremely important when you're leading an outfit like this. I certainly got all of those things from my military background, but as much as anything else I learned to play properly."

Over the course of his military and civilian career, Mick has worked with a substantial number of pipe majors, and found each have brought their own individual qualities to the partnership.

He said: "I would say that it's not necessarily the personality of the person that always comes out in the way they play their music, they can be quite different. Peter McInnes was a very knowledgeable guy and had a great ear for sound. I always say that sound is the key at the end of the day – if the pipes are sounding good the drummers will get a better listen, that's just the way it is. There's no doubt that the pipers corps better, so it's easier for the drummers to tap along, as they say.

"James and Douglas in many ways have a lot of similarities, but they're very different as well. They're both laid back in terms of their character but not in the way they play their music, which is quite driven."

Photo: Stuart Milne

*‘...we had done Celtic Connections in January of that year, and I would say the band was as ready for the season as ever, more prepared than we had been in the two previous years’*

Mick's first season as leading drummer in 2009 saw an immediate improvement, with the band finishing just outside the prize list in most majors that campaign and the next. Their first breakthrough came in 2011, finishing sixth on a washout of a day at Dumbarton and winning fifth prize at the Europeans in July.

Mick said: “It would be fair to say we were bridesmaids quite a few times – we were seventh a lot – and we kept knocking and knocking on the door and eventually got it. What helped us that season was we had done Celtic Connections in January of that year, and I would say the band was as ready for the season as ever, more prepared than we had been in the two previous years. Having to be ready in the third week of January certainly had a big impact on the band. Being asked to put on 40 minutes of music was huge, and something we had never tackled before.”

At the end of that season James took the opportunity to move to Australia, where he is now pipe major of Western Australia Police Pipe Band. He was succeeded by Andrew Mathieson, who led Fife to consistent finishes just outside the prize list in 2012, before resigning mid-way through the 2013 campaign due to increasing commitments to his family and other aspects of his life. He is now in charge of Bowhill & District Pipe Band, runners-up in Grade 4A at this year's British Championships.

Douglas and Andrew had planned to make the transition at the end of the season but the arrangement was moved forward, and Douglas led the band out at the final two majors.

He said: “When I took the band over, we actually lost a lot of players at the end of that season, just through guys deciding they'd had enough and they were retiring. We also lost three or four good players who were students and heavily committed to exams and fourth-year studies. I lost about ten players and I brought in eight over the winter, a lot of whom were Grade 4/Juvenile players. We had a hard winter and a hard year that first season, because we never qualified for the Worlds Final.”

While the band experienced that disappointment for the first time and would again miss out the following year, in September 2014 Douglas became the eleventh piper in history and first for 15 years to win the Gold Medal double at the Argyllshire Gathering and Northern Meeting.

“It was huge,” Douglas said.

“I had been competing in the Gold Medal for about 14 years, and I'd had about seven or eight prizes throughout that time – a fourth or a sixth or something. In 2013 I had gotten two seconds, and I thought if it wasn't going to happen I would give it up. The next year I went out and managed to get the two firsts, which was totally unexpected. My wife will tell you I was constantly practising that year. After the Worlds I had a week and a half to get ready for the first Gold Medal, and it worked just right.”



A very wet day at the Scottish Pipe Band Championships in Dumbarton in 2011, where the band placed sixth in Grade I

Photo: John Slavin@Designfolk Ltd



Former pipe major James Murray at the Celtic Connections concert in 2011

Photo: John Slavin@Designfolk Ltd

The following summer Douglas guided Fife back into the Worlds Final, placing ninth.

They began the 2016 season with their first major international trip in April, playing in the Virginia International Tattoo in the USA and competing in the accompanying Grade 1 contest against Inveraray & District, Toronto Police and Peel Regional Police.

While the tattoo was a new undertaking for the band, snare drummer Craig Baxter was used to such occasions from his time with the National

Youth Pipe Band of Scotland, where he is now drum sergeant of the senior band.

Craig said: “It was really hard going, we played about seven or eight shows over the week. We also went to a couple of schools in the local area and got to play for the kids and take their questions about the kilts and the music. They got to have a shot of the drums and pipes as well. One of the schools was in quite a deprived area, and we were told by the teachers it was the first time the pupils had seen any sort of live music performed for them. It was brilliant – I think they were a bit taken aback by the noise and the whole presentation at first, but they seemed to really enjoy it. Quite a lot of them got to come to see the show as well, which was really cool. It was an amazing experience.”

While UK bands are well used to soldiering on with a competition whatever the weather, the extremes of the North American climate required an abrupt intervention on the day of the outdoor contest.

Craig said: “When we played the MSR in the morning it was absolutely roasting weather. Then the clouds started to come in a bit, and we thought it was fine, since we’re pretty used to that. Then just before we went on to play the medley, they said we had to go inside because there was a hurricane warning. That was a different sort of competition experience from what we’re used to, we had to play in the stadium where they had the tattoo. I think the pipers were a bit annoyed they had to make some adjustments, but we got through it in the end.”

Back on home soil, the domestic season began with two ninths and an eighth at the first three majors, before the band ended their five-year absence from the prize list with a sixth at the Scottish Championships, finishing as runners-up in the drumming standings. Two weeks later, another second for drumming in the MSR round of the final helped Police Scotland Fife to their first-ever prize at the World Championships, finishing sixth overall.

Craig said: “I think we were all absolutely delighted, and pretty shocked as well. We’d been quite happy with how we were playing as we were progressing through the season, but obviously it’s very hard to crack the top six with so many good well-established bands in there. It was great just to see all the hard work we’d been putting in paying off.”

Mick said: “I think you can probably hear on the BBC coverage that we were fairly chuffed. We’ve just worked extremely hard. The band’s



Photo: Stuart Millie

Pipe major Andrew Mathieson with Bowhill & District Pipe Band at the British Championships last month



Photo: Stuart Millie

Craig Baxter

been really committed and attendance has been excellent for the most part. We’ve got a lot of good young players who wanted to learn from Douglas. A double Gold Medal speaks for itself – you’re going to learn from the guy. He and his team have worked really hard with the front end and we’ve tried to do the same with the back

end. We’ve been fortunate to pick up some pretty talented boys and girls.

“The other thing that we’ve got is a number of kids I’ve taught to hold sticks from when they were eight years old from my job at George Watson’s College, so that’s also been quite prolific for us. My daughter Chelsea plays in the bass section now. Throughout the nine seasons that I’ve played here, we’ve had a steady stream of Watson’s pupils playing in the corps.”

The partnership between Mick and the three pipe majors he has worked with at Fife has been key to building the band’s success over the last decade. Now in his fourth full season in charge, Douglas has been able to put into practice many aspects of running a pipe band he and James picked up much earlier in their piping careers.

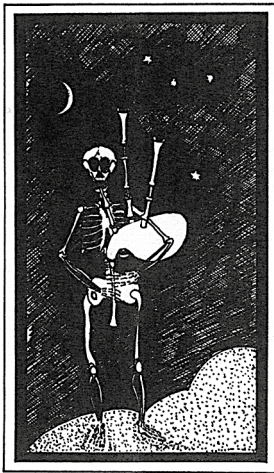
He said: “When I was only 11 years old our father brought us down to Cardenden to Bob Shepherd’s Dysart & Dundonald but I was too young to get in, so I was put into Ballingry School at that time, which then became Lochgelly High School. We learned a lot because Bob was very much into ensemble and how the whole thing comes together. We saw a lot of things there that we’d never seen before.

“I played three years with Shotts, James was slightly longer and Andrew was even longer, maybe seven or eight years. For me, the big thing I learned from Shotts was how Robert Mathieson was approaching the sound, and medley construction as well. He very much let Jim Kilpatrick MBE do his thing, and the tunes were chosen to complement a lot of what Jim was doing, which is what I’ve tried to do with Mick and the corps. I could see there was a lot of good stuff at the back end of the band that really needed to be highlighted.”

Mick added: “When you start off trying to put a medley together, it sometimes feels like a daunting prospect because you’re starting from a blank canvas, but it’s actually quite nice as well. There are so many brilliant tunes out there – right now there’ll be a brilliant tune getting composed somewhere that you can use. A lot of the folky stuff is coming into pipe bands as

*'I think the guys got a bit nervous when they got to the line...but the team recovered well for the British'*

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well, and the musicality of the bands now is great. To be competitive in the top grade you've got to be on board with that.

"If Douglas has sent me an idea for a melody, when I hear it for the first time I'm already thinking about how to bring in the harmony if there's one coming, since that would affect what I was doing with the drum corps and how I was going to layer up the bass section. As the leading drummer in this band, I write the whole drum score – I write the bass section line and split it. If I've got an idea that might be slightly funky or off-the-wall, I'll ask Douglas what he thinks about it. We'll always be hitting off each other with things like that."

Police Scotland Fife have continued their competitive momentum into the 2017 season, winning fifth prize at the British Championships in Paisley. That result means they have now placed at three consecutive majors for the first time in their history. Many of their Grade 1 competitors have taken far longer to get to this level, but just ten years after their founding, Fife are well on their way to becoming established figures in the top six.

Douglas said: "The build-up before we went on to play at our first contest of the season at Dunbar was very good, but I think the guys got a bit nervous when they got to the line, being our first shot out and

playing in the blustery conditions, but the team recovered well for the British.

"Mick and I were delighted with the result from Paisley. We had a good build-up to playing on the day and all the team were working well together.

"We are now building towards the UK Championships in Northern Ireland and working hard on medleys.

"For me, the band is not the finished article, but a work-in-progress to something which is not far away." ●



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## NYPBoS Question time with...

PIPER

# CONNOR JARDINE

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

I am from Airdrie and I am 19.

**Q. How did you get into piping and when?**

I was interested in piping initially from my grandfather and I began learning at Glenboig Pipe Band, who were a local village pipe band where my mum's family are from. My grandfather used to teach me the scales on his old chanter and we would have competitions to see who could blow the chanter for the longest.

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

My tutor is Ross Cowan, who is pipe major of North Lanarkshire Schools Pipe Band. I was a member of North Lanarkshire Schools for five years. I currently play with Inveraray and District.

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

I would practise daily for just over an hour, split between band and solo work, with band practice twice a week for two hours.

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

My biggest strong points would be that I am not afraid to work hard to improve my shortcomings and I am also very lucky to have two very good sets of pipes for band and solos.

**Q. What do you want to achieve in piping?**

Mostly just to enjoy my piping. Placing and winning competitions is good, however, it is much more enjoyable being able to play good music and perform at the highest level.





All photos: John Siavini@Designfolk Ltd

Connor, fourth from the right, with his Inveraray bandmates approaching the line at the British Championships in Paisley last month

**Q. What is your favourite tune and why?**

My favourite piobaireachd would be *Catherine's Lament* and my favourite band medley is the 2016 Inveraray medley.

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

For band, I play a set of Nairns with sheepskin and cane, and for solos I play a 1920s set of Lawries with a synthetic bag.

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

The 2014 trip to the Basel Christmas Tattoo. It was hard work and having all-day practices was a shock to the system. It was my first trip abroad and was very enjoyable to be exposed to the wide variety of different musicians who were also performing. Outwith performing, the Christmas Markets were good to have a wander through most days.

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

My favourite part of being in the NYPBoS is that it allows me to see my friends regularly who otherwise I wouldn't normally see for many months between band or solo competitions.

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

They would say that I am very straight to the point and that when there are newer members, I always make an effort to speak to them and make them feel welcome in the band.

**Q. What is the secret of your success?**

I work hard and practise the aspects that I'm not very good at.

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

The Inveraray uniform, of course.

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

Performing at weddings pays very well, also, piping has provided me with the opportunity to travel the world and to make many friendships that I would not have made if I was not a piper.

**Q. Do you have any pre-performance rituals?**

Arrive early and don't tune for longer than is necessary.

**Q. Who is your pipe idol?**

Alasdair Henderson

**Q. What are your interests outside of piping?**

Piping is my main interest, but I also enjoy reading as well as developing different technological games and software applications.

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

I am studying electronic and software engineering at Glasgow University. So a career in this field would be perfect.

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

My Spotify is mostly piping but I am also a fan of tropical house music.

**Q. Who are your heroes?**

My dad and grandad. My dad never misses a competition or contest and my grandad was always very supportive of my piping. He would have pictures of me and the band on his phone and would proudly show every person he met.

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

I'm not very sporty, however I support the Scottish national football team and Bayern Munich.

**Q. Do you prefer sweet or savoury?**

Sweet (lots of) ●

*“Mind aw they adverts for animal shelters?  
The ones wi’ wee sad lookin’ dugs an’ that?  
That’s wit they pipes looked like when  
ah first clapped eyes on them”*

Dan Nevans, to anyone who would listen, February 2017



**S**TOP reading this article. You’re not ready.  
Take five minutes and get a cup of tea. Put your feet up.  
This is going to get weird.

I don’t really have a religious opinion. I don’t know if there is an all-powerful creator being managing the to and fro of the universe. To be honest, if there is I’d rather keep out of its way, lest interactions with the divine interfere with my piping. Saying that though, there have been a few times where I have felt “the trousers of time” funnel open and send me down one leg rather than another. One of those times happened just at the end of January during a Piping School meeting here at The National Piping Centre.

Piping School meetings are very important as they allow us, the teaching staff, to discuss our projects with colleagues and management in a formal yet supportive environment. There is an agenda to be followed and the fruits of creativity regularly spring from it.



by Dan Nevans

*There's life in the  
old pipes yet:*

A LOVE STORY



At this particular meeting I had quite a lot to report as the Evening/Weekend class programme, of which I am the coordinator, had just begun its winter term, the HNC music theory class I teach had just sat their second round of exams and I had some positive news from Hutchesons' Grammar school where I teach on a Friday. From Hutchesons', I was pleased to report that three of my chanter pupils were just about ready to move on to pipes but there was a small problem.

Literally.

I am particularly proud of this trio of pupils as they have done so well having been playing for under a year and had put in an almost Herculean effort. In fact, I had begun teaching them the basics of piobaireachd technique to try to slow them down a little but they achieved the level required to make a start on to pipes. The issue was physicality, none of the three were taller than 4ft 5 (a little over a metre for our metric readers). So full-sized pipes would be too difficult to manage but regular readers of *Piping Today* must be scratching at their beards and chewing the stem of their pipes thinking, "Dan, what about the sets of pipes donated by the Jewish Boys' and Girls' Brigade from the last issue?"

Well, there you are, right again. Well done.

Where was I?...

Oh yes.

I asked and received permission to set up one of the three-quarter size pipes donated to allow a smoother transition on to the full-sized pipes for these smaller than normal pipers. I am very grateful to our Principal Roddy MacLeod for letting me use this resource as it is paying dividends as we speak. I popped into our museum and started looking through boxes. I found a set of three-quarter Robertson's with wooden mounts and only some superficial damage. These pipes required very little work to get going again — a liberal application of bore oil and poly resin to get the pipes living again and seal up cracks.

The ancient Greek's had four types of love: "eros" — go listen to *Whole lotta Rosie* by AC/DC, "phileo" — platonic friendly love, "agape" — unconditional comforting and supportive love and "storge" — the love for family. I opened an old wooden pipe case in the back of The Museum of Piping and fell in agape with a set of half ivory Henderson's in wicked, disgusting form. It seems awful to quote one's



*I suppose this is a guide to restoring pipes on a budget... let me assure you I didn't run into it without considering the danger.*

self in the beginning of an article that's about yourself but my opening statement is fundamentally true. Why did I bother bringing these pipes back to life?

Someone, at some point, was caught in the glorious folds of agape with this instrument. They were a trusted friend and companion. Considering where they came from, these pipes have likely had a couple of masters already. Call me a romantic fool but I feel like our instrument takes on a spark of life. Not just a tool for releasing the artistic qualities of the player but also an aspect of humanity is taken on by the wood.

Sometimes...

Sometimes it's more than wood and ivory. Sometimes it's alive.

That life seemed to call out to me from the dust at the bottom of that old wooden box. They called out and said: "I still have something left to give. Put me on your shoulder. I can be relied upon. I have waited for so long to sing again."

Disclaimer — a statement that denies something, especially responsibility.

Proclaimers — A set of Edinburgh born twins. Famous for disastrously catchy Scotpop shenanigans. Popular at New Year and inexplicably in Canada.

My disclaimer — I am going to explain to you how I got these pipes going again. I am NOT telling you to do anything. I am NOT advising you to reclaim pipes with any of the

techniques I describe. If you choose to replicate any of this THAT IS YOUR CHOICE AND RESPONSIBILITY.

Now that's taken care of, I can tell you about all the negligence and black magic I employed in getting these pipes going.

As you can see from the picture at the top of the page, the poor things were ragged and dry. In fact every ferrule, save on what became the middle tenor stock, dropped off in my hands. When dealing with pipes in a situation like this common sense says you must list the problems. Are there any cracks in the wood that would make the pipe unstable? Do you have all the pieces? Are all the projecting mounts, bushings and ferrules intact and secure? If the answer to any of these is yes then you're going to have some work to do.

I suppose this is a guide to restoring pipes on a budget really. You'll have noticed by now that I'm not using any particularly specialised materials on these pipes. The next step is a little off-kilter but let me assure you I didn't run into it without considering the danger.

I, like many, own a deep fryer. The deep fryer runs on canola oil because it has a high boiling point and you can get your chicken wings really crispy. A lot of R&D went into that discovery. I tell you this to explain why I happened to have five gallons of canola oil in the cupboard at home.

Why canola oil and not say, almond oil Dan?





Well, like almond oil, canola oil is a curing oil. This means that when it dries, canola oil hardens. For this kind of sensitive work, a curing oil is the best and as stated, I happened to have five gallons of it in the house. In the photo above, you'll see that I had a freezer bag holding a bin liner filled with the oil. I submerged the pipes, every part, in this oil bath for a whole week. It was very important to me that the pipes were soaking for that long, I know I could have just run oil through the bores and a little on the outside and made do but I was INCREDIBLY PARANOID that I would crack something and then get in trouble.

At the end of the week of waiting, I pulled the drones alone from the oil and cleaned off the excess. You do have to leave them at least overnight to settle before starting to do anything with them. I packed the bores with kitchen towels and wrapped them up quite tight in an effort to remove any greasy surface areas.

I realised quite quickly that the reason folks don't use canola oil for this task is because it smells really strongly. My pipe case smelled like a chip shop for two weeks till I Febreezed every inch of it.

Because so many of the ferrules had detached from the wood, I took the opportunity to clean them off. There's a guy on YouTube

*'My heart soared at the sound... right away from the first tone, I knew there was magic there'*

called Irish Mike who makes Big Giant Swords and I watch every episode, some are incredibly detailed and Irish Mike is pretty entertaining himself. In the show when Mike needs to remove the scale from steel, he soaks the piece overnight in a vinegar bath and this allows him to wash off the rust/scale with little to no effort.

I was desperate for a go at that.

In the photo below you can see the ferrules were simply submerged in malt vinegar (I just used the bottle itself rather than decanting the whole thing) and washed the next day

with cold water and kitchen towels. The other reason I used this method is because using polishing chemicals such as Brasso would not have



removed the rust entirely, they would only have cleaned up around it, leaving awkward looking green stains on the metal. To attach the ferrules, I used beeswax and yellow hemp to get a tight but movable fit on the section. Once that was done, I used a very small amount of Loctite glue to secure the ferrule in place.

At this point I had essentially a set of drones ready to go. I used black waxed hemp instead of dry hemp and beeswax because I wanted to keep the look of the slide-less pins as dark as possible. Once the turning joints were ready, I hemped the bottom joints into the stocks on my solo pipes and, using the same reeds, finally got a sound out of a set of drones that were silent for decades.

The tone...

My heart soared at the sound. Yes, I have had to tinker with the drone reeds to get the very best sound I can but right away from the first tone, I knew there was magic there. I am pleased to say that, at the time of writing, I have now started using the original stocks and played these pipes in competition and received extremely positive comments about them.

So here I am, head over heels in agape with an instrument that has been much loved in the past and I like to think has found a new "forever home" with me.

What about the Jewish Lads' and Girls' Brigade? Good question. Well, in truth, a set of half-ivory Henderson's from the early part of the last century is probably not the best instrument for a young person to start with. The National Piping Centre doesn't really deal in vintage pipes so a deal has been worked out that I will purchase an equivalent instrument that would be more suitable for a young piper and donate that back to The National Piping Centre.

I feel like I've been dropped a boon by the universe and I appreciate my luck in finding these pipes. I had always wanted to play with a set of vintage pipes and to have the opportunity to just get them going, regardless of playing them in competition, was a privilege. I look forward to using these pipes for many years to come. ●

## COMPETITION LEAGUE FOR AMATEUR SOLO PIPERS

# 10 questions with Colin Taylor

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

Originally from Easterhouse in Glasgow but I didn't start playing until living in England around 2004 aged 35.

**Q. How did you get into piping?**

After watching the Edinburgh Military Tattoo on TV, I got nostalgic and homesick. So I found a local pipe band 20 minutes from my home and walked in with chanter in hand and blank look on my face.

**Q. Have you had any pipe band experience?**

I started as a learner with Reading Scottish Pipe Band doing street parades and some local competitions but developed a desire to focus more on competitive solo and band piping. I then moved to University of Bedfordshire Pipe Band where we finished third in the Worlds Grade 4A in my first season in 2013.

Over the next few seasons the band entered a transition period, changing playing members, and restructuring so that we now fall in line with

the City of London organisation. It is an exciting time as we work together to promote piping and drumming in the south of England.

**Q. Do you have a regular tutor/practice routine?**

I have weekly lessons with highly respected judge and tutor Hugh Jamieson and we work on all aspects of piping for both light music and piobaireachd. Under his guidance, my piping has improved immensely in past few years. The south of England is not overrun with piping instructors, so I am hugely grateful that he took me under his wing. Also Hugh's wife Lynda bakes excellent cakes.

**Q. Have you found a time where piping has taken a backseat in your life?**

I have a very stressful job working for a major international organisation and I spend a lot of time away from home. Every time I have a consistent spell and make good steady progress, another trip away intervenes. This is when close working with my tutor really helps to have an action plan for those times when I'm away.

**Q. You have competed in CLASP for a few seasons now. Have you noticed a difference in your piping since joining CLASP?**

Hugely. The competitions are far enough apart to work on weaknesses between them but close enough together to keep the drive and focus going. Also I learnt my first piobaireachd "just to get a Clasp grading" but I am now beginning to enjoy the art form and can "feel the music in it". This really is where a good instructor is invaluable.

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

I think main strengths are desire to improve and I think my playing is very musical. Weaknesses are strictly playing to the beat, especially on fast tunes, being a late starter means that the fingers don't always want to do as they are told.

**Q. What CD/track are you listening to at the moment?**

*Bagpipe Revolution* by Jori Chisholm or anything by the incredible Gordon Duncan.

**Q. What are your goals for the future?**

To be the best player I can be, limited only by ability, and not by lack of effort.

**Q. Anything of interest that your fellow CLASP competitors do not know about you?**

I was very lucky with Reading Scottish Pipe Band to join André Rieu onstage at the O2, and also played the closing ceremony of the 2012 London Olympics – a true once-in-a-lifetime experience. ●

Colin receives his Overall Grade 3 medal for 2015/2016 season from the CLASP sponsor, Craig Munro, of Wallace Bagpipes.



Photo: John Stavin@Designfolk Ltd

# Inveraray have the wi

BRITISH PIPE BAND CHAMIONSIPS 2017



Photo: John Shawin@Designfolk Ltd.

# inning Paisley pattern

by Stuart Milne



**C**OULD the sun not have come out a little earlier? Six hours earlier, perhaps?

While the marchpast at the British Championships in Paisley on May 20 basked in a warm evening glow that set all those freshly polished pipes and shiny new drums a-sparkling, the first major of the 2017 season was, for the most part, a chilly one. Although the showers predicted for most of the day were only inflicted upon those unlucky enough to be playing at around 11.30, conditions were mostly cool and blustery until the late afternoon, when the weather finally remembered it was summertime.

The dreich forecast may have played its part in the seemingly low public turnout, despite every effort of Renfrewshire Council to provide free entry, free programmes and shuttle buses from the town centre and the car park next to St Mirren's football ground. Or perhaps the good people of Paisley, nerves shattered by a season of supporting the Buddies through their miraculous escape from relegation from Scottish football's second tier, simply needed a relaxing weekend on the sofa?

Whatever the reason, the spacious St James Playing Fields felt oddly empty and the atmosphere flat for most of the day. The M8



Pipe major Ryan Canning with Shotts & Dykehead Caledonia Pipe Band

overpass and regular air traffic from Glasgow Airport, which for once replaced the yatter of so-called spectators as the most irksome interference with listening to a contest, made for poor substitutes for the spectacular trees surrounding Grant Park in distant Forres. There could be no greater contrast in glamour and convenience between two major championship venues.

The upside of the sparse attendance was that it was very easy to grab a prime listening spot for the largest Grade 1 competition outside the World Championships since 2012. The 14-strong UK and Ireland field, enlarged by the off-season upgrade of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, Johnstone and Buchan Peterson, was bolstered by the visit of both top-tier bands from British Columbia: Simon Fraser University and Dowco Triumph Street.

At the end of the two-and-a-half-hour March, Strathspey & Reel contest, last year's champions Inveraray & District succeeded in defending their title, besting Field Marshal Montgomery by seven points to eight. Whereas many of their competitors struggled to nail their premium sound in the day's mostly cold conditions, it would take a weather event straight out of a Roland Emmerich disaster film to throw either of these bands off their game. However, while the quality of tone and playing was just what we have come to expect from these bands, neither performance was free of errors. Inveraray's missed attack in the pipe corps was not audible from the front, but the squeak of trailing drones at the end was; while Field Marshal Montgomery earned a third for drumming despite a dropped stick early in the strathspey.

No such issues noticeably affected Shotts & Dykehead Caledonia, who finished eight points behind Field Marshal in third place. A slightly imprecise break into *The Smith of*



Pipe major Stuart Liddell of Inveraray & District Pipe Band

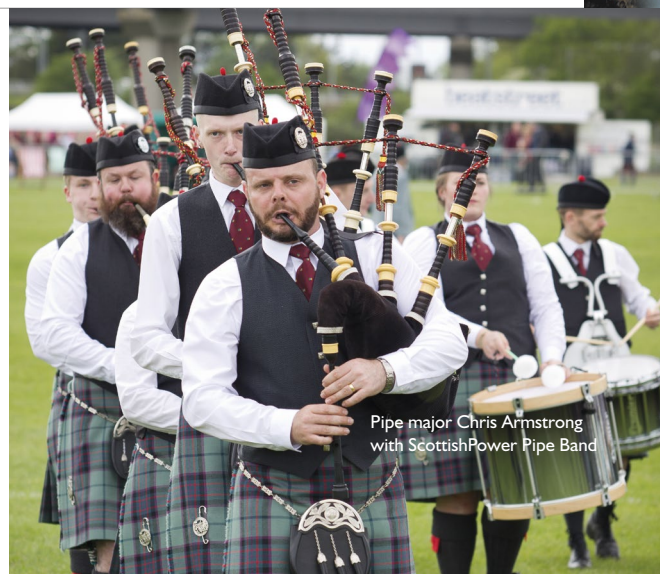


Pipe major Richard Parkes MBE with Field Marshal Montgomery Pipe Band

St Laurence O'Toole came close behind in fourth place. Their aggressive approach to the strathspey and reel tempo will please those who have commented online recently about MSRs being played too slowly, although their drone sound was not as spot-on as usual. Stephen Creighton's corps added the drumming prize to last season's World title with an unusually small snare line of seven, plus the six tenors and bass. Given that Grade 1 bands have just

*Chilliechassie* was the only obvious defect in a performance that showed off the sweetness in tone, tightness in playing and strength of expression that characterise this pipe corps after four reasons of moulding by pipe major Ryan Canning.

about doubled in size over the last two decades, is it time for a proper debate about the optimum ratio of drummers to pipers? The rest of the season will tell us if SLOT's contrarian approach to the numbers game turns out to be the way forward.



Pipe major Chris Armstrong with ScottishPower Pipe Band



Pipe major Alen Tully with St Laurence O'Toole Pipe Band

All photos: John Savin@Designfolk Ltd

Police Scotland Fife matched their previous record of fifth place at the European Championships in 2011, achieving their highest-ever placings for piping with a third and a fourth. While their drum corps, runners-up at the Scottish Championships and the MSR round of the Worlds Final in 2016, fell to an uncharacteristically low 12th place, there can be no doubt that the return of Douglas Murray and Mick O'Neill's band to the prize list at the end of last season was no fluke.

ScottishPower rounded off the top six. They were sounding terrific in final tuning a week earlier at Gourrock but could not sustain their drone sound in the circle; this time the drones stayed solid but it was chanter issues that let them down, "D"s especially. However, Jake Jorgensen's drummers continued their fine start to the season after beating Inveraray's 2016 Champion of Champions drum corps on opening weekend, placing fourth.

Inevitably for a 16-strong contest, there were always going to be bands with top-six ambitions facing disappointment. Peoples Ford – Boghall & Bathgate Caledonia began the new campaign by continuing their run of seventh-place finishes under pipe major Ross Harvey. There has been little noticeable drop in quality in Boghall's performances since the retirement of Harvey's predecessor Ross Walker, now training as an adjudicator, but an early chanter perhaps proved costly on this occasion.

Dowco Triumph Street have qualified for the Worlds Final every time they have made the trip since 2009, and signalled their intentions to climb higher with the headline-grabbing off-season appointment of leading drummer Gary Corkin, who led the Royal Ulster Constabulary drum corps to the World title in 2000. Naturally, Triumph Street's drumming was the focus of attention at Paisley.

Anyone who has heard the new corps in person, or in recordings from the British Columbia indoor competition, will recognise Corkin's dextrous and fluid style that made the RUC so successful, but the pitch of the side drums was remarkably flat compared to what we have become used to in recent years, and along with the bass and tenors, seemed to be light on projection when heard through the pipe corps head-on. Still, it appeared to work, a fifth for drumming helping the band to eighth place overall, leaving Triumph Street without a top-six breakthrough, but presumably far happier on the long flight home to Vancouver than their near neighbours.

For the best part of 30 years, Simon Fraser University's place in the prize list on their trips to Scotland was as certain as death, taxes and rain at Gourrock, but while their dominance

*Johnstone's remarkable rise from Grade 3A under the Bowes family and leading drummer Les Galbraith continued with a top-ten finish, resplendent in their new (very) Blue MacKay kilts'*



Johnstone Pipe Band

at home has continued, Alan Bevan's band have struggled to maintain the Transatlantic form that won them six World titles under ex-pipe major Terry Lee. It was difficult to tell if the issue was caused by one malfunctioning instrument at the front of the band or if the tune-up just didn't go to plan, but a major drone problem throughout the performance doomed SFU to 12th place, a catastrophic result by their high standards.

As with Boghall, it would be unfair to say the dip in results is due entirely to new pipe majors needing time to settle in – both bands are justly famous for the quality of their drums corps, but have fallen in the standings recently



Pipe major Scott Oliphant with Buchan Peterson Pipe Band

as others have come to the fore, with Boghall and SFU finishing ninth and tenth for drumming respectively at Paisley.

Still, it is worth remembering that SFU have been in a similar, if rather less sobering, position before, when they last visited the British Championships in 2006 and finished sixth. This setback prompted a well-known overhaul of their pipe sound in time for the Worlds that year, where they won the piping in

the Medley event to help them to second place overall. An even greater comeback is required this time, but the knowledge that it can be done will be the only consolation the band can take from this trip.

Among the bands to beat SFU were two of the three newcomers to the top flight, Johnstone in 10th and PSNI in 11th, while Buchan Peterson finished 14th thanks to an eighth for drumming, the best result from a band from the north-east of Scotland at a major in Grade 1 in well over a decade. PSNI had enjoyed the best start to the campaign by beating Field Marshal Montgomery for drumming to finish third out of five at Bangor, while Johnstone and Buchan just barely saw off Grade 2 competition at Gourock and Banchory respectively. Nevertheless, all three bands acquitted themselves admirably, despite mistakes from PSNI in their march and Buchan in their reel. PSNI kicked off the contest with panache, putting out a big, bold and clean sound that held better than some bands that finished above them. Buchan's ensemble, perhaps their greatest asset in their championship-winning years in Grade 2, was on full display, in no small part due to Brian



Pipe major Alan Bevan with Simon Fraser University Pipe Band



Leading drummer Eric Ward with Bleary & District Pipe Band

Their long-serving former leading drummer Eric Ward has taken over Bleary & District's corps from the retired David Brown, and while there are fewer pipers at this early stage than last year, Ward has a lot of drummers to work with. Bleary enjoyed a solid first season back in Grade 1 in 2016 without always hitting the same consistency of performance that won them majors in Grade 2, and they are capable of playing and placing better than 15th.



Pipe major Iain MacPherson of Glasgow Police Pipe Band

All photos: John Slavin@Designfolk Ltd



Pipe major Samuel Connelly with Ravara Pipe Band

Martin's powerful drum corps.

Johnstone's remarkable rise from Grade 3A under the Bowes family and leading drummer Les Galbraith continued with a top-10 finish, resplendent in their new (very) Blue MacKay kilts. They also coped well with the difficult conditions early in the draw and the pipers kept their finger work tighter than their last run-out, although many will criticise their delivery of *John Morrison of Assynt House* as too slow. The senior band's streak of World Championship wins will now surely stop at three, but on this early evidence, all three promoted bands have much to offer Grade 1.

Two famous names that have been at this level for much longer took ninth and 13th place: Vale of Atholl and Glasgow Police, both subject to significant off-season changes. Adrian Hoy helped Cullybackey to six straight trips to the Worlds Final, which

the Vale have failed to qualify for since Paul Turner's retirement as leading drummer in 2010. Hoy has arrived as their fifth lead tip in seven seasons, and is clearly having an immediate impact, with the Vale making the top six in drumming. Combining this early success with a robust pipe corps, ending the band's absence from the Worlds Final is an achievable target for this year, with stability at the back end vital for future success.

Greater Glasgow Police Scotland never exactly rolled off the tongue, but the re-branding into Glasgow Police, as they were known when they won World titles in 1949 and 1951, is the least important change to the band since last season. A new leading drummer in David Henderson and an overhaul of the membership and setup of the pipe corps have meant wholesale alterations to many aspects of this band, and it appears more time is needed for everything to settle.

Ravara were left adrift at the bottom of the table in 16th place. While they began their current spell in the premier grade in fine fashion in 2012, momentum seems to have shifted to other bands in their native Northern Ireland, although pipe major Samuel Connelly has decades of experience to draw upon to keep Ravara on the right track.

With the top of Grade 2 reset by the promotion of the three leading bands in recent seasons, there was much talk in the winter about a straight title-fight between Lomond & Clyde and the Glasgow Skye Association this campaign. That prediction is so far proving to be exactly right, with Lomond & Clyde winning their second Grade 2 championship and first under pipe major David Wilton,

with Ewan Henderson's Glasgow Skye Association finishing a whopping 14 points ahead of Dundee's Mackenzie Caledonian in third place. Balagan, who have members from Scandinavia, Scotland, Germany and Austria, recovered from their disappointing showing at last year's World Championships to match their fourth prize from the 2016 Europeans. Closkelt, low on numbers but high in quality, came fifth, while a first for piping helped Bucksburn & District to their first top-six finish at a major in Grade 2 since 2006. In a remarkable display of resilience, Manorcunningham won Best Drum Corps in their first major back in competition after a year away, and could have finished higher than seventh overall had it not been for a missed attack in the pipe corps.



Alan Laird, leading drummer with Manorcunningham



Manorcunningham Pipe Band

Dumbarton & District were also back in the second tier after a two-year sabbatical, now led by brothers William and James Brown. Paisley was the first outdoor competition for the newly-formed City of London Pipe Band, combining members from the University of Bedfordshire, RAF Waddington/Halton and Pride of Murray bands in the South of England. Iain Westgate's band turned heads with a lively interpretation of *Lord Alexander Kennedy* to open their medley when recordings circulated of a performance earlier in the month, but could only manage 12th place on their debut, another poor start dividing opinion among the judges.

Along with Manorcunningham, City of London's piping marks were 10 places out of sync, with Isle of Islay out by nine. A similar phenomenon also occurred in several of the lower grades, although Grade 1 was much more consistent. In a novel and welcome move, the RSPBA posted live clips of each band's medley opener on Twitter, with the entire Grade 2 contest now available on YouTube in excellent quality. Readers are invited to enjoy the medleys and make their own assessments.

There was success in Grade 3A for two newcomers arriving from opposite ends of the pipe band pyramid. 2622 (Highland) Squadron RAF cleaned up the drumming and band prize after winning Best Drum Corps in 3B at the Worlds last season, while Royal Burgh of Stirling cushioned their landing from Grade 2



Quinn Memorial Pipe Band

All photos: Stuart Milne

with second place, only losing the overall title on ensemble preference.

Royal Burgh of Annan finished bottom at the four majors they entered in Grade 3A last year, but started life in 3B in victorious fashion ahead of Northern Ireland's Quinn Memorial, who took second place and the drumming prize in their first major since 2014.

Juvenile may be the smallest grade, but the



Denny & Dunipace Gleneagles Pipe Band

talent and dedication of the youngsters playing in it always makes it one of the most exciting. The medley event at Paisley was no exception as all seven selections brimmed with classy tunes old and new, with North Lanarkshire Schools and George Watson's College both playing *Hector the Hero* as their slow air. North Lanarkshire proved they are fitting right into this demanding grade after going up as double World Champions in Novice Juvenile A last year, but Dollar Academy took the British title, finishing their selection in style with a rounded version of the hornpipe *Moving Cloud*. George Watson's College took the drumming award with only four snares, which, coupled with SLOT's success with a reduced corps in Grade 1, shows that small can still be



*‘...let nothing obscure the reality that music brings us together like almost nothing else on this earth’*



Sergeant Walker Memorial Pipe Band

beautiful. The reprise of this marvellous medley contest will be a must-see for everyone venturing to the Europeans in Forres in late June.

Denny & Dunipace Gleneagles followed up their victory at Dunbar on the opening day of the season by winning Grade 4A, with Kinross & District taking the drumming. Glenrothes & District 2010 also made the prize list in their first appearance at this level after coming down from Grade 3A via a sabbatical in 2016, finishing fifth. The two Northern Irish bands in Grade 4B took the top two spots, Lisnamulligan winning the drumming prize and finishing 10 points ahead of Sergeant Walker Memorial in the overall standings.

Dollar Academy won Novice Juvenile A with straight firsts, while Lochalsh Junior narrowly missed out on matching that feat in

Novice Juvenile B, earning firsts in piping and ensemble but seeing the drumming prize go to Bucksburn & District. Queen Victoria School finished second overall as they started their first campaign on the RSPBA circuit for many years.

In the drum major competitions, Rebecca Hamilton of Tullylagan won the Junior title, with Closkelt’s James Kennedy taking Juvenile and Alicia Dickson Hamilton of Matt Boyd Memorial winning the Adult section.

While it’s all too easy to become addicted to the euphoria of winning trophies and consumed by the misery of defeat, an innocuous episode early in the afternoon helped keep things in perspective.

While this correspondent was watching Novice Juvenile A, a little girl made her way to the front, mother in tow. Like mothers the world over when engaging their children with their surroundings, she asked her daughter a simple question: “Are they making music?”

That, surely, is the question to ask ourselves

every time we take the pipes out of the case or pick up a pair of sticks. When we go to a contest we put on a kilt to tell the world we belong to *this* band and not *that* band, and when the pipe major gives the command our goal is to play well enough to beat everybody else, but it’s love of the music that got us all into pipe bands in the first place. It’s what keeps us going when the results don’t go our way and the awful, awful politics sometimes makes us want to pack it all in. It’s what brought our honoured guests from Canada halfway round the world to perform for a grand total of five minutes, and it’s what will bring them back to do it all again in August.

In the wake of the atrocity in Manchester where children were murdered because they went to a concert, let nothing obscure the reality that music brings us together like almost nothing else on this earth.

The great British summer is still young. Here’s to three more glorious months of music-making. With a little more sunshine, please. ●

by Stuart Milne

# Bill's Grade I debut at 61

*'What I find encouraging about the scene now is the tremendous camaraderie between a lot of these young players, which I think comes from The National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland'*

**P**ART of the buzz surrounding the first major of each new season is the personal milestones set by bandsmen and drum majors – the first time out with a new band, moving up into a new grade or even playing in front of a judge for the very first time.

Bill Grant, a piper with Buchan Peterson Pipe Band, achieved one of the more unusual personal bests at the British Championships by competing in his first Grade I major at the age of 61.

Like many young men from St Andrews in the late 1960s and early 70s, Bill started piping in the Boys' Brigade. In 1972 he and other ex-members founded the City of St Andrews Pipe Band, who began competing at around the same time as one of his Grade I opponents at Paisley – Boghall & Bathgate Caledonia.

Bill said: "Our first competition was at North Berwick in May 1974, and we were 13th out of 13 in Grade 4. I have a vivid memory of Boghall making their appearance on the competition circuit with their white shirts, black ties and their flannels. They got permission to play without Highland dress at that time.

"When we started there was no ambition to drive the organisation into Grade I, we just wanted to get out and play pipes and drums and continue something we'd all enjoyed doing in the Boys' Brigade, and like a lot of bands lower down the grades, just try and get better."

Get better they did, and by 1982 City of St Andrews were challenging for major titles in Grade 2, losing the European Championships at Shotts to Nat Russell's Royal Ulster Constabulary by a quarter of a point.

Forty years after helping form the St Andrews band, Bill joined Grade 2 Buchan Peterson closer to his home in the Northeast of Scotland, and in his very first season won the World Championship in 2013 – the only title to have eluded him in his career.

With Buchan now in the top flight, much of the pressure of the Grade 2 years had fallen away to make their first major of the campaign more enjoyable.

Bill said: "The objective over the last four seasons has been to go out and win every Grade 2 competition. The plan this year was to go out and not be last, especially at our debut major in Grade I. We knew what we were capable of doing in rehearsals – all we wanted to do was take that onto the park.

"Once your pipes are under your arm and you're making your way into the circle, you know you've crossed one of the biggest hurdles. Once you've turned into the circle and you can see the pipe major's fingers, you just focus and muscle memory plays you through it a lot of the time.

"Obviously there were things we knew we could do better, but given the fact that it was our debut and the new players that were in the band, we were really happy with our performance."

Along with the dramatic increase in the size of



Photos: John Slavin@Designfolk Ltd



Grade I bands and the evolution of the mid-section, according to Bill, one of the main changes over the years has been the number and attitude of youngsters at the top end of the pipe band pyramid.

He said: "What I find encouraging about the scene now is the tremendous camaraderie between a lot of these young players, which I think comes from The National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland. In the 70s and 80s there was almost a Rangers-Celtic mentality – a tremendous and sometimes bitter rivalry between bands. The younger players now see themselves much more as trying to push the music forward and are very appreciative of what their fellow musicians are doing. They still want to go on the park and beat them with their own band, but they're much more appreciative because they know the work it takes to get to that level."

Bill is thoroughly enjoying this stage of his pipe band career, and still has his own goals for the future.

He said: "I would like if possible to still be competing with Buchan in 2020, which will be the band's 50th anniversary, and coincidentally the 50th anniversary of the first time I competed in a World Championship at Hazelhead Park in Aberdeen in 1970. That would be a huge milestone for me and the band, but that's three seasons away. I'm at an age now when I just look from day to day and month to month and see what's around the corner." ●

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by Timothy Cummings



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# Theory Top-Up: Harmony writing (Part 2)

## Writing harmonies ‘of thirds’

**I**N the last instalment of this column on music theory, we began looking at the most primitive, basic form of harmony that I could think of: the drone, or ‘pedal point’. Of course, droning is what most bagpipes do automatically, so we went a little further and looked at why the drone is effective, and how we can also try out pedal points on the chanter, with one piper playing an appropriate long, solitary note on his or her chanter while another piper plays the tune. This type of chanter harmony can be potent in sparse, short segments, but obviously it will become irritating if employed any more than that. We’ll need some other ideas if we want to succeed at writing effec-

**tive harmonies. Thankfully there are plenty of other options!**

The next approach that we’ll be looking at is one that most of you will be familiar with — possibly too familiar with — the harmony ‘of thirds’ (or sometimes ‘in thirds’). Second only to the pedal point, this would probably be the quickest, easiest, cheapest, just-add-water solution to harmonizing a given melody.<sup>1</sup> It’s an approach that, with a little practice, could even be improvised on the spot. Harmonies of thirds are ubiquitous in pipe band music,

particularly the older settings of massed band tunes. If you’ve ever heard massed bands playing *The Rowan Tree*, *When the Battle’s O’er*, *Skye Boat Song*, etc., in harmony, you’ve heard harmonies of thirds. This style harmonisation is so common because it doesn’t require any more than the most elementary knowledge of music theory to produce: simply play two notes below the melody, or two notes above the melody, and presto!, you have just created a harmony of thirds.

You might be wondering why I’m using the word ‘thirds’ to describe a harmony part that involves playing either two notes below or two notes above the melody. The word ‘third’ in

1. The harmony of thirds is so popular that there is a stop on many pipe organs called the *tierce* (French for third, or triple), which causes the organ to automatically sound an additional note a major-third above whatever note is being played on the keyboard. If you were to play the equivalent of our low-A on the keyboard with the tierce stop pulled out, the organ will simultaneously sound both the A and also an C# (albeit often in a higher octave).



Spirit of Scotland Pipe Band at the Worlds in 2016

this case refers to the interval, or the distance between two different pitches. If you play a low-A on your chanter, and then I play a high-A, we'll be an 'octave' apart from each other. What's being imagined is that there is a standard musical scale forming above your low-A, and if you were to play every note of that scale all the way up to the high-A, that would be the eighth 'degree' (or note) of the scale, the *octave*. If I were to play a high-G against your low-A, then together we would be creating the interval of a 'seventh'. An F(#), and it will be a 'sixth'. Follow that pattern all the way down to C(#), and you will also arrive at the word-du-jour, 'third'. It may seem counterintuitive at first, but any interval that involves two notes that are two scale degrees apart from each other is considered a third apart. The chart on the right may provide more clarity:

Standard intervals (based on low-A) that can be played on Scottish chanters

Major	perfect	Major	Major	perfect	perfect	Major	minor	perfect
<b>2nd</b>	<b>unison</b>	<b>2nd</b>	<b>3rd</b>	<b>4th</b>	<b>5th</b>	<b>6th</b>	<b>7th</b>	<b>octave</b>

Standard thirds that can be played on Scottish chanters

Major	Major	minor	minor	Major	minor	minor
<b>3rd</b>	<b>3rd</b>	<b>3rd</b>	<b>3rd</b>	<b>3rd</b>	<b>3rd</b>	<b>3rd</b>

\* "Major" and "minor" describe the intervals more specifically, as per the number of semitones (or half-steps) separating the two notes.

If you use the pattern of thirds above or below the melody, you will be instantly creating a passable harmony. At times the harmony part may sound very good, even exciting; at other times, it may sound a bit naff, not-quite-right. There may be several reasons for the naughtiness of a particular harmony, and I think those will become more clear as this series continues to explore different types of harmony.<sup>2</sup> But I will give some quick examples as to why a harmony of thirds can be less than ideal. As we have explored in previous issues, there are a great number of pentatonic tunes in our repertoire — tunes that use only five notes of the scale. Take G.S. McLennan's retreat march, *Loch Maree*, for example. It's a tune that completely avoids Gs and Ds in the melody, and thus has a particular quality to it similar to other pentatonic tunes: timeless, uncomplicated, light. If you add a harmony part based on thirds, then the moment

you try to harmonise the B, you'll get either a low-G or a D, thus compromising the originally intended pentatonic feel. If you harmonise the E from above, you'll introduce a high-G, which again changes the nature of the tune. The above concern also applies for tunes like *Colin's Cattle* which imply the key of A-Major, but use more than five notes.

There are also tunes that imply more of a minor (darker, sadder) key, despite being based on an incomplete, or 'gapped', scale. *MacGregor of Ruara*, for example, does not feature any C(#)'s anywhere in its melody. But if you were to harmonize it using thirds, you would be introducing C(#)'s. And when based in the key of A, as is the case with *MacGregor of Ruara*, bringing in C(#)'s will change the mood from being darker to sounding much brighter and happier. It would completely corrupt the tune, in my opinion.

(I must also admit there are times when introducing new notes via a harmony part can be quite enjoyable, and can help flesh out a tune harmonically. The common seconds for *Amazing Grace* quickly come to mind. As with everything in music, these matters ultimately come down to personal taste. But what's important to keep in mind is that the harmony-of-thirds approach does not guarantee musical success.)

In closing, I offer a suggestion for those of you trying out a harmony of thirds: if, as you test-drive the harmony part, you find there are some parts of the harmony that don't quite jive for you, there's no reason whatsoever not to change them. Try shifting the offending note(s) up or down one degree, or even further. (Consider, too, sneaking in a brief pedal point somewhere, as discussed in the previous issue.) Explore all the possibilities and simply *play* the music (in the literal sense of 'play') and see what comes out. After all, composing is often just a form of play, of slow-motion improvisation. ●

2. I would argue that the most successful harmony writing is based not on prescribed mathematical intervals, but rather on a good intuitive sense and understanding of the musical chords implied by a given melody. Musical chords make up a very broad topic which will be explored piecemeal in forthcoming *Theory Top-Up* columns.



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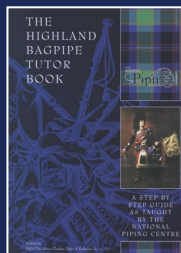


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## A Jack MacArthur Serial

BY DAN NEVANS

# A Lament for Lady Frances Minto

### PART III

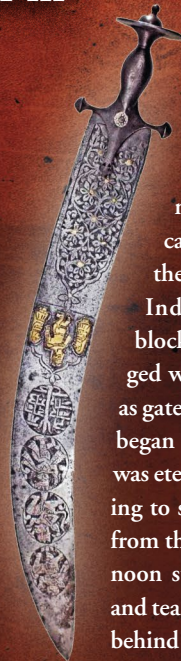
EDINBURGH, MARCH 10th, 1786

**T**HE waxing moon illuminates the cobbles. Soot, sweat and a nervous energy hang like cobwebs over every street. Friday night in Edinburgh: Rose Street echoes with revelry, children run underfoot, playing their evening games, mothers' voices calling out after them in the dark, the gallows are being primed for a peak performance.

Justice, dark and red would swing over the Grassmarket on the morrow.

Jack MacArthur was a man under a cloud. His benevolent employer had set him on a difficult task; find the body snatcher responsible for the theft of Lady Minto's corpse and bring them to justice. "What does 'justice' mean?" Jack asked himself in a half muttered breath, "The Lord's justice or His Lordship's?" Now standing at the foot of the gallows, Jack's thoughts are grave; would he be forced to take a life for another man's revenge?

Years before, barely out of his boyhood, Lord Minto had dispatched Jack to India for a year to aid the powerful East India Trading company with a hunt for bandits that had been terrorising the long established trading posts in Surat, Indore, Bhopal and Ahmedabad. Jack being a talented young ghillie on the Minto estate had excelled in hunting deer, wolves, poachers and cattle thieves. His lordship saw these bandits as no different. After a horrible sea journey and several weeks in various carts, Jack arrived and was put straight to work. Within a few months, Jack knew the outlands of the East India Trading Company's major holdings, the most frequently attacked areas. Using this information, he had worked out the few



places the bandits could be hiding. After weeks of searching various sites around the Mahi River, Jack finally led the Company up into the hills near Jharni to the mouth of a fortified cave entrance. It was a grim place, even in the bright sunlight and heavy heat of that Indian summer. The cave mouth was blocked by heaped boulders forming a rugged wall, two huge iron sheets were secured as gates to the now obvious hideout. The siege began and by the break of it, Jack MacArthur was eternally changed. Some nights upon drifting to sleep Jack still saw the horseman burst from the gates. Scimitar gleaming in the afternoon sun, coated in shining, golden armour and tearing through the throng of troops. From behind the rider, bandits charged from the gate, taking the Company troops by surprise. Jack, being only a scout, was well behind the front line. Waiting on a boulder near the command tent, he saw the rider break the line and steam on to the officers standing before the tent watching the carnage. Without thinking, Jack raised his rifle. The powder flashed and the horseman fell from the saddle without a noise.

Jack was suddenly a hero. Jack was now a killer. Later, it was revealed the "bandits" were local tribesmen who were unhappy with their people's treatment by the East India Company. The rider was the son of a chief who had stolen his family's ancestral weapons and armour and ran off to lead the small band of hardy fighters in a bid to free the area of corporate control.

The memory of that red day resurfaces now as Jack meanders through the streets of Edinburgh. The docks at Leith had undergone a massive change in recent times;



10 years before Leith was just another dock area, busy with the hustle and bustle of trade from around the world but largely unchanged since Cromwell's time. In 1779, a flotilla of American revolutionary ships had sailed up the Forth with the intent to attack Edinburgh. Only bad weather stayed their advance and a battery of nine guns was quickly erected. Now Leith Fort was an institution, offering all the delights that fighting men with government gold in their pocket brings to any area.

A few half pennies and one half a crown had led Jack here; The Black Horse inn, an infamous gathering place for the less than salubrious citizens of Edinburgh. Jack pushed through the door into a low-ceilinged, smoky room. Near the fire, a fiddler and a melodeon player hammered out reels at breakneck speeds to the joy of the patrons. Not much more than a bothy, the inn was jammed with people; working men from the docks, the occasional soldier from the fort, more than a few sailors and the shifty eyed men dotted at tables around the walls. Watching, innocuously enough, chatting with each other and joking. Eyeing the crowd for prey.

At the back of the room, there was a heavy table and some shelves, Jack elbowed and excused his way across to it. He was met by a set of giant arms, coated in thick, wiry hair. They were attached to an apron and then to a beard.

"Ha' penny for ale, penny for whisky, hawf croon fur the night and hawf a croon more for the company."

Jack looked to his left to see a group of ladies standing near the stairwell leading to the rooms above. A buxom woman with fire-red hair and bright pink cheeks leered back and winked.

"Can ah start with an ale and see where ah end up?"

The landlord grimaced a crooked smile revealing gleaming white teeth. "Aye sir, ale it is."

A rough tankard was flung his way. Jack shook the container, being pressganged was not on the cards this evening. A lack of rattling eased his mind. He turned and began to assess the room, he was looking for The Resurrection Man: Hamilton Brody. What would Edinburgh's most notorious body snatcher look like? Could it be the broad shouldered man standing near the door? He certainly looked dirty enough to deal in bodies. It must have been nearly 10:30pm and this man was dead drunk. Wouldn't the professional that Brody is meant to be, be in control of his faculties after dark when his work was due? What about the stocky fellow sitting near the fire? He looks cheerful and definitely sober, a little chubby but muscular enough to lift a body. The man at the fire moved to get up, bringing a cane up from the floor. It may be difficult to shift corpses around with a wooden leg.

Jack sipped at his ale and pondered. After a few minutes his patience ran out. He turned and signalled the landlord.

"Ha' penny for ale, penny for whisky, hawf croon fur the night and hawf a croon more for the company," the large man repeated.

"How much fur information?"

The landlord furrowed his already furrowed brow, near eclipsing what space between beard and eyebrows was left for vision.

"You from the Croon? Tax? Army?"

"No, ma cousin is frae here and telt me o' a line o' work I might enjoy. Telt me to look

for a man named Brody and he might be hard to get a hold o'."

The big man did not look pleased. It was incredible to Jack that up till now it seemed the landlord had been wearing what could be considered an affable expression in comparison.

"Two pounds."

Jack nodded and emptied his pocket into the man's meaty hand. At the last clink of coin, the fleshy bear trap closed into a rock like fist around the money.

"Ah'll ask aroon." The landlord turned and walked away.

Assured that he'd just been robbed of all his money, Jack stood again sipping his ale and watching the room. "That might not have been a good idea," thought Jack. "I wonder which one of these hounds is going to try to stab me first?"

Jack waited at the table. After some time he noticed the landlord wasn't talking to anyone, let alone "asking aroon". After some more of this, Jack decided to leave, not only did he have no further information but he also had no money. It was time to cut his losses and go home.

Once outside the inn, the cool night air seemed curious, finding a way to every vulnerable spot on Jack's body. Quiet now, the business of the road down from the West End seemed desolate in comparison with the early evening. It was, after all, nearly midnight. Jack's ears pricked up at the scratch of shoe leather on cobble behind him. Following someone is more than just being quiet, you can either fall well back and watch from a distance very quietly, making sure not to disturb anything on your way, or you can get close in a crowd, make yourself seem uninvolved and your appearance a coincidence. The third and most common option is to try to get close without being heard, normally adopted by street thugs with no imagination, wannabe spies and people who don't know how to be underhanded.

Jack stopped dead in his tracks and heard the boot scrape again against the cobbles followed by a fumbling sound and a crunching click.

"Dinnae turn roon," the amateur phantom said in a shaky tone, "ah've a pistol aimed at yer heid."

"Aye sir, no complaint here, ah fear though your efforts are in vein as ah have left all my money with the landlord of The Black Horse."

"Ah dinnae want yer money. Wit dae ye want wi The Resurrection Man?"

Jack felt the air grow colder. The amateur phantom didn't say Jack should have his hands in the air or anything. Jack's right hand gently moved across his chest to the short knife kept in a specially designed "quick release" sheath on the inside of his jacket. The reality of a flintlock



pistol is that they are very inaccurate and often did not fire at all. Jack was readying himself to spin around and take the chance.

“Information.”

“Wit kind o’ information?”

“Ma laird’s wife was resurrected not long ago and he would like to see her returned to her eternal rest.”

A brief chuckle from the phantom.

“The Resurrection Man doesn’t take toffs; lead powder and liver lesions dinnae sell too well.”

“Ah still need a word. Coin in it if he’ll but talk wi me.”

“Gang awa hame. Morra evening, after six bells, make yer way to Mary Cullen’s. Ah’ll see the man himself meets ye there.”

## MARCH 11th, 1786

SATURDAY morning seemed to well up round the edges of the city and burst under the shutters of the tiny room Jack slept in. Golden and fluid light like so much egg yolk poured onto the floor cut a white line across Jack’s face. Snapping his eyes open and sitting bolt upright, Jack achieved consciousness. The journey home was a blur, his thoughts consumed by the appointment he had made and what new light might be shed on the mystery at hand.

Who is Hamilton Brody? What does he do with the bodies he snatches? How do you get corpses from graves without arousing suspicion? How do you transport them? The amateur phantom mentioned selling them, what does that mean? And to whom?

A few minutes later Jack was washed, dressed and on his way to his lordship’s rooms. Upon opening the door, he was greeted with the sight of Lord Minto squinting at a newspaper from a high backed leather chair.

Without looking up Lord Minto said: “Good morning Jack, I trust the day finds you well?”

“Very well m’lord.”

“Excellent, you have a big day ahead of you I believe. Mr MacDonald has sent word he would prefer to visit us here than have you attend his lodgings.”

Lord Minto spoke always in questions or statements depending on the situation. This was Jack’s morning briefing. Now that Jack had been given the information he needed, it would be time to report. “And how goes the hunt?”

“Well again m’lord; last night I made my way to The Black Horse Inn. There the landlord arranged a meeting with someone who could put me in touch with our Resurrection Man. I am to meet him in Mary Cullen’s hostelry this evening at six bells.”

“Good work Jack.” Leaning out of his chair Lord Minto called to the space behind Jack.

Duncan Cu had entered the room in Jack’s wake, walking of feathered steps, the giant was far more subtle than many would give him credit. Jack was made uneasy by the big man’s sudden appearance but would make no show of it. “And of you Duncan, what have you turned up?”

“I stayed guard in auld Calton last night

## PART III

m’lord. No visitors came till almost two bells. Two men, dressed in black and grey. Carrying a makeshift gurney full of shovels. I followed a while m’lord but they only seemed to be digging new graves from the empty plots of land unused. They dug a fresh pit and left.”

“So, nothing then?”

“Nothing m’lord.”

His lordship returned to the storm cloud he had inhabited for the last few days.

“You will accompany Jack to his meeting this evening.

Perhaps you can make yourself useful holding coats.”

Duncan grunted and took the hint to leave the room.

“M’lord, Brody will be expecting only me. If Duncan comes along Brody may be spooked and run.”

“I’ll have him arrive long before you and take supper at this Mary Cullen’s. He’s a big fool but he can blend in.”

“Yes m’lord.”

Three o’clock struck and Donald MacDonald arrived. A squat man, his breadth betrayed his true height. Older than Jack by maybe a decade his hair was dark brown and steely grey at the temples bleeding into his thick beard. He was dressed in a casual shirt and grey trousers, his boots were of a very high quality but worn down, at his side he carried with him a rugged looking wooden box. Jack had laid out his bagpipe upon the desk in what Lord Minto was using as his study. This was where the lesson was to take place.

“Good afternoon, sir, Donald MacDonald is my name.”

“Welcome sir, I’m Jack MacArthur. I’m very pleased to meet you.”

The two men shook hands and Jack gestured to the divan near the fire for his instructor to sit.

“Are you any relation to the MacArthurs from up on Skye Jack?”

“I believe so sir; my father played and I understand his uncle taught him. I only got the Ceòl Beag from him though.”

“Oh,” the great man looked disheartened. “Do you play the Ceòl Mòr at all?”

“Oh yes, sir,” Jack nodded vigorously. At 29 years old he was long since a grown man but having not taken a lesson in perhaps 15 years, he was slightly giddy at the prospect. “I was sent to Gairloch in the summers to visit my aunt and received tuition there from Angus MacKay.”

Relief swept Donald’s face. “Good to hear Jack. He was such a grand player. Now take your pipe to your shoulder and let us hear how good a student you were.”

Jack had already spent some time playing his pipe in the morning and was more than ready to perform. He had prepared Donald Mor MacCrimmon’s classic *A Flame of Wrath for Patrick Coagach*. The pipe took little time to settle and off into the ground. The opening phrase of Jack rolled through in the lyrical form taught by Angus. In his mind’s eye he could see the flagstone floor and creaky stool of Angus’s cottage.

The old man’s scratchy, jaunty voice echoed throughout the variation. “Ceòl Mòr is about melody lad; it doesn’t start and stop in bits, it flows on like the changing of the seasons. Peaks and troughs of tremendous might and cold subtlety. Love, loss, victory, failure, pride and power all flowing from your soul, into the soul of another. The Ceòl Mòr is more than music boy, it’s life.”



The tune ended and Jack realised again where he was and who he was with. Donald sat with folded arms and said: "Your crunluath is not even and the runs in the ground are too quick."

Jack was mildly taken aback. "Yes sir."

"Try the ground again and I want you to try to space out the opening phrase more: 'Hi-A-oen-em rather than Hiaoen-em.'" Jack felt his stomach fizz, piobaireachd is such a subjective art, different players from different places take such individual views on how it should be played. Few carried such an individual style as Donald MacDonald. The pipes struck up under his arm and he made way into the tune. MacDonald conducted and sang the tune as they followed the tune together, pointing out sections of phrasing Jack felt smoke lift from his vision of the tune. The shape of the piece seemed to arch and change under Jack's fingers. A new and better image appearing with every change.

"Excellent, Jack. You appear to be a quick study."

"Thank you, sir."

"Now onto our main subject. The commissioned tune." MacDonald reached over and opened his worn, wooden pipe case. The pipes he pieced together looked uncomfortable to Jack's eyes and his face must have betrayed him.

"Ho Jack, you'll not have seen these before." He hefted the instrument upon his shoulder, dark and mighty, Donald MacDonald stood proudly holding a prototype of The Great Highland Bagpipe. "These are a little something I have been working on. Longer and broader, with bigger reeds and bells. These pipes about dwarf the classic pipe."

Not wishing to be rude, Jack smiled and nodded feeling as though he was being told of the musical eloquence of a claw hammer.

The great pipe started and the walls shook.

The sheer volume of sound was at first uncomfortable but after a few moments Jack had settled in. It was like getting into a hot bath; unpleasant at first but quickly comforting. MacDonald tuned and played through some simple short tunes, a couple of reels in the Irish style and a short strathspey.

With a long low A and a sweep of the left foot, *The Lament for Lady Frances Minto* had begun.

"Hiharin, Heaodin, Chere-O-E, Heaodin, Hiharin, Heaodin, Chere-O-E, Heaodin, Vi-ri-ri E O, Chere-O-E o-en,

"Hiharin, Heaodin, Chere-O-E, Heaodin, Vi-ri-ri I O, Chere-O-E o, Vi-ri-ri E O, Chere-O-E o-en,

"Hiharin, Heaodin, Chere-O-E, Heaodin, Vi-ri-ri E O, Chere-O-E o-en."

Jack was in awe of the great man. The simplicity of the piece was an understatement to the prowess of the player. As the variations rolled on, the theme only became more powerful. A great tribute to a kind and compassionate woman.

When the tune ended Jack was dumbstruck.

"Short, I know," said MacDonald. "But I feel it really says something".

Jack nodded. For the next couple of hours, MacDonald sang Jack through the tune and Jack mimicked the sections on his pipes, now seeming saccharin and thin in comparison. By the clock striking five, the lesson was over and Jack had to prepare for the evening's work.



The Great Highland Bagpipe by Donald MacDonald of Edinburgh, c 1806. Photo used with the kind permission of Hugh Cheape and the National Museums of Scotland

"Your master has engaged me for the next few days. I will return tomorrow at the same time to hear your progress. Well played today, Jack."

Mary Cullen's was a small inn tucked into a small square behind the flesh market. Climbing the Fleshmarket Close is an agonising experience for any traveller. Knees have been known to explode from the weight of gravity and climbers often find themselves with nosebleeds and headaches from the lack of oxygen. Like many of the stairwells leading from the low end of the town, they were designed to discourage the poor and needy from making an appearance in the more salubrious parts of the city.

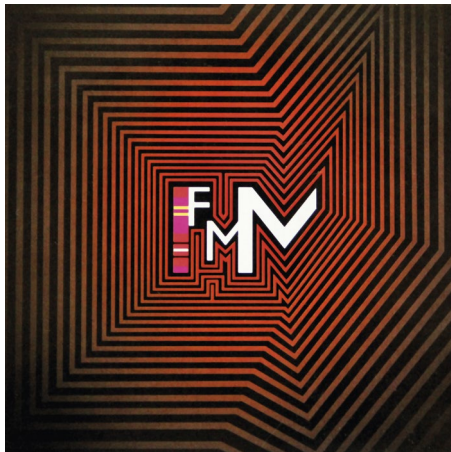
Jack climbed through the short door to be confronted by almost darkness. The tiny inn was not much more than the living room of a tenement, stairs led from the back of the room curling upwards. From there, a small window let the early evening's lazy sunlight drain in. Candles on short square tables illuminated inches around themselves and nothing more.

This is a trap. ✠

## CD REVIEWS

## Field Marshal Montgomery Pipe Band

*IMPACT: Live at the  
Glasgow Royal Concert Hall 2016*



**W**HAT do you do when your concert had so much great music you can't decide what to leave out on the CD? Make two and keep the lot.

That's what Inveraray & District Pipe Band did with *Ascension* three years ago, and Field Marshal Montgomery have adopted the same approach with *IMPACT*, recorded three days before they recaptured the Grade 1 World Championship last August.

The limited edition double album, lavishly illustrated with gorgeous photographs by Alister Sinclair, contains the entire concert repertoire except for the encore performance of the ever-popular *Trevor Buckley* medley that won FM back-to-back World titles in 2006-07.

Inveraray's *Ascension* release set a new standard for audio quality in live pipe band recordings, and another masterclass by sound maestro Murray Blair ensures *IMPACT* is in similar territory. More than their previous concerts, Field Marshal collaborated with some of the most accomplished traditional musicians on the Scottish scene, and their marvellous contribution to the evening is evident right from the off in the spine-tingling opening to *The Mists of Time*. Unfortunately, no microphone seems to have directly picked up Jonathan Greenlees' pipe solo from way up in the gods, but rather fittingly, the faint strain of the piobaireachd movement could well be calling from the distant past.

When the band then launch into a jig version of the already technically demanding strathspey *The Piper's Bonnet*, delivered with all the flair characteristic of the Irish style, there is no trouble understanding why this is the most dominant competition band of modern times.

A huge part of that is the famous richness of their pipe tone. Anyone who has ever stood next to Field Marshal striking up in final tuning will know the experience is like drinking a Pan Galactic Gargle Blaster, which sci-fi-comedy writer Douglas Adams compared to having your brains smashed out by a slice of lemon wrapped round a large gold brick. Here the chanter's are as pristine as ever but the

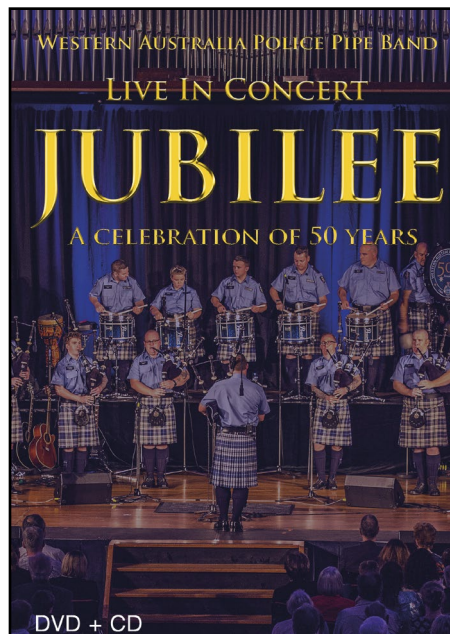
drones are slightly quiet, although some will enjoy that balance. The snare drums also have a mild echo, and the contribution of the mid-section, as so often with concert recordings, isn't as clear as it was on the night. The sharp flavour of the lemon is there, but a sound system with a hefty bass is needed for those preferring a little more gold brick.

Long-time fans will recognise a lot of familiar competition and concert repertoire, including *Random Star 10* from FM's first release and the *Sandpiper* medley from *Unplugged*, but the standout track is the *Spice of Life* set on disk two. It begins with an up-tempo version of the 2/4 march *Donald MacLellan of Rothesay*, before moving into what could have been an interminable selection of seven jigs. Instead, pipe major Richard Parkes MBE and everyone involved with putting this together have crafted a masterclass in light and shade, with regular key changes and strategic interventions from the drum corps and backing band to hold the listener's attention from beginning to end.

Nine years after their last album, *IMPACT* is a valuable record of a pipe band some say are the best there has ever been. ● BY STUART MILNE

## Western Australia Police Pipe Band

*Jubilee: Live in Concert*



**T**HERE is no other Grade 1 pipe band like Western Australia Police. While the 1998 Grade 2 World Champions have made a triumphant return to competition under pipe major James Murray, winning the last three biennial Australian Championships since 2012, surely none of their potential opponents anywhere in the world can claim to have performed over 800 engagements to four million people in that time.

The pipe band play an important ambassadorial role for the police service, and their extensive back catalogue of recordings is a major component. *Jubilee: Live in Concert* is their 12th CD and first DVD, celebrating 50 years of service to the State of Western

Australia. That history is a big part of the DVD: while the film is about 90 minutes long, the attractive and informative sleeve notes reveal there are only eight music tracks from the anniversary concert itself.

Fully half the running time is dedicated to interviews with figures from the band's founding in 1966 to the more recent past and their current leadership. The most important of these is MacGregor "Mac" Napier OAM, whose family tartan the band wears. Mac played a pivotal role in forming the band, and by his own reckoning spent around 10000 hours teaching new recruits, many of whom had no prior musical experience.

There are some cracking stories about the band's travels within the state and abroad, plus priceless video of WAPOL's impromptu collaboration with the Trinidad & Tobago Defence Force Steel Orchestra on a calypso version of *Amazing Grace* that brought the house down on the last night of the 1997 Edinburgh Military Tattoo.

While all this is gold dust for anyone mad about pipe band history, and it is important that these stories live on through the ages, there is rather a lot of it compared to other pipe band DVD releases from the last decade, and the balance of interviews to music might well frustrate viewers simply looking to enjoy the band's famously creative repertoire.

Thankfully, the music of *Jubilee* is marvellous from start to finish. We begin with Alasdair Fraser's wonderfully atmospheric air *First Light*, performed first by fiddler Fiona Davidson, whose playing is one of the concert's highlights, and the backing band, before pipe sergeant Stuart Robertson and then the full band strike up for four reels: *Dawn Rant*, *Upper Denton*, *The Bird's Nest* and *The Harris Dance*. It's an arresting (sorry!) start to the show, but the abrupt ending on a short "B" doesn't do justice to the tremendous build-up.

The pipe band are joined by a string section for *The Gael*, Dougie MacLean's much-loved contribution to the *Last of the Mohicans* soundtrack. Pipe major Murray plays the solo before the full band segues into *Abbotsinch to Aldergrove*, the powerful hornpipe Shotts & Dykehead Caledonia played off the field as World Champions in 2015.

Duncan Chisholm's sumptuous slow reel *Farley Bridge* is as beautiful as it's ever been, and either side of a drum fanfare we have two sets on the smallpipes, played by Robertson and Scott Wallace respectively, in the company of the backing musicians. Robertson, fiddler Davidson and accordionist Victoria Murray take us through the folk band Ímar's almost obscenely happy second set from their debut album, *L'Air Mignonne* and *Luke Skywalker Walks on Sunshine*, while Wallace's set is based on the Gordon Duncan classic *Pressed for Time*.

The most sophisticated piece of video editing fittingly matches the most sophisticated piece of music, with a split-screen shot highlighting the harmonies and counterpoint in the opening bridge to the climactic arrangement of *The Cameronian Rant*, played in straight competition fashion by the pipe band but given a chilled backing treatment reminiscent of the Red Hot Chili Peppers' cover of *Everybody Wants to Rule the World*. It's by far the best camerawork and editing in a film that, perhaps constrained by the venue, doesn't offer particularly exciting visual presentation despite the occasional presence of dancers. *Cont on page 45*

*'If you're gonna be dumb,  
you better be tough'*



by @DanNevans

# Keep yourself pipe-fit for years to come

**I am not what you would call an Adonis.**

**Over the years my personal fitness level has peaked and troughed.**

**Some would say I am currently in the Mariana Trench of troughs but at the peaks, I've been known to do some of the classic exercises; running in a circle round a traffic warden, jumping up and down in the middle of Argyle Street screaming, lifting cars stuck in traffic jams and turning them around. You know, exercising.**

My lust for rippling abs is a fairweather flirtation. The kind of passion needed to morph this mere mortal form into a Michelangelo style chiselled being is solely reserved for my piping. This July I will begin my 23rd year of playing pipes. When I was a teenager I played every day for an hour and felt like I was working real hard. I could also stay out all night and go to a Sunday morning band practice without a care and play well (or I think I played well, I should say). I could pretty much eat whatever and do whatever and thought I could maintain a good level. How wrong I was.

I play a lot and by the end of the day, my left tricep is raw. You might say: "Dan, you're a well-known mentalist, you're over playing, take it easy." Except I'm not over playing.

Here's the rundown; to play in one of the best pipe bands on the face of the earth you MUST play every day. No ifs and no buts, Grannies birthday? Play your pipes, Dog dead? Play your pipes. Spouse threatening to leave if they hear one more note from the pipes again? Better give your lawyer a call and bid your dog farewell because you are getting the pipes out. And it's not a cursory blow either, just playing for 10 minutes to keep the pipes going is not enough. You must be playing whole sets back to back, working on starts and stops, thinking about the phrasing of every bar. Referring to previous performances and notes from the PM about what and how you should be playing.

On top of that, I would like a crack at the top solo prizes, an ambition shared by many, true, but I didn't get this far by having small dreams. So every day, I get the solo pipes out and ask myself the same question over and over again: "What can I do today to make me better?" This is arguably more difficult because although I am coached, I don't have him around the whole time to constantly scrutinise my playing. It's up to me to make and maintain positive changes in my performance.

Sounds stressful, eh? I love it though, I couldn't see myself being as happy doing anything else.

What keeps me awake at night is frankly mortality. There are not a lot of pipers over 60 playing at a high level and given that according to some medical research, children born today may have the option of pretty much immortality because of the advances made in medical science, we, the current young adult group, should have a pretty good chance of playing well into our 80s? Maybe 90s?

In a world where the bar gets raised ever higher to where most envelope pushers are having to go over and above the call of duty and sports/military platitudes are being abused in such a tawdry manner that they are almost meaningless, what are we to do?

Eat right, exercise, stretch and above all practice smart  
EVER see that TV show where parents with unhealthy kids (Fat Weans) are shown a computer mock-up of what their kid will look like at 40? Dara



O' Briain has a great bit about this if you're in a Youtube-y kind of mood. They pull the parents into a small dark room and show them a picture of Shrek, only less green, and these

folks are horrified. Well you would be. Then they say: “If only you fed Wee Billy on carrots and wheatgrass juice, he’d look like this.”



Barry Handsome - all teeth and side shed

Wee Billy, of course, freaks out because instead of milk, he was weaned on cola and without steady doses of sugar and trans fats, he goes through a “Renton in Trainspotting” style comedown. What I’m saying is, your diet can affect your hands, your arm and your energy levels. I said it at the start, I’m no Charles Atlas but I do appreciate that eating crisps and drinking ginger isn’t going to fuel me to play well. On a contest day, I tend not to eat much at all but I will always start the day with a big bowl of porridge and two boiled eggs. Plenty of good carbs, fibre and protein for a good performance. On the day, I drink pretty much water or tea, caffeine can actually cause your hands to tighten so I tend to lay off the caffeinated drinks where I can on and around contest day. (Mind you though, the wheels of education are lubricated by tea and coffee. I must consume three or four cups on a normal working day so cutting it out on the run-up to a contest can be difficult). I try to maintain a reasonable balance between the food groups but hot wings and IPA are awful temptations. What you put into your body will eventually effect what comes out.

When I say exercise, I certainly don’t mean you should be pumping iron for your piping, many of you are already eating dry spoonful’s of protein powder and rubbing various fat-burning gels on to yourselves but that’s nothing to do with the sport really. Walk places. That’s all I ask. Get the blood flowing. If you are sitting all day working at a desk then go home to sit on the couch, your blood supply system will not be as effective. Try this for a week. Come home from work and do whatever chore needs done then go walk around the block for half an hour – take the kids, the dog, your spouse, who ever. Try that then see what effect it has on your hands. Is that birl better? Is your E doubling starting to loosen? Give it a go and I guarantee you that you will see small but very definite improvements.

Small steps are the way forward. This is very true when it comes to the development of your performance. What’s the first sign of madness? It’s not hairy palms. It’s not looking for hairy palms either. The first sign of madness is repeating a process and expecting a different outcome. When you practise, you have to make small but positive changes. I said earlier a cursory play is not enough to improve. When you practise, pick something you want to make better – the timing of a piece of technique or the blowing through a break – by all means play through the whole set but focus on the problem at hand. The next time you get the pipes out, you should now be in control of that problem and be able to maintain the positive change you have made while working on another issue. Eventually, you will have worked these changes into the internal vision you have of the piece and it will have improved. This is what I mean by “practising smart”. You don’t have to slog through the same problems over and over, you must continue to

improve these things one step at a time.

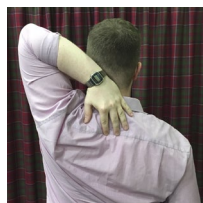
You know what really grinds my gears? Ignorance. Just because Hector MacShoogle didn’t stretch his arms and chest out before playing in 19-canteen doesn’t mean you shouldn’t. For the record, by the way, most folk will have no idea what the training regimes of the great and good were. Don’t be so unimaginative. Remember the standard is only getting better so shouldn’t you be looking for anything that will keep you stronger in your performances today and in the long term? Google pectoral and tricep stretches. Livestrong.com has some good advice but if you’re unsure, please seek the help of a local sports physio. These people are highly knowledgeable and will help you define any problems you may be experiencing. Also take a look at The National Piping Centre’s Facebook page and website for information and videos with hints and tips.

The stretches I do are pretty simple really. Here’s a couple I got from Livestrong.com;



## TRICEP

**Step 1:** Sit on a chair or stand in a relaxed position with your back straight.



**Step 2:** Raise your left arm straight overhead, then bend it so your left hand is on the middle of your upper back. Your biceps and forearm should be touching.



**Step 3:** Reach over with your right hand and grasp your left elbow on the top, so your right palm faces down.

**Step 4:** Pull your left elbow gently toward your right side until you feel a stretch in your left triceps. Hold the stretch for 10 seconds and repeat on the other side.



## CROSS BODY

**Step 1:** Sit comfortably in a chair or stand with your back straight.

**Step 2:** Reach your left arm across your body, just under your chin at about shoulder level.

**Step 3:** Place your right hand on the outside of your left elbow and pull your left arm gently toward your right shoulder.

**Step 4:** Stop when you feel a stretch in your left shoulder and hold it for 10 seconds. Relax and repeat the stretch with your right arm.



DON’T let anyone tell you, you can’t. There’s no magic words, no faery silver chanter, no special serum or pills. Sheer stone cold hard work is what progresses the player. You can do it and I hope that what you’ve just read can help to keep you going when the going gets tough. Here’s to another 70+ years of playing. ●

## CD REVIEWS continued from page 41

The accompanying CD has a deeper bass sound for those wanting to enjoy the percussion element more, and some added musical variety. The DVD finale of *Going Home*, played with the pipe bands of Scotch College and Presbyterian Ladies College, is replaced with an enjoyable solo by Scott Hannah, as well as WAPOL's competition sets from the 2016 Australian Championships. The barnstorming medley is performed with a sense of excitement and freedom that we never quite heard from pipe major Murray at Fife Constabulary, and the ending is an absolute cracker. If Fred Morrison was a pipe band, it would sound like this.

*Jubilee* is a welcome celebration of an extraordinary band, but the balance between backstory and music could be a problem for some audiences. At least with WAPOL, we know we won't have to wait long for the next recording. ● BY STUART MILNE

## Old Blind Dogs Room with a View OBD013



**I**n just a shade under 30 years since forming, Old Blind Dogs have been at the forefront of the resurgence of Scottish traditional music and its growing worldwide popularity. Irrespective of the line-up, the band have always looked to champion both the older traditional material and the newer compositions, blending both into a compelling and enticing sound.

This incarnation of the band has original member Jonny Hardie on fiddle, long-time members Aaron Jones on guitar and bouzouki, Ali Hutton on pipes and whistles and Donald Hay on percussion. As you would expect from such a talented quartet, the music on the album is beautifully played with arrangements ranging from the sparsely atmospheric on *John McColl's March to Kilbowie Cottage* to the rousing pedal

to the metal *Died and Gone to Prague*, with Ali Hutton's pipes leading the charge.

The four songs, *A Ring on her Hand*, *Earl O March's Daughter*, *Sawney Bean* and *Warlike Lads of Russia* are all sympathetically done with *The Warlike Lads* and *Earl O March's Daughter* vying for the title of album highlight. The songs, like the instrumental tracks, have a very intimate feel (even when singing about Napoleon or the fabled cannibal Sawney Bean) this is undoubtedly due to the fact that the band haven't brought in a suite of guest musicians and have just relied on their skills and instruments. This does mean that you get to appreciate what each player/instrument is bringing to the party and how skilfully they have been woven together. In particular Donald Hay's percussion gently, but very definitely, underpins the music giving it a lazy Sunday afternoon vibe.

This is a delightful album that, while undeniably a product of the 21st century, does hark back to an era when bigger, louder, more complex wasn't the order of the day and a few good musicians could make a sound that was both interesting and a joy to listen to.

Whether playing a traditional gavotte, gavotte des montagnes, or more recent compositions by such luminaries as Gavin Marwick, Joel Turk's, and Alasdair White, *An luchair*, the Old Blind Dogs treat them with sensitivity and let their passion for the music shine through in their playing – and that's a very good thing. ● CHRIS MACKENZIE

## Skipinnish The Seventh Wave SKIPCD26

**S**IXTEEN years and seven albums later, Skipinnish have gone from the unassuming duo of Angus MacPhail on accordion and Andrew Stevenson on pipes (big and small) playing straight-up, west coast of Scotland

traditional music, to a band with a core of seven, a cast of supporting musicians that is a who's who of the traditional scene and a sound that fills big stages.

The eponymous first album all those years ago was, and still is lauded for its simple ethos of 'good tunes, well played' and Skipinnish have held true to that across the last 16 years. They have always been a WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) band, no searching for the melodic line with them, and they are loved for it.

As the band have grown, the big changes have been to a more song-led selection on the albums and this one continues that, albeit with Norrie MacIver, best known for his work with Manran, taking over the vocal duties from Robert Robertson.

While Norrie and Robert clearly have different voices, the difference isn't so much as to change the nature of the Skipinnish sound, and there are three of the band's previously released tracks (including *Walking on the Waves*) redone with Norrie on vocals. All hold up very well.

Robert's influence on the band is still strong as he has co-credits on six of the nine songs, with only Angus MacPhail's *Alive* (the CD opener), the Angus and Norrie penned *Harvest of the Homeland* and the Runrig classic *Alba*, not having his input.

The material is all familiar ground for the Gael with tales of the seafaring islander, lost loves, the wistfulness of those living away from the old country and, of course, love's young dream. All are beautifully delivered in the big anthemic sound that has made the band such a favorite at festivals the world over. The tribute to the tragic Iolaire disaster is poignant and heartfelt and I doubt there is a Leodhsach alive who won't have a lump, the size of the Ness Lighthouse, in their throat when Caitlin Smith breaks into *Eilean Fraoich* and the end.

The trio of instrumental tracks see the band get help from a very respectable trio of pipers, Duncan Nicholson (ex-PM of Glasgow Police Pipe Band), James Mackenzie (Breabach) and Seonaidh MacIntyre (Trail West) all pitching in with pipes or whistles as required and creating a rocking, rollocking, big sound that will have even the most reserved souls bouncing like Skippy on steroids.

This is the "band's biggest and boldest production yet", but as the sound gets bigger and the production fills out, the essence of Skipinnish, epitomised by Big Angus and Andrew, still shines through. The band keep the melody first and foremost with everything else layered in a way that never sacrifices the tune or gets in the way of the lyrics. That said, there is a lot going on in the arrangements, and repeated listenings do pay dividend as the subtleties are revealed.

*The Seventh Wave* sees Skipinnish in great form and here's to another seven albums.

● CHRIS MACKENZIE



# Grey's Notes

by Michael Grey

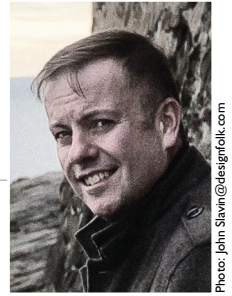


Photo: John Savin@designfolk.com

## The collateral damage of nice

**T**O be clear and direct in communicating – getting across what you really feel to your fellow person – must surely be one of the rarest of human traits. In my experience, it's the norm for people to often do whatever can be done to avoid saying what might be said in the most concise and unvarnished of ways. In our use of words, in our lexicon, we've even invented a special category for words that are indistinct, words that soften the impact of a purer, more literal alternative. We have the euphemism.

Death and dying are taboo discussion subjects in much of the world. Rather than to die or to have died you'll know it's much better to have "passed away". To have passed away must be among one of our most common euphemisms. Like quietly leaving a big party, easing away from a large dinner table or fading from sight at the end of a long road, people just "pass away". So much nicer to think of death that way, isn't it? Of course, euphemisms can be crass and colourful as much as they can be gentle and soft: to kick the bucket, flatline, croak and push up daisies all fall into the category of words and phrases to use when you don't want to say the D word.

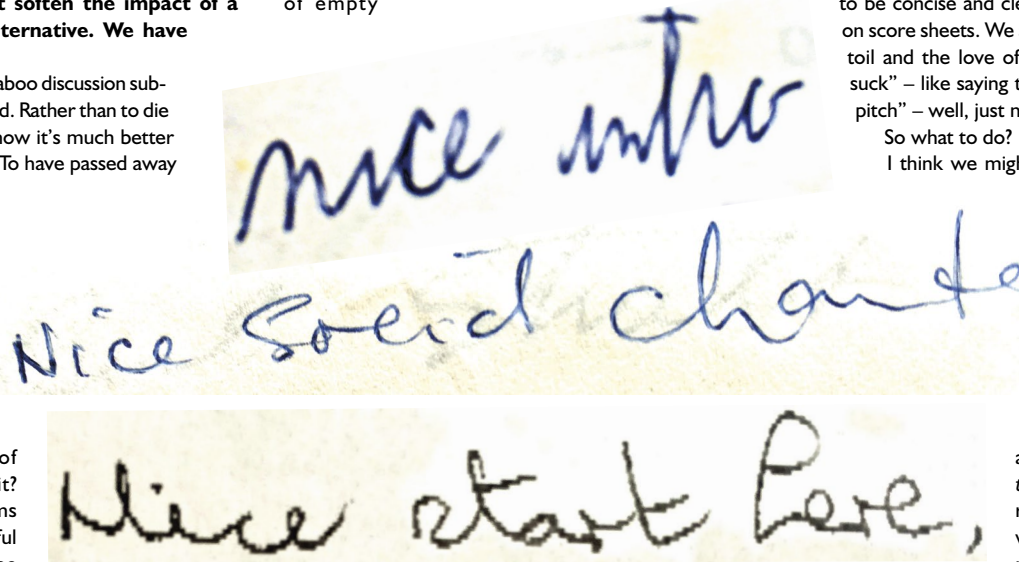
Among many other things, Winston Churchill was a master of the English language. In 1906, in responding to a question in Parliament regarding government treatment of unskilled Chinese labourers, he said: "Perhaps we have been guilty of some terminological inexactitudes." Terminological inexactitudes: a lot of syllables and letters to say the crisp and explicit monosyllabic "lie". Of course, the word lie is considered unparliamentary language and so Churchill looked to the cloying and – this time – clunky euphemism.

Sometimes called doublespeak or double-talk, the euphemism is usually about substituting words that might be blunt, or even offensive, with something milder and more indirect – vague even. Readers of George Orwell's 1984 will be familiar with his inventions of "doublethink" and "newspeak". There is danger in euphemisms because while the words may seem sweet, true and clear, meaning is camouflaged. Something bad can seem good. The intolerable can seem bearable.

When bombs are dropped on wartime targets bad guys can be "eliminated" – killed. At the same

time, there can be "collateral damage": civilians can be blown into a thousand bloody pieces. I can't recall ever having heard a newsreader say anything close to "a thousand bloody pieces" in the context of a bomb exploding. "Collateral damage" is so much less, well, bloody.

And so to piping. Collateral damage in the context of pipe bands might be an acre of litter and detritus after a Worlds contest: a sodden sea of empty



pint cups. We're not without our doublespeak. We certainly have euphemisms aplenty.

A short laundry list might look like this: "good fingers" might have a double meaning as in musically not-so-great, "lovely pipe" can mean sausage fingers. The solo piper coming off a contest and saying, "I got through it", means s/he played pretty good and expects a result. In pipe bands, "well away" for a clean intro means, well, a clean intro and "I'm listening". "Not in the idiom" means the judge has no idea what you're doing.

It was a late-May Saturday that it came to me. I was judging pipe bands at a contest in Canada. Clipboard in hand, pipe band playing their collective sweaty heart out and me with pen, hastily scrawling the most illegible of good-intentioned critical assessment. It was two words: "unaligned pitch". I could have said, "flat, under blown Ds" or just "Ds suck" (though probably not acceptable language by the local organisers). No. I wrote, "unaligned pitch on D". Where did that come from? I'm hoping today the band couldn't read my very poor cursive handwriting and just shrugged and said the usual, "whatever". It was an epiphany. My "score sheets", as we call these things in piping, struck me as over-heavy on euphemisms.

In our game, judges for the most part are people who have been through the mill, the wars of pipe band life. It's all practice and sacrificed time away from other important things and just hard graft. No matter the grade, pipe band life is not always easy-going and almost always involves some sacrifice or, at any given time, a tricky emotionally-charged people "situation" (euphemism alert) – usually both. I think knowing this makes a judge less inclined to be concise and clear and euphemism-free on score sheets. We all respect the effort, the toil and the love of the music. To say, "Ds suck" – like saying the converse, "unaligned pitch" – well, just not on.

So what to do?

I think we might draw on a bigger vocabulary to describe what we mean. I don't think the classical music world's Italian glossary would help. If people don't know what the words mean how useful can any effort in communicating an assessment be? *Sentimental* air, *spinto* reels. Cue rolled eyes (like those who read my "unaligned pitch" comment).

What about drawing on commonplace words to describe what we hear? Consider: ambitious, bold, catchy, braw, breathtaking, effortless, enigmatic, satisfying, gallus, passionate, stylish, riotous, unpredictable, miserable, couthy, throbbing and heartfelt. What's wrong with saying, "this tune made my heart soar"? Or, "too slow and uninteresting. Left me cold"? You get the idea.

One word that has stunk out more score sheets of mine than I care to think, both band and solos, is that most genial of words – "nice". I think "nice" in this context is a euphemism for inoffensive. "Nice" is the path of least resistance. You know, your tune didn't make me want to jump out of my seat and strangle you so – "nice phrasing", "nice lift", "nice intro" – just "nice". And when it comes to music – and art in general, is there a more offensive word than inoffensive? Your art is "nice". Your music is "nice".

As much as we – er, me – need to stop with the "unaligned pitch" – we need to stop the nice. It's true that "no major errors" and the inoffensive can hit prize targets, but we can do better, I think, in simply describing what is great and not so about any performance: a description without euphemism. Tell it like it is.

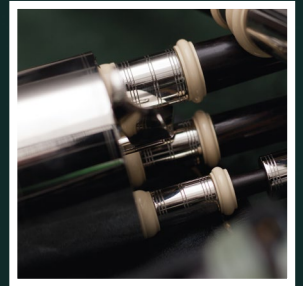
Still, I thought I'd hear pop my clogs when I heard your sensuous strathspeys. Now isn't that nice? ●

# Fred Morrison

## UILLEANN PIPES

These stunning new Fred Morrison Uilleann Pipes were launched at *Piping Live!*, Glasgow 2016. Fred gave the pipes their first ever public airing, as well as a playing few tunes on his other instruments, at The National Piping Centre. More details and some YouTube clips will follow soon.

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