

# PIPING TODAY

## CELTIC CONNECTIONS

Celebrating 25 Years

### The Glenfiddich

*Liz Maxwell talks about the changes down the years*

### The National Youth Pipe Band

*Rockin' Auld Reekie*

### Alan Waldron and the Stirling Burgh Pipers

*Stirling Bagpipes*

### Steal this article

*Knowledge is power*

### A Lament for Lady Frances Minto

*A Jack MacArthur Serial – The Finale*

### Youngstars

### Grey's Notes

by Michael Grey

*It's big. It's bouncy.  
And it's spectacular*

### Theory top-up

by Tim Cummings

*Chord-based harmonies  
for slow airs – Part 6*

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CENTRE

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Angus J. MacColl playing in the  
Johnstone Pipe Band concert at  
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Photos: John Slavin@designfolk.com

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ALBA | CHRUTHACHAIL

## Editorial



**I**N this issue we feature The National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland (NYPBoS) in our Youngstars section with some photographs from their *Inspire* concert. The title is very apt because anyone who attended the event would agree that their performance was indeed inspirational. The photographs portray a sense of the event but, you really had to be there!

I can say with complete confidence that the band is just getting better and better with each year and the talent within the ranks is really quite amazing considering the average age. Great credit must go to all of the regular tutors from around the country who work with these kids and to the bands with which they play. It takes a lot of time and dedication to get to the required standard to become a member of the NYPBoS but the rewards of membership are many. The NYPBoS Director, Alisdair McLaren, has done a fantastic job in moulding this talented group of youngsters into a first-class performing ensemble.

Their excellent technique and tone are of top-end of Grade 1 standard. However, as a non-competing unit which exists to develop the performance aspects of piping and drumming, they also reach the highest standards by producing a continually evolving show which includes thoughtful arrangements to old classics and fresh new experimental repertoire, developed through workshops and rehearsal weekends.

The band now consist of two bands really. There is the Development Band for the younger age group to learn the ropes before progressing to the Senior Band. The Development Band is now of such a high standard that when I was listening to them rehearsing, it took me several minutes to realise this was not the Senior Band! As I said, the standards are continually moving forward and that is so rewarding and inspiring to see, even for someone like me who has been around the piping block a number of times.

Our annual junior piping championship was held on February 26 and it is great to be able to report that we had a record entry this year – unbelievably – the 22nd year of the competition. We have retained our original trophy book with all of the results going back to the earliest competition and so it is really interesting and pleasing to see how many of the prize-winners have continued on to become top-level players such as Finlay Johnston, Alisdair Henderson, Ben Duncan, Callum Beaumont and Faye Henderson, to name just a few.

We hope that this year's crop of players will follow suit. A huge thanks to our many sponsors who have supported us generously and, in particular, R.G. Hardie who have donated the top prize of a set of pipes.

As February drew to a close I was off to Bruggen in Germany for the annual Winter School in partnership with The Piper's Corner, run by David Johnston. The enrolment was very healthy as per usual and this is due to David's continual hard work and effort throughout the year.

The piping teachers for the event were Willie McCallum, Finlay MacDonald, John Mulhearn, Dan Nevans and yours truly. Drumming was being taught by Mark Wilson on snare and for the first time, Tyler Fry, was the tenor and bass teacher. A very impressive team by any measure!

So the busy period is upon us and it would seem that there will not be any deceleration in activity with the weeks to follow full of interesting new challenges. We wouldn't have it any other way!

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

## Workshops and CLASP competitions

**A**NOTHER two-day CLASP workshop series has been scheduled for **October 5 and 6 in The National Piping Centre in Glasgow.**

Organisers say they are pleased to confirm that Murray Henderson will be joining The NPC team again for this series.

CLASP have also updated their list of forthcoming competitions.

They are:

The National Piping Centre CLASP Competition, Glasgow – Saturday, April 7

Army School of Piping Competition, Edinburgh – Saturday, June 2

Luss Highland Games, Luss, – Saturday, July 7.

Balloch Highland Games, Balloch – Saturday July 14.

Inveraray Highland Games, Inveraray – Tuesday, July 17

The Worlds, Glasgow – August 14, 15, and 16.

Northern Meetings, Inverness – Friday, August 31.

Dates for the CLASP competitions at Chatsworth Country Fair, Chatsworth, and SPSL, London, have still to be confirmed at time of press.

For more on CLASP, including results and a Q&A with Grade 3 competition winner Joris Panis, turn to Page 20.

## Sign up for a Tuscan treat

**T**HE Italian Piper's Association are hosting another school in April in Calambrone near Pisa in Tuscany.

The spring school is being held from April 26 - 29 and teachers include The National Piping Centre Principal Roddy MacLeod, Wilson Brown from the NPC and Alberto Massi.

Prices start from 330 euros for all tuition, accommodation and full board.

The school, which offers the opportunity to sit PDQB examinations, will be held at the hotel Il Cenacolo.

It has a beautiful setting with a beach close by and is a lovely spot for a break for family or friends travelling with pipers attending the school.

Find out more about the school by visiting [www.bagpipe.it/wp/](http://www.bagpipe.it/wp/)

## Top SCQF award and a new role for Finlay

**N**ATIONAL Piping Centre instructor and double Gold Medal and Clasp winner, **Finlay Johnston**, has recently passed the **SCQF (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework) Level 8 exam at the Army School of Piping.**

The SCQF promotes lifelong learning in Scotland, and the PDQB (Piping & Drumming Qualifications Board) use the SCQF exams in Scottish Bagpipes and Scottish Pipe Band Drumming. These exams are certificated jointly by the Scottish Qualifications Authority and PDQB, and they fall within a group of SQA qualifications known as National Progression Awards and Professional Development Awards. The National Progression Awards in Scottish Bagpipes and Scottish Pipe Band Drumming, and the higher level Professional Development Awards in Scottish Bagpipes, are based directly on the syllabi for the PDQB qualifications. The Level 8 award achieved by Finlay is the top award and he is now qualified as an assessor for the PDQB.

Finlay explained: "To achieve PDQB Level 8 I sat a performance and theory exam. For my performance I had to prepare six piobaireachds, six MSR's and six hornpipes and jigs. My piobaireachd selection had to include tunes which had each of the different styles of crunluath – standard, crunluath amach, fogsailte and



a breabach. Of my six submitted tunes I was asked to play one. For light music I had to play two each, similar to how we would compete.

"Preparation for the practical exam was similar to how I would practise for most competitions. However for the theory exam I had to get the books out to learn canntaireachd

and also the history of a famous piping family, which I found interesting.

"The award will allow me to assess students who come to The National Piping Centre, or to our workshops and seasonal schools, and who are sitting their SCQF exams.

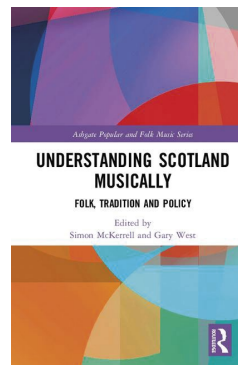
"The SCQF awards allow a player to sit an exam at their appropriate level and work their way up. It gives a piper or a drummer a goal to aim for and an added challenge and focus to their practice, and also gives great satisfaction when the award is attained."

## Understanding Scotland Musically

**A** new academic book titled **Understanding Scotland Musically** has been co-edited by well known pipers and musical academics **Simon McKerrrell** and **Gary West**. The **290-page volume, published by Routledge, is part of the Ashgate Popular and Folk Music Series.**

The 19 chapters in the book are written by a collection of authors and the complete work is described by the publisher as providing "a cohesive set of perspectives on how traditional music performs Scottishness at this crucial moment in the public life of an increasingly (dis)United Kingdom".

The chapters cover a wide range of related topics including: *Traditional music and cultural sustainability in Scotland* • *Traditional music, community organisations and public funding* • *The emergence of the 'traditional*



*arts' in Scottish cultural policy* • *Where the Gaelic Arts and Non-Traditional Theatre Meet* • *Referendum Reflections: Traditional music and the performance of politics in the campaign for Scottish independence* • *Traditional Music, Tertiary Education and an Argument for Post-Revivalism* • *Slaying the Tartan Monster: Identity, Revivalism, and Radicalism in Recent Scottish Music* • *The problem with 'traditional'* • *Distant voices, Scottish lives: On song and migration* • *The Globalization of Highland Dancing* • *Wynds, Vennels and Dual*

*Carriageways: the changing nature of Scottish music* • and finally, *Understanding Scotland Musically: Reflections on Place, War and Nation.*

The book is available from the Routledge website in hardback for £115 or as an ebook for £39.99. It is also available from Amazon.

## Pre-Worlds concert for St Laurence O'Toole

**S**T Laurence O'Toole Pipe Band will headline the **2018 Pre-Worlds show at Glasgow Royal Concert Hall on Wednesday, August 15.**

Kurt Mackintosh, of the Glasgow Skye Association Pipe Band who organise the event, said: "We are thrilled to host yet another of the world's greatest pipe bands for the pre-Worlds concert.

"St Laurence O'Toole Pipe Band are renowned for their concerts. It has been eight years since they last took to the stage at our pre-Worlds concert and we

have no doubt they will put on another fantastic show." Pipe Major Alen Tully said they were delighted to be asked back.

He said: "*Turas Ceoil* – *Resume* will take our audience on a journey through the ages, paying homage to where we have come from in a musical perspective, right through to where we are today. We can't wait to take to the GRCH stage once again."

Tickets, priced £20, are on sale from [www.glasgowconcerthalls.com](http://www.glasgowconcerthalls.com) or by calling 0141 353 8000.

# Gregor wins the prize pipes at The National Piping Centre junior competition

**T**HE National Piping Centre Junior Competition took place on February 24 and there was a very high standard of competition across all the events.

Gregor MacDonald, right, was the Overall Novice (under-15) Champion and received a set of Peter Henderson Heritage Bagpipes kindly donated by R.G. Hardie.

The Overall Junior Champion (under-17) was Brodie Watson-Massey and the Overall Chanter winner was Angus Scott. The full results are as follows:

### 15-17 PIOBAIREACHD

1. Brodie Watson-Massey; 2. Angus MacPhee;
3. Andrew Ferguson; 4. Ross Conner;
5. Eosaph Caimbeul; 6. Luke Shearer

### 15-17 MSR

1. Andrew Ferguson; 2. Jamie Niall Campbell;
3. Angus MacPhee; 4. Ross Conner;
5. Brodie Watson-Massey; 6. Ian Hamilton

### 15-17 JIG

1. Brodie Watson-Massey; 2. Jamie Niall Campbell;
3. Luke Shearer; 4. Ruairidh Brown
5. Andrew Ferguson; 6. Craig Peters

### U15 PIOBAIREACHD

1. Paul Christie; 2. Gregor MacDonald
3. Cameron May; 4. Bobby Allen
5. Amy McIntyre; 6. Joshua Reilly

### U15 PIOBAIREACHD - GROUND ONLY

1. Euan Lindsay; 2. Ryan McCreadie
3. Laura Robertson; 4. Dugald MacKechnie
5. Gregor Grierson; 6. Ruairidh Blyth



### U15 MARCH

1. Christopher Happs; 2. Gregor MacDonald
3. Paul Christie; 4. Bobby Allen
5. Euan Thomson; 6. Finlay Peden

### U15 STRATHSPEY AND REEL

1. Gregor MacDonald; 2. Christopher Happs
3. Paul Christie; 4. Bobby Allen
5. Nicholas Knowles; 6. Fraser Hamilton

### CHANTER SLOW AIR

1. Harrison Bishop; 2. Angus Scott;
3. Mason Morrison; 4. Alexander Drysdale-Dykes;
5. Cayla Winter-Wright; 6. James Simpson

### CHANTER MARCH

1. Angus Scott; 2. James Simpson;
3. Anna Thomson; 4. Christopher Drummond;
5. Ryan Baikie; 6. Robert Wallace

## News in brief

● **THE SCOTS** Guards Club hosts the semi-final of their knockout piping contest on Sunday, March 25.

Ben Duncan and Dan Nevans will battle it out for a place in the final. Each player must play a 30-minute set, to include an MSR and the ground of a piobaireachd.

The competition starts at 4pm at the Scots Guards Club, 2 Clifton Terrace, Edinburgh, EH12

5DR. The final will be held at 4pm on Sunday, April 22 at the same venue.

● **ALMOST 200** musicians submitted video auditions after responding to an appeal by the Pipers' Trail for players for performances at the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo.

Organisers are going through 190 entries from pipers and drummers keen to take part. Players who missed the deadline and are still interested in taking part can contact Pipers' Trail on their Facebook page – [www.facebook.com/Pipers.Trail](http://www.facebook.com/Pipers.Trail)

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by Fergus Muirhead

# Reflections on The Glenfiddich

Liz Maxwell talks about the changes down the years

**L**IZ Maxwell's name is synonymous with the Glenfiddich Piping Championship. She has been involved with the competition since 1978 and for many competitors she is the first port of call if they have a query with anything, from whether they are likely to qualify for this year's contest to where they're sleeping and eating when they arrive at the Atholl Place Hotel the night before the event.

But involvement in the competition happened almost by accident for Liz. She said: "My first job in William Grant & Sons was Assistant to the Public Relations Manager, Margaret Foster. The Grants Piping Championship, the original name of the event, evolved from a suggestion by Mike Grieve – son of Hugh McDiarmid – and Seumas MacNeill, who approached the PR company we were using at the time, David Donald Associates. Two years later, Meg suddenly left the company,

taking all her files with her and additionally, we changed agencies to Tait & McLay Advertising. Between us, we had no paperwork and a scant history of the event which was into its fourth year. Fortunately, we quickly realised there were lots of people we could ask for help and advice. Everyone was very

happy to help ensure the event continued and did what they could to help us on the way."

Organising The Glenfiddich, as it is affectionately called by everyone involved, has never been Liz's main job while she worked for William Grant. The PR function was relocated to the London offices and she moved to work in the finance department, organising the competition as a sideline to her daily duties. Although she is seen as the public face of Glenfiddich, at



Liz Maxwell



The Glenfiddich 2017 pipers from the left: Cameron Drummond, Callum Beaumont, Glenn Brown, Craig Sutherland, Alasdair Henderson, Angus MacColl, Jack Lee, Ian K MacDonald, Roderick MacLeod and Iain Speirs.

*'We never deviate from our qualifying rules, they're cast in tablets of stone. And the pipers actually know who has qualified before we do'*

# as the next generation step up



© Derek Maxwell/ WmGrantFoundation

the event she has a small team of experienced and dedicated individuals who are always there to lend a hand. Liz explained: “Pat and Rob MacPherson, both retired from working at the Glenfiddich and Balvenie Distilleries in Dufftown, and Dennis MacBain, who was the coppersmith at Glenfiddich for 50 years, are

undoubtedly a massive help on the day of the Championship. Occasionally we have Brian Kinsman who is our Master Blender – and a piper – so in terms of whisky and piping, we have the most knowledgeable and entertaining



Jack Lee from British Columbia placed first in ceòl mòr and second in MSR to become the Glenfiddich Champion for 2017.

© Derek Maxwell/ WmGrantFoundation

group of people manning our guests’ bar.”

Anyone who has spent any time in the bar over the years will understand exactly what Liz means, since piping and whisky form a large part of any conversation that takes place, naturally over a dram or two, with the competitions and their guests. You’ll never see a competitor in the bar before they have played all of their tunes, because it’s a serious day. It’s the most prestigious piping event of the year for the competitors, although Liz reckons there’s a more relaxed element to today’s Championship. She said: “I’m not sure but it might be related to the younger age of today’s competitors and perhaps because they don’t need to worry about anything other than their music. We take care of everything else and aim to make the weekend as successful and enjoyable as possible.”

It’s a year-long job for Liz these days. “I start planning the next event almost immediately. Before I leave Blair Castle and Atholl Palace Hotel I confirm the booking for the following year and then round about March, we meet up to double check the details. Apart from a few enquiries regarding tickets, nothing really happens until all the qualifying events have taken place and the invitation list is completed. I’m very happy to leave the technicalities of organising the live streaming and the online sale of tickets to The National Piping Centre!”

As Liz reflects on this, she realises that the qualifying list for next year actually starts to take shape on the day of the event this year. She said: “Qualifying actually starts immediately as this year’s champion will be invited to defend his title. The SPSL event in London the following week gives us a second and third name for invitation.

Well, it should, but for a number of years it’s only given us one name!”

What Liz means by this, of course, is that one player can win more than one event in a year, and this can cause problems. She added: “We seldom have individual winners for the nine qualifying events and more recently, we have used second and third places from the first four qualifying events to achieve the required number of competitors. Prior to 1988 we had 12 competitors and I don’t recall very many second place invitations being issued. We never deviate from our qualifying list, it’s cast in tablets of stone and the pipers usually work it out for themselves. I get emails and phone calls saying things like ‘I was third in such and such a competition and think I’ve qualified for an invitation.’ They’re usually right!”

Although the competition has always been held at Blair Castle, the accommodation and after-event entertainment have moved around a bit. Liz said: "I don't know much about the first few years but I believe there was a dinner and perhaps accommodation in the Tilt hotel in Blair Atholl. In 1978, we moved to Scotland's Hotel in Pitlochry. That was a really good venue because we took the whole hotel over for the weekend and that's where the Pipers' Ceilidh was born. Someone suggested that after dinner, we might want to dance, so the carpet was rolled up and the rest is history. Unfortunately Scotland's Hotel failed to meet our requirements and we successfully moved to Atholl Palace about 10 or 12 years ago."

Over the years, the Pipers' Ceilidh has become an integral part of the day's event. Liz said: "The Ceilidh has grown in popularity. At the beginning it was only for the competitors, judges, guests and their partners but we've extended it to anyone who supports the event at Blair Castle. It's a nice way to get together and celebrate a successful day."

The other major change that Liz has seen over the years is in the competitors who take part on the day. She said: "For my first four or five years, it was people like John Burgess, Hugh MacCallum, Malcolm McRae, Pipe Major Angus MacDonald and Murray Henderson, many of whom are now judges. Nipping at their heels, to name a few, were Roddy MacLeod, Willie McCallum, Angus MacColl and Alasdair Gillies. Now they are being challenged by a new generation of pipers."

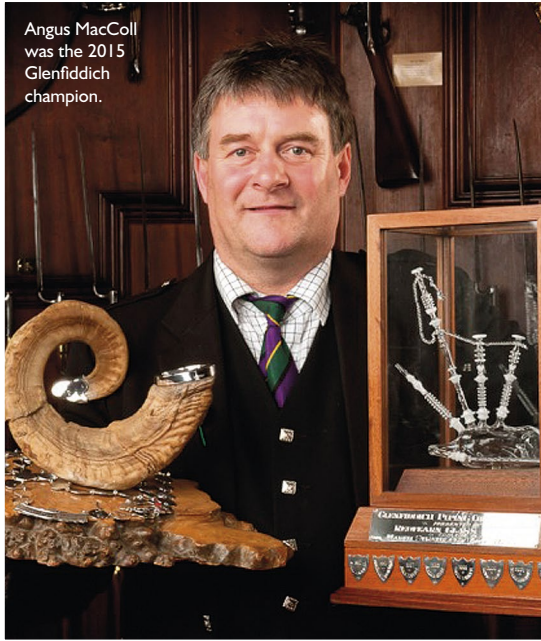
Angus MacColl has been playing at the event since the early 90s and is aware of this younger group snapping at his heels. He said: "It definitely doesn't get any easier. It has been a long time for me, I think 1991 was the first time – before some of these younger players this year were born. But it doesn't get easier."

"It's the biggest one of the year, and it's based on performance and how you've done over the year whether you get invited or not. You put yourself under a lot of pressure. You need to be prepared and come here to put on a good show. It's the venue and the whole thing – it's a big pressure. You don't like to not be here."

Angus reckons that the younger players might find it a bit easier than his contemporar-



Overall winner Jack Lee with runner up Roddy MacLeod who won the MSR.



Angus MacColl was the 2015 Glenfiddich champion.



more nerve-wracking than it was when you were in your twenties and you took it all in our stride. They'll be keyed up though and hoping it all goes well for them."

Craig Sutherland was one of the younger players Angus refers to, and he sees the Glenfiddich as an opportunity to soak up as much as he can from his more experienced colleagues. Craig said: "Roddy and Angus have amassed a ton of experience over the years, not just at the Glenfiddich but at other competitions."

I'm quite young and still looking to pick up skills so if I can pick up anything from these guys it will be great. There are a lot of younger players. It's good to see the old guard not in the competition



© Derek Maxwell/WmGrantFoundation

ies. He said: "It's very different this year, with a lot of young guys and a few of us old fellows still hanging in. Perhaps having youth on their side, they are not as stressed as we are. I don't remember what I was like in the early days, I guess when you understand it all, it's maybe



Derek Maxwell/ WmGrantFoundation

was the first and perhaps still the only event to include spouses and families in the invitation. This makes it a really unique occasion as the competitors are supported all weekend.”

Liz believes that the Fear an Tighe also deserves mention. She said: “People don’t always realise that the Fear an Tighe has a lot of work to do. With each piper submitting six tunes in each discipline, the Fear an Tighe, like them, doesn’t know which tunes will be chosen until the night before the event, so his homework is multiplied by 10. We’ve had various people chairing the event over the years but latterly it’s been John Wilson and Bob Worrall. It’s a very difficult job to hold it all together from 10am until sometimes 7pm and have knowledge of all the tunes.”

There is no doubt that the Fear an Tighe does a sterling job keeping the audience amused and informed, especially when a competitor takes slightly longer than expected to make their way from the final tuning room to the stage. Once they get there, they have to be aware of the time spent tuning before starting their tune or tunes. This is still a subject discussed widely in the bars after the competition, and Liz and her team are always looking at ways to minimise the tuning times without putting the players under too much pressure. Liz said: “I’m not sure we want to introduce lights. We discussed this with the competitors and suggested that in order to stop lights being introduced, they needed to be more aware of their tuning times. A clock was introduced a couple of years ago, which we hope sits discreetly on the stage – on the piano behind the MSR trophy – and that definitely helped. The first year, we finished an hour earlier than expected.”

Even although the event runs smoothly every year as far as the spectators are aware, there have been one or two hairy moments for Liz and her team. She said: “One year we had three separate medical emergencies. A lady fell and broke her ankle which was number one. Number two was blue light for a suspected heart attack and the third was for a perforated ulcer where the

person had locked themselves in the toilet and the door had to be knocked down. The great thing was that the competition carried on with both the pipers and the audience oblivious to all of this! One or two did however ask why an ambulance with flashing blue lights was passing the windows at the end of the great hall.”

Now an integral part of the event and one that Liz is most proud of is the Balvenie Medal. She said: “We introduced the Balvenie medal in 1985. The idea came from David Tait of Tait



Sandy Jones was presented with the Balvenie Medal for his services to piping in North America.

© Derek Maxwell/WmGrantFoundation

and to see a lot of new blood come in. But these guys can still do it and it wouldn’t surprise me if 2018 is back to a competition filled with the old guard and the younger players taking a back seat. These guys are more than capable of delivering excellent performances and at the end of the day, that’s what it’s all about.”

Listening to the competitors talking positively about each other confirms one of Liz’s strongest views on the day – the teamwork and camaraderie that exists between the competitors and their families. She said: “They are all very supportive of one another and I couldn’t start to count the number of people who have helped me over the years. Every single one of them would go out of their way to help solve a problem.”

Perhaps at least part of that is to do with the way the players and their families are treated by Liz and her colleagues. She is reluctant to take all of the credit. She said: “I really believe The Glenfiddich is an important event. I think it

& McLay Advertising and we thought it would be a perfect way to recognise services to piping. We had a bit of a dilemma to start with because there were so many high-profile people who deserved to be awarded the medal.

“When this was accomplished, we moved onto the unsung heroes and for me, this was the most meaningful part. Occasionally, we only receive a nomination at the very last minute but as we take no part in choosing the recipient, it’s something we have to accept. The person who submitted the nomination makes the presentation which is a nice personal touch. We’ve only presented it in absentia twice and the most poignant was posthumously to Jimmy McGregor who died a few days before the event. Murray Henderson, who had nominated Jimmy, was able to tell him a few days before he died that he was going to receive the medal.”

The format of the competition has changed little from the first year, but modern technology means that thousands who can't attend on the day can now watch the event. Liz said: "The live streaming has made a great impact. It's far too technical for me and as I said before, I'm happy to leave it to The National Piping Centre to organise. So many more people from overseas come to Blair Castle because they watched the live streaming."

There was a fear that fewer would come in person if they could sit at home and watch it without braving a Perthshire autumn day but this has proved groundless. Some of the visitors to the Castle over the years have been interesting. Liz said: "Clement Freud turned up one year and we had no idea who invited him. After lunch, he made for the bar, stayed there all day, never smiled the whole time and we never heard from him again. We thought he might write something nice about the event – he didn't!

Another year we had the Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands with his entourage.

"The Scottish Office approached us with a problem. They had some visitors from overseas, didn't know how to entertain them and could they come to the Glenfiddich Piping Championship? We made them welcome and after listening to some music, declined the offer of a dram in the bar because they didn't drink. Having said that, they still managed to leave the Castle with as many bottles of Glenfiddich as they could carry and big smiles on their faces."

Liz remained tight-lipped when asked to talk about her favourite competitors over the years, and some of their antics either on the day or at the post-competition ceilidh. She did, however, reveal that the late lamented Alasdair Gillies did get himself in a bit of hot water one year. Liz said: "He was caught taking a nap in Queen Victoria's bed, fully clothed, including brogues. He didn't think it was a problem because the

bed was in the tuning room he had used for a number of years and he was tired!" Seems fair enough, can't think why the Castle staff thought it was a problem.

Liz is also greatly encouraged by the number of young people who attend the event each year, and in this, she sees the importance of the event continuing well into the future. She said: "It's something for these youngsters to aspire to and there are more and more coming along each year. I hope the William Grant Foundation, who now support the event, realise this really is a special occasion worthy of continued support."

Angus MacColl agrees. "I remember when I was wee and learning the pipes and putting on records of The Glenfiddich and listening to Iain McFadyen and Angus MacDonald and all these guys playing and hoping that one day I'd be able come and do that as well. It's just a great occasion." ●



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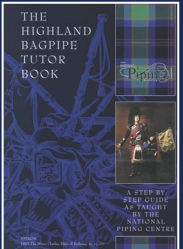


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by Stuart Milne

# Through the Celtic mists of time

Celtic Connections 2018

“A quarter of a century is a long time,” proclaims protagonist Mattie Ross at the end of Charles Portis’s 1968 Western novel *True Grit*. When the first Celtic Connections festival was held in Glasgow in 1994, Bill Clinton was in his first term in the White House, the world wide web had only been available to the public for three years and Scotland’s absence from the FIFA World Cup was a mere blip after qualifying for five consecutive tournaments, to be rectified once again at France 98.

The festival too is a much-changed beast. In 1994, the 66 events all took place in the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall – add some 200 gigs to that number in venues spread across the city and even today’s most dedicated music lovers can only hope to scratch the surface.

The endurance of the festival itself is matched by the longevity of many acts in the Celtic music scene that was its original main focus. The 25th anniversary opening night concert on Thursday, January 18, combined many veteran performers with a younger generation making their mark on the modern scene.

The honour of playing the first notes of the 2018 festival fell to The National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland Development Band pipe major Robyn Ada McKay, playing a slow air and march supported by a collection of drummers from the Glasgow Police, Inveraray & District, Police Scotland Fife and Scottish-Power pipe bands.

The piping theme continued with the 10-strong supergroup Tryst performing James Duncan Mackenzie’s composition *The Plough on the Crossbeam*, with Rory Campbell reciting verse by Mackenzie’s ancestor, the Lochcarron bard John Macrae. With no concern for the conventions of standard pipe band performance, this group have taken the free-form approach characteristic of the Breton bagads, with pipers joining in the tune in pairs, and keeping the drones turned off to facilitate long

pauses between sections. The first portion of the piece comprised a simple yet effective slow air, reminiscent of band member John Mulhearn’s arrangement of the piobaireachd *The Desperate Battle of the Birds*, before launching into a high-energy reel after the poem.



The only female member of the line-up, Mairead Green, stayed on stage and switched to her accordion to join Orcadian outfit Saltfishforty. Fiddler Douglas Montgomery explained that they very nearly didn’t make it down to Glasgow thanks to the snow covering much of Scotland that day, but the audience were very grateful that they did, enjoying the *Glassel* jig set from their *Netherbow* album, and a mournful ballad about men lost at sea.

Singer Siobhan Miller preceded her rendition of *The Unquiet Grave* by recounting how she was so terrified before her first Celtic Connections performance at The National Piping Centre aged 15 that she could do nothing but hide in the toilets. After Admiral Fallow singer Louis Abbott also shared a tale of how nerves ruined his brief career as a brass band snare drummer before performing his number, the audience were treated to the first of the evening’s cross-cultural offerings. While the early years of Celtic Connections very much emphasised the Celtic factor, latter-day line-

ups are far more diverse, featuring everything from mainstream heavyweights like Tom Jones and Olivia Newton John to artists from rich musical cultures around the world that would never be considered “Celtic”.

In this reviewer’s experience, hearing such musicians for the first time has long been one of the treats of this festival, and Syrian *qānūn* player Maya Youssef is one of the most wonderful surprises of all. The *qānūn* is a 78-string plucked zither, an instrument Youssef was told as a girl she would not be able to learn because it was traditionally played only by men. Her mesmerising piece *Bombs Turn Into Roses*, inspired by a dream she had about the horrendous civil war still tearing her country apart after seven years, sounded in places like a jig version of the already spine-tingling *Carol of the Bells*, and when she was then joined by a pianist and two Celtic singers whom Youssef had just met that afternoon, the effect was spellbinding.

The first half was rounded off by String Sisters and a special medley of songs from the First World War by the cast of the *Far Far From Ypres* stage show, which will perform at Edinburgh’s Usher Hall at the Armistice Day centenary this November. It was heartening to hear many of the audience join in such old favourites as *Keep Right On to the End of the Road*, *It’s a Long Way to Tipperary* and *Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag* that are still well-known today.

Irish-American festival favourites Cherish the Ladies, formed in New York nearly a decade before the first Celtic Connections, were first on after the intermission, accompanied by an Irish dancer who very nearly hit his head on the ceiling from leaping so high.

There was more delightful music from Drever McCusker Woomble, Indian musicians Sharat Chandra Srivastava and Gyan Singh, Gaelic singers SIAN, Sharon Shannon and Eddi Reader, before Ross Ainslie and Ali Hutton and then the rest of Tryst, accompanied by the drummers who opened the show, brought the formal proceedings to a close with

two contemporary classics: Ali Hutton's beautiful retreat march for his Gran and Gordon Duncan's off-the-wall reel *Pressed For Time*, mixed in with the ground of *Earl of Seaforth's Salute* he memorably used as counterpoint in his second album *The Circular Breath*.

As if that wasn't enough, several acts teamed up to sing and play *The Bloody Fields of Flanders* for an encore, the entire cast of more than 40 performers eventually made their way on stage for a spontaneous session for the ages, with solos and duets alternating with perennial favourite tunes including *Wee Michael's March* by John McCusker and *Roddy MacDonald's Fancy*. It was a magnificent celebration of pure musicianship and set the bar very high indeed for the rest of the festival.

Ireland and Persia are two musical traditions you wouldn't immediately thinking of working together, but judging by the audience reaction in the concert hall's Strathclyde Suite the following evening, Dublin-based quartet Navá are on to a winner. In their first performance outside the island of Ireland, Iranian brothers Shahab and Shayan Coohé, Paddy Kiernan and Niall Hughes wowed the crowd with a wondrous blend of santoor (Iran's national instrument), percussion, guitar and

banjo, giving the much-loved Irish jig *The Foxhunter* a memorable makeover.

Someone who has probably played that tune many times over is uilleann piper Jarlath Henderson, one of six musicians comprising The Secret North, a musical project involving Ailie Robertson of Scotland on harp, Donald Grant of Scotland on fiddle, Karen Tweed of England on accordion, Sondre Meisfjord of Norway on double bass and Swedish/Norwegian Marit Fält on mandola. Their music was all composed while sharing a house together Big Brother-style for a week, with instructions to write a concert's worth of material. Luckily, there seem to have been no major fallings-out in the process to get in the way of creating beautiful music, with a wide emotional range leaning from toe-tapping reels to heartfelt songs and poems.

Saturday afternoon at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall means pipe band concert time at Celtic Connections, and Grade 1 newcomers Johnstone Pipe Band from nearby Renfrewshire were the 2018 headliners in their 75th anniversary year. They put together a most impressive and entertaining line-up of sup-



Angus J. MacColl

porting acts for the first half who many fans of piping music would pay to see on their own – Finlay MacDonald and Ross Martin, Angus J. MacColl and the aforementioned Jarlath Henderson.

Johnstone began their portion of the show with pipe major Keith James Bowes playing the ground of *The Piper's Warning to His Master*, the piobaireachd the band have adapted into a march to open one of their



Johnstone Pipe Band

medleys. Anyone who has heard Johnstone play this marching up to the line or in the act of competing will know it as one of the most impactful medley openers for quite some time, and the pipe corps striding on to the stage brimming with confidence made for a spine-tingling start. Strathspeys and reels from the same medley followed, plus a couple of extras – *The Amorous Carling*, *General MacDonald* and *Howie's* by Fred Morrison – accompanied by folk band Herron Valley. The backing arrangements were tastefully done but a touch overpowered by close to a full line-up of snare drummers. This was followed by a trio of seldom-heard 9/8 marches and a competition MSR, beginning with an equally rare march, *Allan Dodd's Farewell to Scotland*.

While venerable Celtic rockers Runrig are set to close out their 40-plus years of live performances this summer, their songs have been going strong in pipe band medleys of late, with Johnstone's other selection centred on *Hearts of Olden Glory*. A finely crafted waltz transition to *Corkhill* followed this, before reverting to its traditional jig form, rounding off with

Peter MacLeod Jnr's *The Loch Ness Monster*.

A quintet of younger pipers took centre stage for an intriguing set including compositions by two of the performers themselves, and a waltz and jig version of R. S. MacDonald's *Last Tango in Harris*. It is good to see Johnstone's own band members add to the distinctive musical identity being moulded by their pipe major.

The vigorous health of the Johnstone organisation their 75th year is testament to their longstanding teaching programme, with many members of the Grade 1 band having won three World titles in a row moving up the grades. The newly-promoted Grade 3B outfit were already picking up prizes at this level playing up from Grade 4, and the rapid progress of the junior band was on show as they joined the senior band for two jigs from a previous medley: *The Unknown Jig* and *£50 Cashback*. At this rate and on the evidence of this performance, Grade 3B could be yet another happy hunting ground for Johnstone in the seasons ahead.

In yet another new spin on existing medley material, Katie MacKenzie came on to sing

the Gaelic air *Mi Le M' Uileann air mo Ghlùn*, with pipe sergeant Dougie Campbell leading the band in the pipe version and continuing with the last two jigs from that selection: *The Mallaig Ferry* and Gordon Duncan's *The Fourth Floor*. Keith Bowes showed a touch of the humour and showmanship from his years with the National Youth Pipe Band by becoming possibly the first Grade 1 pipe major to (voluntarily) dance on stage.

In a powerful display of the countless hours of teaching required to get a band to this level, the concert ended with the entire Johnstone organisation (Grade 1 band, Grade 3B band, Renfrewshire Schools Novice Juvenile band and learners on practice chanter) marching on to the stage to a set of well-known 4/4 marches: *Moonstar*, *The Battle of Waterloo* and *Flett from Flotta*. So many top-tier bands have faded away into history in the 75 years since Johnstone's foundation, but organisations with such commitment to nurturing their own talent are surely destined to remain with us for as long as pipe bands exist.

The sole let-down with this concert was the disconcertingly small audience. The cabaret seating in the stalls area was filled up by the hundreds of family members and supporters of



Photo: John Shavin@Dagbladet



Tannahill Weavers

the three bands on stage for the finale, but the upper tier was almost completely deserted and the mid-level terraces were not full either. The icy weather plaguing Glasgow that weekend may have persuaded some ticket-holders to stay put rather than risk the slippery pavements, but it was still a very disappointing turnout. A scattering of familiar faces in the crowd revealed some prominent band leaders had made their way from as far afield as Northern Ireland and Moray, but as a community we surely need to make much more of an effort to support the scene on our doorstep in a hotbed such as Glasgow before we can persuade the non-playing wider public to take our art form seriously.

This was a great pity, because Johnstone put on a highly entertaining show that was a masterclass in economy of repertoire, with only a few minor slips of execution here and there. A great deal of the music was derived from existing competition material, but the creativity lay in fresh presentation thanks to the cast of supporting musicians. In more ways than one, Johnstone's model for success as a pipe band is one many would do well to learn from.

Upstairs in the Strathclyde Suite that evening, another pillar of Scottish music was celebrating a significant milestone. Founded 50 years ago, the Tannahill Weavers became the first professional folk band to include bagpipes, and the present members were joined on stage by four of their surviving pipers emeritus: Iain MacInnes, Kenny Forsyth, Duncan Nicholson and Colin Melville, with original piper Alan MacLeod making a special



Innovation & Tradition: The Future of Piping discussion

appearance by video link. Perhaps inevitably there were some balance issues with the rest of the instruments and vocals at times, but as a one-off experience the spectacle was certainly worth it.

The current line-up of Roy Gullane, Phil Smillie, John Martin and Lorne MacDougall were also joined by a series of special guests, including Mary Ann Kennedy, a bow tie-clad Dougie MacLean who had to immediately run back to the other show he was playing that night, and "wee Gordy" Duncan, whose famous father also served as the band's piper. The trademark Tannahill Weavers blend of classic folk songs, good tunes old and new, and a healthy dose of jokes, has stood the test of time very well indeed.

Sunday afternoon offered something different for piping enthusiasts in the form of a discussion on the extremely broad topic of the future of piping. Panel chair Gary West was joined by a diverse range of pipers whose

opinions are well worth listening to: Michael Grey, Faye Henderson, Andrew Bova, John Mulhearn and Finlay MacDonald. It was a lively debate that thanks to strong audience participation covered a wider range of topics, from defining "tradition" to the pitch of chanters and, perhaps most interestingly, the causes of the perceived lack of creativity in pipe band competition repertoire. It was observed that the desire to win the World Championships, plus the increasing commercialisation of that event, has led to an increasing aversion to risk-taking. Finlay MacDonald made the case that responsibility lay with the Grade 1 band leaders to first shake things up at the top of the pyramid for the rest of the field to follow.

With such a large panel, the discussion would have benefited from another half-hour to give each of the highly influential pipers more of a chance to speak, and the small audience indicated that charging for the event might not have been the best idea.



Torupulli Jussi and Finlay MacDonald



Photo: John Shaw@Designfolk Ltd



James Duncan Mackenzie

Finlay MacDonald was back in action on Friday, January 26, in collaboration with Estonian folk group Torupulli Jussi, following the launch of *Srõmos*, the second solo album by Breabach piper James Duncan Mackenzie. As he joked at the beginning, the definition of “solo” may have changed a bit, and the talents of the six musicians sup-

porting him are a major part of what made the performance and the recording itself such a joy to listen to.

The packed audience clearly enjoyed the Estonians’ lively and sophisticated blend of fiddle and indigenous pipes, with drones hanging horizontally across the thighs, and the most delightful song about moose testicles you’re ever likely to hear. Finlay’s own set was up to his usual high standards of entertainment, but the best part of the evening was his combined performances with Torupulli Jussi, including piper Cätlin Mägi’s rendition of Gordon Duncan’s jig *Pitlochry High School Centenary* on Jew’s harp. There’s no mistaking the distinctive rhythm of that memorable third part.

Any time we pipers congratulate ourselves for being creative by playing “C” and “F” naturals in a tune or reprising the slow air at the end of a medley, we should all take a reality check by listening to the music of Martyn Bennett. Surely no other piper has ever stepped so far out of our collective comfort zone to create such a mind-boggling blend of classical and electronic sounds with preserved samples of Scotland’s folk tradition. No one who attended the debut performance by Greg Lawson’s GRIT Orchestra on the opening night of Celtic Connections in 2015 will ever forget how stunning the recreation of Bennett’s final album was right from the first notes, and this time *Bothy Culture* took the festival to the cavernous SSE Hydro, supported by Celtic fusion band Niteworks, among the most forthright torchbearers of Bennett’s legacy. Featuring pipers Calum MacCrimmon, Ross Ainslie, Ali Hutton and Fraser Fifield and a special cameo by Finlay MacDonald, the vast ensemble made superb use of the space available by introducing some spectacular visual accompaniment, including aerial dance company All or Nothing, and a much-anticipated appearance by stunt cyclist Danny MacAskill.

While the orchestration of the *Bothy Culture* material was superb from start to finish, the unquestionable highlight came when singer Fiona Hunter took the stage to reprise the most memorable number from the original performance –

the magisterial *Blackbird*. It forms the soundtrack to MacAskill’s viral video *The Ridge* of his ride over the Cuillins in Skye, currently standing at 56 million views on YouTube. Thanks to an obstacle course laid out over the auditorium floor and a mountain façade behind the orchestra, MacAskill faithfully recreated his epic journey, complete with rowing boat to open the sequence.

Although no one track on the *Bothy Culture* album matches *Blackbird* for sheer emotional impact and memorability, the show made full use of all available resources to create a marvellous spectacle. It is harder to imagine a more effective way of conveying to a mass audience in a concert venue or on television just what Scottish music is capable of.

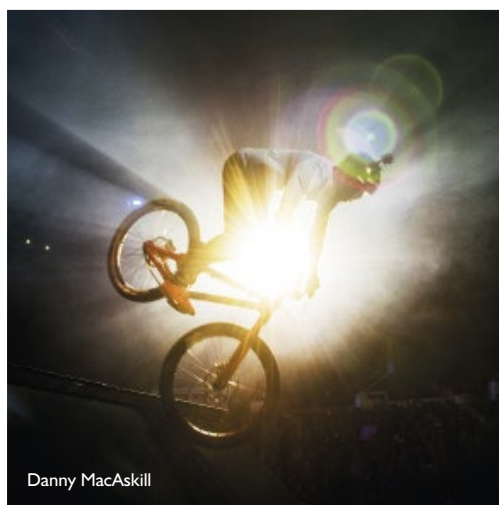
Since 2001, BBC Radio Scotland has done much to foster the Martyn Bennetts of the future by organising and broadcasting the Young Traditional Musician of the Year competition, the final of which was held at City Halls on Sunday, January 28. Two pipers made the cut this year: Alexander Levack

Photo: John Shawin@Designfolk Ltd



Mohsen Sharifian and David Shedden

Photo: Gaelle Bert



Danny MacAskill

Photo: John Shawin@Designfolk Ltd



Ailis Sutherland in the TMSA Young Trad Tour concert



Ewen Henderson and Gary Innes of Manran

Photo: John Shawin@DesignItK Ltd

and occasional vocals, it was remarkable how quickly the local audience, helped by the sizeable Iranian contingent, became absorbed in the hypnotic rhythms and started clapping along to this most unfamiliar music. A special collaboration with David Shedden's new trio Assynt set the crowd into full-blown party mode ahead of Scottish veterans Old Blind Dogs, whose characteristic blends of songs and lively tunes prompted a mini-ceilidh of their own at the end of their slot. Sharifian and his colleagues will surely be a sleeper hit at any festival in the world with the foresight to book them.

There are few Glasgow venues more popular for a dance than the O2 ABC on Sauchiehall Street, the venue for this year's closing party. Following an opening slot by rising Irish stars The Young Folk, who impressed with a sound highly reminiscent of Mumford & Sons, MÀNran rounded things off in magnificent style. They were accompanied for large stretches by a string quartet, who added a delightful layer of extra subtlety and grace to MÀNran's already sophisticated sound, and the Glasgow Gaelic Choir. From the back of the venue at stage right the choir mostly didn't come over as particularly audible when singing with the band, but in the rousing strains of the utterly brilliant *An Dà Là* the impact was stunning. There were two further delights – Capercaillie's Karen Matheson joining the lads to sing her own band's haunting Gaelic anthem, and the reassuring observation that every time vocalist and fiddler Ewen Henderson picked up his pipes, he did so to shrieks of delight from young female audience members.

The 25th Celtic Connections was a fabulous showcase for everything that has made the festival so successful throughout its evolution. Perhaps the greatest joy for a fan is discovering new artists from musical cultures you know nothing about that become your festival favourites. Three of this year's biggest surprises – Maya Youssef, Navá and Lian – are rooted in Middle Eastern traditions notably absent from the festival's earliest days. Defying all logic, Glasgow in January has become the perfect place for icons of traditional music to celebrate major anniversaries, but it is also clear that the next generation of performers are doing a marvellous job of reaching new audiences.

Guessing which of them will still be performing at the 50th Celtic Connections is going to be a lot of fun. ●



Hannah Rarity

Photo: courtesy BBC Scotland

to win the title stands for another year.

Another young piper worth a serious listen is Calum Stewart, one of only a handful of Scottish-born exponents of the Irish uilleann pipes. Supporting Irish fiddle trio Bow Brothers at the Mitchell Theatre, Stewart and his backing musicians, including fellow piper Scott Wood on whistle, put on a classy and often energetic

display of music from his new album *Tales from the North*, true to the legends, landscapes and people of his native north of Scotland. Anyone given a new enthusiasm for Iranian instruments after catching Navá earlier in the festival owed it to themselves to come to the concert hall's New Auditorium on Saturday February 2 to see Mohsen Sharifian with his band Lian perform the double-chantered *ney-ambān*, a pipe without drones but featuring one of the largest bags in the whole of the bagpipe world. Enhanced by Iranian percussion

and David Shedden, alongside pianist Rory Matheson and singers Hannah Rarity and Amy Papiransky, with singer/guitarist Luc McNally sadly unable to play after suffering an injury. Levack has a knack for the fastest fingering this reviewer has ever seen played on whistle, while Shedden's atmospheric rendition of *Lament for the Bishop of Argyll* was the standout moment of the entire show. After a contest of remarkable quality, Hannah Rarity was crowned the 2018 winner, meaning Stuart Cassells' record as the only piper ever

display of music from his new album *Tales from the North*, true to the legends, landscapes and people of his native north of Scotland. Anyone given a new enthusiasm for Iranian instruments after catching Navá earlier in the festival owed it to themselves to come to the concert hall's New Auditorium on Saturday February 2 to see Mohsen Sharifian with his band Lian perform the double-chantered *ney-ambān*, a pipe without drones but featuring one of the largest bags in the whole of the bagpipe world. Enhanced by Iranian percussion

# 10 questions with Joris Panis

Joris was the Overall Grade 3 winner at the Scots Guards Club and Royal Scottish Pipers' Society CLASP event in Edinburgh recently

**Q. How long have you been playing and what made you decide to take up the pipes?**

While in elementary school I started exploring music at the local music school. After two years of music theory my first instrument was the trumpet which I played for two years or so.

We had a piano at home on which I taught myself the bare essentials. In my teenage years, I moved to the guitar to accompany songs at campfires. Last stop before picking up the pipes were the African drums: Djembé.

It must have been in 2004 that my piping adventure started. At that time I was 26.

I'm not quite sure from where the interest for the pipes comes from, probably a mixture of several influences. At the age of 12, I visited the Royal Military Tattoo. If I remember well, after returning home from our summer trip in Scotland, I asked my parents if I could learn the pipes.

But in a world where Google was not invented yet, the answer was simple: "You can't in Belgium."

My parents will probably deny this fact.

Several years later I found out that bagpipe instruction was offered only a village away.

The second influencer was probably my grandad: Max Vansichen. He didn't play music himself but he encouraged everyone in the family to do so.

In 1945, he started his military career in the RAF - Belgian Branch. Through him I learned to respect military life and to appreciate the military style of music.

**Q. Tell us about your instruction...where and how often do you receive piping lessons?**

I started in a way that we tell every new student not to – on a lazy Saturday afternoon I bought some Pakistani bagpipes with one of my first pay cheques.

Only after completing the Ebay transaction, I started browsing the net to see where I could learn to play.

I started tuition with a small band in St-Niklaas in Belgium. The band's motto is: "Just for fun." I had a great time in that band, but soon found out it was not the best place to receive decent instruction.

As well as the band practices I started taking additional private lessons with Walther Weymeersch, pipe major of another band.

He made me start again from scratch and after a while, he encouraged me to stop taking lessons with him and join Belgian Blend Pipe Band.



Together with some other new members, I had to start from scratch a third time at Belgian Blend. But I am convinced that a more solid foundation was built at that time.

Belgian Blend were moving through the grades at that time: from 4B to 4A and then to 3B. That made it hard for me to close the gap. As a result I had to step away from the band.

At that point, I was blessed to continue private lessons with Gert Mathé. Gert used to play with Belgian Blend, Ballagan and Antwerp & District.

He made me pick up challenging tunes, work on musicality and technique. And not to forget,

he introduced me to piobaireachd.

Finally I was at a level good enough to join Belgian Blend again in Grade 3B.

I played with the band for three seasons and our best result was fifth in 3B at the Worlds.

The last year I tried to take regular Skype lessons with John Mulhearn but it is not easy to fit in with my other priorities – family life with the most wonderful and supporting wife, and two beautiful daughters, and on top of that a challenging professional career.

In parallel with the above, I always tried to find additional instruction with visits to Josien Teerlink in Holland, Winterschool in Bruggen, Germany and intensive courses at The National Piping Centre.

**Q. Where do you live and is there a healthy piping scene in your local area?**

My hometown is Munsterbilzen, a small village in the community of Bilzen in Flanders, Belgium. It's the same community that is home to Alden Biezen Castle.

Since 1994, this wonderful place has been hosting the annual Belgian Pipe Band Championship. ([www.schotsweekend.be](http://www.schotsweekend.be)). And in 2003, it even hosted a major championship: the Europeans.

## R A M A T E U R S O L O P I P E R S

I currently live in Kontich, not far from Antwerp. Flanders currently has about 25 pipe bands, of which only a few actively play in competition. The highest graded bands are Belgian Blend and Antwerp & District, both based in Antwerp. For those with an ambition in the pipe band scene, there is a career path, but options are limited.

Throughout my piping career, I have been involved with several bands, most of the time playing simultaneously in a competitive band and a non-competitive one.

For band competition, there are only two Belgian-based events. First of all is the Alden Biezen competition early September, which is the main event for the Belgian piping scene. Secondly there is the Trio Competition in March, supported by the Red Cross Pipe Band and I'll be driving that organisation for a sixth year in a row.



This year we'll be hosting 39 trios and I'm happy with the success of the competition. We will have a trio from Inveraray & District judging and performing this year.

For additional band competitions, we need to travel to the Netherlands, Germany or UK.

The solo scene is completely non-existent in Belgium. Alden Biezen used to have a solo competition but it stopped running a few years back. The closest solo competitions are run by the Bagpipe Association of the Netherlands but only two a year.

I must give credit to Josien Teerlink again as she does manage to host a well-run piobaireachd competition in Hilversum in the Netherlands every year.

I'm not sure how successful it will be, but we recently had a first piobaireachd workshop at our band hall. The plan is to continue with the workshops on a bi-monthly basis, trying to stimulate the ceol mor and solo playing.

**Q. You currently compete in Grade 3 in the CLASP. What are your ambitions in piping?**

The sole ambition I really have in piping is to be able to play enjoyable music at a decent level. The objective is that my playing sounds solid and clear, that it doesn't sound amateuristic.

I also want to enjoy playing music and confirmation of that fact might be moving up to Grade 2

in the CLASP. But when I'm in Grade 2, I'm sure I'll start aiming for Grade 1. One of the things that kept driving my need for improvement were the PDQB certifications.

For me, it helps to have a clear objective that drives your practice. I recently did the assessment for SQA level 6 and I'm now preparing to complete the Tutor's Certificate in November.

At band level, I currently don't have that many personal aspirations. Nevertheless, I'm still putting in a lot of patience and hard work with the Flanders Red Cross Pipe Band. We are slowly evolving to a standard that is competition ready.

**Q. How many times a year would you visit the UK for piping-related purposes?**

It depends year to year but I think I'm on an average of five visits a year.

*Piping Live!* has been a standard appointment in my agenda for the last few years and I try to attend as many CLASP competitions as time and money allow.

For foreign players such as me, the CLASP is three-day trip or more. Mostly I would be flying in on Friday and sacrificing a day off at work, playing on Saturday and flying back home on Sunday. With flights, transportation and hotels, it makes it an expensive undertaking, totalling £400-£500 per trip.

Apart from playing myself, I also love to come and listen to the top players and visited the Glenfiddich last year with two friends.

**Q. What do you feel the greatest challenges are when competing?**

Concentration and the fear of failure. With solos, I'm easily distracted from the music, impressed by the fact that a poor Belgian guy like me is playing solo in Scotland, and impressed by the presence of the judge.

For me, the challenge is to keep concentrated on delivering the music, relaxing and only producing the music. That's hard if your mind wanders off. When that happens, I start mixing or forgetting parts, breaking down as result.

For some reason, I prefer to do solo competition in UK. In the CLASP, you have multiple competitions over a year. If you mess up one, you can prepare for the next one two months later. Here on mainland Europe, with only one or two competitions to attend, the stakes are much higher.

But you can only make a mess once a year. I've got way more fear of failure on the mainland than I would have in the UK.

**Q. How do you prepare in the run-up to a competition? Talk us through a typical practice session.**

In trying to answer this question, I realise I could do with more practice – and more structural practice.

Once I know a tune by heart, I will only try practise the technical bits on practice chanter.

I'm still struggling to clearly produce a lot of embellishments in a consistent way.

Most of this work is done during my 45-minute train ride to work and on the journey back.

A session on the pipes would generally take me 45 to 60 minutes. After a very rough drone tuning, I start with some 6/8s to warm up the pipes.

Next, I always cross check my chanter tuning with a Saul tuner. As the tuning is being checked every practice, any changes required are minimal. With a balanced chanter sound, I move to tuning the drones.

I used to tune drones one by one but to speed up the tuning process, I'm practising tuning outer tenor and bass together. Once tuned, I move on to the real practice.

In every practice session, I try to cover all competition material: MSR, hornpipe and jig and a piobaireachd.

On pipes, I mainly try to focus on correctly delivering the idiom and keeping the tempo controlled and steady. While I play, I try to identify which passages are hard for my fingers and they will become my focus for my practice chanter work.

Recording myself make it easier to identify those parts. Fixing them is the hard work.

**Q. What pipe set-up do you play?**

In 2017, I played a sheepskin bag for the first time, and it was a pleasant experience in contradiction to all the negative things you hear about them.

But I found out that a sheepskin is not optimal for me or my practice schedule.

Depending on work and family life, I'll have weeks where I don't touch my pipes at all and I could feel that in the response of the bag.

In the build-up to a competition, I would play almost every day resulting in too much moisture, which affects the drones.

Also, based on best practice feedback from top solo pipers, I recently switched back to a synthetic bag making my current set-up as McCallum pipes, fitted on a WMC Bannatyne hide bag. This produces a nice drone sound with MG drone reeds. In the blowpipe, I have a Moose valve, and for moisture control, I rely on a Ross canister system filled with orange Bannatyne silica gel balls. The canister is fit in the bag with Moose tubes. It's a bit a mix of what I find best.

I use my band chanter also for the solos. It's a McCallum MK2 and I'm currently using an MG chanter reed.

**Q. Do you listen to piping? Who do you regard as your favourite/most influential pipers?**

There is so much to listen to and so many influences. I love the work of Martyn Bennett. It puts the music in a total different perspective.

There is always at least one CD of a pre-Worlds concert in my car for on the road.

For solo piping, I prefer to listen to it in real life in London, or at the Masters, or the Glenfiddich.

If I have to put down a favourite three pipers, it would be Angus McColl, Callum Beaumont and Roddy MacLeod for piobaireachd.

But I also remember many years back being completely overwhelmed by a lunchtime recital from Sarah Muir.

**Q. Do you have any advice for anyone thinking about joining the CLASP**

If you have a busy life like me, where you try to combine family life, a job, a pipe band, other hobbies and travel – it might work for you to work towards clear targets.

With several CLASP competitions a year, you can pick just one or all of them.

With the grading system, you can comfortably roll into solo playing. You will learn that even the best of class will have an off-day, and that even a breakdown is something to learn from.

On a good day, you might take home some prizes. In the end, every experience will make you a better piper.

The most positive thing about the CLASP is that it feels like, and is, a bunch of friends trying to produce the best music they can deliver on the day.

Everybody wants to do good, but there are no adversaries, and definitely not in the bar afterwards.

Yes, there is that one judge. But he is noting down bullets and points for you to work on, so your next performance might be better than the previous one. ●



From left: Greig Canning (judge), David McRobb, Joris Panis and Harry Walters

## Scots Guards Club and Royal Scottish Pipers' Society CLASP

**OVERALL WINNERS** Grade 1: Harry Walters; Grade 2: David McRobb; Grade 3: Joris Panis

**GRADE 1 Piobaireachd:** 1. Gordon Hislop; 2. Con Houlihan; 3. Harry Walters • **2/4 March:** 1. Ross Walker; 2. Robert Wilson; 3. Harry Walters • **Strathspey and Reel:** 1. Ross Walker; 2. Harry Walters; 3. Graham Farr  
**Jig:** 1. Harry Walters; 2. Stewart Gaudin; 3. Gordon Hislop

**GRADE 2 Piobaireachd:** 1. Robert Wilson; 2. William Wardrope; 3. David MacKenzie • **2/4 March:** 1. David McRobb; 2. Ewen Brindle; 3. David MacKenzie • **Strathspey and Reel:** 1. David McRobb; 2. David MacKenzie; 3. Ewen Brindle • **Jig:** 1. David McRobb; 2. Stewart Allan; 3. Ewen Brindle

**GRADE 3 Piobaireachd:** 1. Alfred Graf; 2. Joris Panis; 3. Duncan Lamont • **Piobaireachd Ground:** 1. Joris Panis; 2. Alfred Graf; 3. Dugald MacLeod • **2/4 March:** 1. Duncan Lamont; 2. Dugald MacLeod; 3. Joris Panis  
**Strathspey and Reel:** 1. Dugald MacLeod; 2. Duncan Lamont; 3. Robert Thomson • **Jig:** 1. Joris Panis; 2. Robert Thomson; 3. Dugald MacLeod

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INSPIRE  
2018

REMO

# Rockin' Auld Reekie

**H**OW do you follow up playing with Irish rockers The Script at the Hydro in front of 10,000 people? Sell out your own concert the next night in Scotland's capital city. That's exactly what the young musicians of the National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland did on Saturday, February 17, bringing their *Inspire* show to the Corn Exchange in south-west Edinburgh.

by Stuart Milne

The development band began proceedings with Mark Saul's popular suite *The Beaches of Harris*, originally played by Simon Fraser University Pipe Band from Canada, but given a makeover by the talents of backing musicians Christopher Grey on keyboards, Fraser Stone on percussion, Connor Sinclair on whistle, Andy Lamb on fiddle, Ron Jappy on guitar, Al James on bass and Ewan Malloch on electric guitar, with development band leading drummer Callum Edwards often switching to kit drum throughout the evening. Although the decision to drop the short reprise of the main theme at the end of the piece made for a more abrupt ending than some might have expected, it was a wonderful way to kick off the show.

Just under half the total repertoire came from the recently-released recording of last year's concert, *Thunderstruck*, including the supremely tasteful 2/4 march and jig set beginning with *Pipe Major Sandy Spence*, *Atholl Highlanders*. Lincoln Hilton's sublime 12/8 *Ian MacMaster* was then tacked on to the front of the returning set of 9/8 marches, followed by two superb solos from Christopher Happs and Brodie Watson-Massie that featured such crowd-pleasers as Alen Tully's hornpipe



arrangement of *The Highland Wedding* and Adam Quinn's jig *The Blue Cloud*.

Next up were two modern hornpipes with a certain edginess to them: *Aldergrove to Abbotsinch*, jointly composed by Ryan Canning and Donald MacPhee in honour of their frequent journeys to Field Marshal Montgomery practices via Belfast and Glasgow airports, and *Ian Green of Greentrax* by Gordon Duncan.

Ali Hutton's sumptuous 3/4 *Gran's Tune* is crying out to be played by pipe bands across the world, and arrangements with other instruments as good as this will bring tears to anyone's eye, composer's granny or not. This introduced a new set of reels finishing with another Gordon Duncan favourite, *The High Drive*. Just before the interval, the combined drum corps of development and senior bands came on to perform a fanfare written entirely by the young drummers themselves – easily one of the most enjoyable such compositions this reviewer has seen for a long time.

During the interval, some pipers well past the age limit for the NYPBoS observed with glee, envy and a touch of embarrassment that since we had just heard material made famous by world-champion Grade I bands played



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Youngstars



by the “wee band”, the second half with the seniors promised to be a riot, and indeed it was. The *Thunderstruck* set from last year’s show is even more fun to listen to live than on the album, but the competition MSR comprising *The Argyllshire Gathering*, *Caber Feidh* and *Loch Carron* proves these youngsters can deftly handle the serious stuff too.

The *Mary’s Dream* march and jig set received an updated ending, with the more cheerful *Donegal Lass* and *Pitlochry High School Centenary* replacing *The Cameronian Rant*, before a break for long-serving piper Seamus O’Baighill to showcase his considerable talents on the fiddle.

Next came two of the best tracks from the *Thunderstruck* album, the awesome 400% suite and the delicate *Lightly Swims the Swan*, followed by two very cool hornpipes with an Australian connection: *As Good As It Gets* from Victoria Police Pipe Band’s celebrated *Masterblasters* CD, and the hilariously titled *Shark Bait Ooh Ah Ha!* by NYPBoS director Alisdair McLaren, named after a memorable scene from the film *Finding Nemo*.

There could be no better send-off for retiring pipers Daniel McDermott, Josh Fraser, James McPetrie and Liam Donaldson and drummers Jenni Clark and Thomas Barnes than to finish the concert with the wonderful suite composed by the band members



Youngstars



All photos: John Shawin@Designfolk, Ltd



## Youngstars



themselves: *Our Musical Journey*. There was, of course, to be one last hurrah: a rousing rendition of hornpipes *The Germanator* and *John Cairns' Double* by the massed ranks of the development and senior bands.

Alisdair deserves his share of free beers for stepping up at short notice to comperé the evening as well as playing in every single set, plus the considerable pressure of getting dozens of 10 to 25-year-olds to be on stage with instruments ready at the right time, which clearly proved tricky once or twice. Coupled with a masterful lighting set-up and impressive visual accompaniment from the Aileen Robertson School of Dance, he has orchestrated as enjoyable a spectacle of pipe band music as anyone could ever ask for. The myriad of flashing camera phones snapping the massed band at the end showed how much such an opportunity means to band members' families, although if you were to ask the musicians themselves, they might well say playing with *The Script* was cooler.

Oh to be young again... ●





by @DanNevans

# STEAL THIS

**I** feel like a lot of my articles are complaints. I sit here behind my laptop like some whingeing granny in the hairdressers, bleating on about how the world has changed and how uncomfortable I am with that concept. Because of the often cantankerous comedy voice I use in my writing, I worry you'll dismiss whatever I write as dross from the mouth of some "wee laddie" whose mouth is more expansive than his understanding.

Stop it. You're dooming us all.

What if... John MacDonald of Inverness never taught the Bobs of Balmoral? Would our piping landscape be anything like it is today? Very often our personal understanding is defined by one or two sources, although it is really the men and women who teach us from whom we glean the tradition of our music. I don't mean to start this piece sounding as if I'm about to have a massive go at The Bobs. I certainly am not. This article is about the dissemination of knowledge, a search for meaning in it all and to fly the banner for those who have kept the history of our proud art form alive.

What do you really know about piping? Some of you reading this (the editor of this fine magazine for example) know a great deal about the structure, history and performance of the music and the mechanical set-up of the Great Highland Bagpipe. By and large, the vast majority of pipers are quite ignorant when it comes to the journey that the pipes took to become the beloved animal cruelty kazoo it is today. Most of us got taught to play in

a community hall (although as time goes on I suppose a lot of you will be taught at school). I learned the basic basics in the cloakroom of Auchterarder community hall (next to the bowling club). In the early days of my piping, there was no time to talk about the tradition and history of the music, we spoke a little about the composers of some of the pieces. (My tutor when I was wee was Bob MacFie of the Veteran Pipers' Association. Bob is a pupil of Peter MacLeod Sr and when I learned a Peter MacLeod tune Bob would tell me stories

of lessons with Auld Peter). I was always interested in stories and the stories I was told early on were tales like *The Silver Chanter*, fairy stories mostly, but if they had a piper in them, damn sure I got told them. As I got older my dad, would tell me tales of competition pipers like Alasdair Gillies getting the red light at Oban when tuning up or the 78ths in 87 using portable hair dryers to keep their drone reeds in decent shape before their historic win. These tales would be spun into epics on the car ride to Carluke and District Pipe Band practices.

I am often confronted with the notion that we haven't really moved on as an art form. There's a quote from a book by David Keenan called *This is Memorial Device* and it reads "Then I had this awful feeling. Like it was all a drug. Something for sleepwalkers.

Dreaming their way from generation to generation" and when I read it, I had to go and get a fresh pair of shorts. It's easy to think negatively about the culture of competitive piping especially. I love being a competitive piper, in fact I probably wouldn't be playing at all if I wasn't competing. That being said, we do have a tendency to err on the side of caution when it comes to our music. Every few years someone does something a bit left-field and is condemned but then a few years later it's suddenly the norm. Bonkers stuff really, we often fail to appreciate what is being done right in front of us until it's too late. As if a person or group has to be "sacrificed" before anything changes. That can't be true, look at the career of Donald MacLeod, he innovated throughout his career and is lauded as one of the great pipers of all time.



# ARTICLE...



**‘The next time you get into a conversation about the history or structure of the music of the Great Highland Bagpipe please hand your stolen article to the other piper’**

Here’s the thing about piping that really upsets me – generations of pipers are actually quite short. The vast majority of the children who start learning the pipes only play competitively or at least publicly for maybe 10 years. How many folk do you know that put the pipes away when they left secondary school? How many once they got into their career path or got married or had kids or developed a sudden and inexplicable love for golf (eww)? My point is that piping sieves out folk whose heart isn’t in it and that leaves folk like you (well done, aren’t you handsome, my how you’ve grown since I last saw you \*ruffles hair\*) and folk like you should be informed. Once you have informed yourself (that’s the crux of the matter, you need to do a bit of leg work to find this stuff out), you can create your own opinions and maybe in a couple of generations we could get some straight answers around here.

AND ANOTHER THING! Why is it that when the Greats got old, stopped competing and started judging and really had some time to think about and quantify their thoughts on the whole Zeitgeist did we stop listening to them?

I’ve been poring over Piobaireachd Society conference proceedings dating back to 1974 over the past three weeks and there’s some amaz-

ing things in there. Seamus MacNeill and John MacFadyen verbally duelling over the family tree of piping, General Frank Richardson’s memoirs of John MacDonald of Inverness, the list goes on and on and it’s gold!

If the music of the Great Highland Bagpipe can be described as anything in terms of its artistic value, it’s as a device to ensure the social history of the instrument is preserved. Think about this – there is no way we can verify that the piobaireachds of the 16th to 18th centuries were composed anywhere near to the events they memorialise. This fact haunts the dreams of many academic piping specialists and aficionados. Yet, their existence serves as some proof of these events taking place, and these individuals having lived.

What is it the Native Americans say? “Live not in fear of dying but of your second death, when your name is spoken aloud for the last time.”

Do us all a favour and think on these names:

• **John MacKay**

*(The funnel through which all piping flowed)*

• **Colin Campbell of Netherlorn**

*(You owe him formalised canntaireachd)*

• **Angus MacKay**

*(Modern type settings of piobaireachd, doublings and classic tunes like the Highland Wedding)*

• **Donald and Alexander Cameron**

*(The Cameron School)*

• **John MacDougall Gillies, Robert Reid, Robert Hardie, John MacKenzie**

*(Pupils of the Cameron school, champion pipers, leaders of great pipe bands and teachers of many a great and influential piper)*

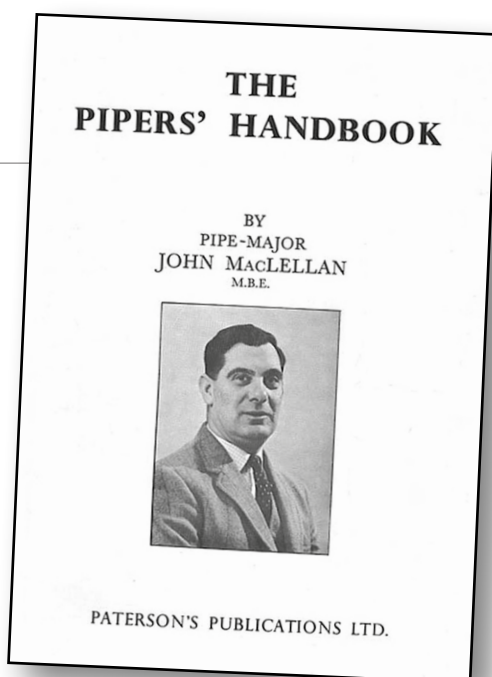
• **Calum Piobair', John MacDonald of Inverness, Robert Brown, Robert Nicol**

*(The MacPherson School, champions and responsible for an incredible amount of the great pipers of the 20th century)*

You've just done all of piping a favour. Now Google the hell out of them.

WHAT do you really know about piping? What do you really know about the bagpipe? One of the most frustrating and ignorant things ever said to me was this: "You just set your drone reeds right and they work."

If you are nodding to that statement then strap in, you're about to get your feelings hurt. If this is the kind of advice you give to other pipers about how they should manage their instrument, then you should stop giving advice. It's ignorant and unhelpful. If you simply lack the verbal capacity to explain how you maintain and improve your instrument, then pick up a thesaurus and take a seat. I'm not going to type out the process by which you should test and set your drone reeds, it would be useless, mainly because Captain John MacLellan did a



**'...many of these books and materials reference each other and add corrected information in different formats so it's worth taking the time to look at them all even if you can only take certain things from them'**

much better job in his *Pipers' Handbook* (Wait for it) than I could.

When it comes to the dispensation of knowledge in and around the piping world misinformation is rife. Everything from the origins of tunes being fudged to advice like "If your reeds are drying out in the summer put your chanter in the fridge" (Real thing that happened btw, I'm as shocked as you). I called this feature *Steal this article* because I want to pass you a short list of places to find information, methodologies, histories and hopefully some inspiration.

Why?

Because on March 24, 2018, I will be presenting a talk to the Piobaireachd Society conference in the Birnam Hotel (Tickets available, see piobaireachd.co.uk for more details) and I'm terrified. The talk I'll be giving as part of the delegation for the Competing Pipers' Association is about the use of "Modern" piobaireachd in competition. At first I was like "Whaaaaaaa?" then I was like "Dang!".

I have always known that the culture of competition piping moved at a slow rate but I fear I did not appreciate till now how slow. I began researching the subject and hit upon some pretty interesting ideas: Ever think of piobaireachd by era? Seamus MacNeill did, he had it set pretty much that from 1500 to 1745 we could call this the "MacCrimmon" era then 1745 – 1880 the "MacKay" era and anything after that was "modern". He said this in 1974. Are we honestly going to call a period of 140(ish) years the "Modern" era? What will we call the next era or is that us now in the "Modern" era forever? The questions seem to never stop cresting the horizon of my mind. Which, for the record, I think is good. Wouldn't it be awful to wake up one day and be bored by piping?

So here is the list. This is probably a very, very, very, very short list compared to the amount of stuff that is out there and some of it you will have to hunt for with some real energy if you do not live in the UK (even if you do you may have some difficulties). But I can assure you that it will be worth it in the long run. In fact, many of these books and materials reference each other and add corrected information in different formats so it's worth taking the time to look at them all, even if you can only take certain things from them.

***The Kilberry Book of Ceol Mor.*** Sorry Piobaireachd Society, this isn't about the tunes inside but for the foreword, there is a whole lot of information here about the history of piping and the structure of the art form. (Although somewhat dated, it's still a pretty solid place to start.)

***History and Structure of Ceol Mor*** by Prof. Alexander Haddow. This book is pretty dated now in some aspects of the epistemology of the instrument but there are a lot of useful insights in here for anyone really trying to get a shape of the history of the art form.

***The Highland Pipe and Scottish society 1750 – 1950*** by Dr William Donaldson. Some real strong opinions in this very weighty book. Again this text is invaluable because of its point of view. It's an academic's take on our history.

***Piperspersuasion.com.*** Join Alan Hamilton in a series of interviews with some of the greatest living pipers and from these interviews we can really piece together the piping culture of the 20th century.

**Piobaireachd Society/piobaireachd.com.** The Piobaireachd Society has created such a wealth of information on our music. From the side notes in every collection through to the Piobaireachd Society conference records and in fact the event itself.

**Noting the Tradition** – James Beaton. James is the librarian at The National Piping Centre and has curated a series of interviews available for listening through The National Piping Centre website.

**A Professional Piper in Peace and War** by John Wilson (Toronto) and **Preposterous: Tales to Follow** by Bill Livingstone. Both of these entries are biographies which show two different piping lives at the top level of competitive art internationally over the course of a century from the perspective of two very influential but very different players. John Wilson's early life in Edinburgh and his incredible influence on North American piping is equalled by the journey taken by his pupil Bill Livingstone.

**Ceol Mor** – Major General C.S. Thomason. This legendary tome is where John MacDonald of Inverness allegedly got the settings he played. Very difficult to get your hands on but if you hunt around your local libraries or booksharing websites you might find a copy and the opening of the book is well worth a read to fill in the blanks between the beginning of the 19th century and the early years of the 20th.

**Piping Today.** Piping magazines in general are written by the players and give unprecedented insight into what is happening in piping now.

**The Pipers' Handbook** by Cpt. J. A. MacLellan. This publication was given out as part of the induction kit for the Army school of bagpipe music in the 1960s and 70s. Cpt MacLellan wrote this as a pretty solid FAQ guide and it includes insights into everything from tying on bags to manipulating reeds. It enjoyed a reprinting a few years ago I believe and there are a few copies floating around the world now.

TEAR this article out of this magazine and put it in your pipe box. The next time you get into a conversation about the history or structure of the music of the Great Highland Bagpipe please hand your stolen article to the other piper. They might chuck it in the bin or eat it right in front of you out of spite but that won't matter, you will have given another piper an opportunity to find out some really cool stuff about the instrument. I feel like I've done a really bad job of describing the kind of information you will discover when you begin to explore the materials in the list on the left. I kind of don't want to give the game away or put thoughts in your head before you see anything.

I love piping, I cannot see my self doing anything else and the more I discover about the history of the music and the people that wrote it, the more in love I fall. If all you take from this article is that there's a whole lot of information out there, then that even is better than having no knowledge of the depth of information available to you.

Like G.I. Joe said: "Knowledge is power." ●

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by Stuart Milne

## Alan Waldron and the Stirling Burgh Pipers

**D**EPENDING on your persuasion, Alan Waldron's career in piping owes a great deal to either chance or fate. When the proprietor of Stirling Bagpipes on Broad Street, just below Stirling Castle, was looking for somewhere to set up shop, he felt sure he had found his new premises when he parked his car outside No. 8 and it refused to start again.

Although fascinated by the instrument since watching West Calder Pipe Band parade down the main street of his home town in West Lothian as a boy, Alan only learned to play later in life, thanks to equally forced circumstances, in a part of the world far from famous for its piping tradition.

Alan said: "I came back to Scotland from Australia in 1992, and boy was it cold that winter! I decided to travel with my brother,

and when we reached Gibraltar I had £12 in my pocket and needed work quick. I only stayed in Gibraltar for seven months, but my brother is still there 25 years later.

"I was having a few beers in the pub and I met a great guy from Kilmarnock, and he gave me my first piping lessons. I used to live in La Línea de la Concepción across the border, everybody who lived in that part of Spain crossed over to Gibraltar for the work. I used to take my passport and cross from Spain to Gibraltar for my bagpipe lessons every Wednesday and Friday."

After earning some much-needed cash Alan moved on to live in Galway in Ireland for five years, becoming further inspired by the vibrant Irish folk scene of the time. He received lessons from former National Piping Centre instructor Allan MacDonald upon his

return to Scotland, and started learning his craft as a bagpipe maker under Nigel Richard of Garvie Bagpipes in Edinburgh at the turn of the millennium.

By 2009, Alan felt ready to start working for himself, and, with perhaps a little prompting from his malfunctioning car, found the perfect location for his own business in Stirling.

He said: "When I moved here, I just fell in love with this little shop, and the rent was cheap. I don't want to be the Hardie or McCallum of tomorrow – that would be a nightmare for me, I'll stay small. When you're small, I think you get better attention to detail. Everything that goes out is checked by myself, it's not a production line. If you're doing everything from start to finish, you can guarantee it's done right, and if it isn't, there's no one to blame but yourself."

“When I make a new set, every stage has got to be a process of quality control, making sure the bores are straight and so on. When I finish off with the set on the table I can say, ‘That’s a bit of me, that’s a slice of my life’. When I’m gone, that set will still be here in the world to live on. It’s not just a job that you have to do again tomorrow like a window cleaner – a window’s dirty the next day, but these sets of bagpipes might be here in a hundred years.”

While he makes his own line of instruments of various types, the bulk of his business comes from Alan’s favourite passion of repairing and restoring old sets of bagpipes.

He said: “I love it when a box comes to me for an MOT, and you don’t know when you flip open that box if you’re going to have something that is firewood made in Asia, or silver and ivory Hendersons. It’s a bit like rummaging in an attic as a kid, or a child in a sweetie shop.”

One repair job that particularly stands out in Alan’s mind came from a lady in Bedfordshire with Aberdeenshire roots, who had discovered from researching her family history that a set of pipes had made their way to relatives in California, whom she visited to collect the heirloom.

Alan said: “The pipes had been sitting in an attic in her cousin’s house. When I got them for their MOT, they still had the *Aberdeen Press & Journal* from 1939 in the box. It was about a month or so before the Second World War began. They must have been shipped out there for safety.

“Doing them up was great, but they were in terrible shape initially. I thought they should go to a good pair of hands, so I recommended to her that they go to Allan MacDonald to see if he could get them singing. When she came to pick them up I played a couple of simple tunes, and the tears started to run down her face. It was well worth it.

“I’m not just making a living here – you can reincarnate a bagpipe so to speak, and doing something for society – helping a person bring back their family roots – is great. Instead of just being a pile of sticks in a box, you can bring it back to being an instrument again. You certainly don’t do this for the money, you don’t make too much off it! It’s an addiction – a healthy one.”

One more recent addition to the retail side of Alan’s business is the result of a historical interest of his own.



He has commissioned artwork for limited edition prints (and mugs and jute bags) based on the burgh pipers of Stirling. Burgh pipers were a common staple of life in the towns of Lowland Scotland from as early as the 16th century until the early 1800s, and Alan was inspired to learn more about the men who for generations would have paraded outside his front door twice a day as a kind of roving alarm clock to stir the populace into waking and later settle them down for the night.

Six pipers, playing a mixture of two and three-drone instruments, are depicted in a frame around extracts from the burgh records of Stirling detailing the terms of their employment – and to announce their termination.

The first such record dates from 1672, when one John Inneis was commissioned to play morning and evening, accompanied by a drummer, for the sum of £24 a year. However, in 1687, in a round of belt-tightening perhaps reminiscent of modern-day council funding crises, the practice was discontinued. Happily, it seemed the period of frugality did not last long, for payment was made to piper Duncan Stalker just four years later.

The final entry from 1727 paints a fascinating picture of burgh life and the station of the burgh piper, then Alexander Glass of St Ninian’s. By this time the annual wage had increased to £36, as well it

might given Mr Glass had to waken every weekday in time to begin his first performance at 4am, to be repeated at 7pm. He was also issued every two years with a new uniform, consisting of a coat bearing the town livery and a blue bonnet. Such amenities came at a price, however, for Mr Glass could only leave the burgh and skip his evening performance with the express permission of one of the Stirling magistrates. The daily 4am walkabout, however, appears to have been non-negotiable. Weekends at least were free – indeed, records from Stirling and Perth show pipers being prosecuted for breaking the Sabbath by playing on a Sunday.

Alan said: “I got a lot of this through Eslpeth King, who is the manageress of the Stirling Smith Art Gallery and Museum. She’s a very intelligent woman and very

good at her research. When I received it I just thought this should be used for something. Stirling doesn’t really promote itself enough. The history is all there, but we don’t actually tell the world about it.”

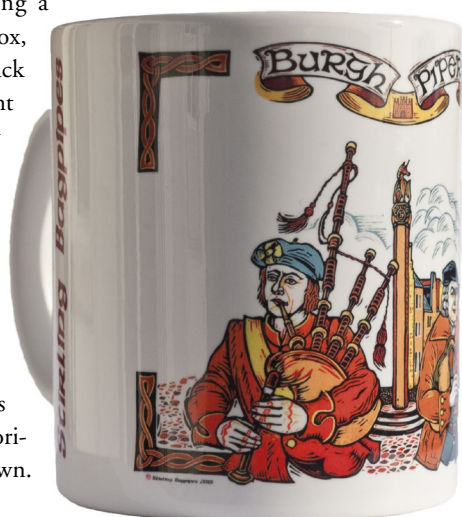
To try and do his part, Alan engaged the services of printmaker illustrator Owain Kirby, who grew up west of Fort William in the Scottish Highlands, but like Alan has called Stirling his home for a number of years, and has previously created illustrations for the Stirling Smith.

Owain said: “His plan was to do a poster design based on the burgh pipers of Stirling, and wanted to combine text and images reflecting piping through the ages. He gave me a brief to look at piping from the early days onwards and put it into the Stirling context.

“I quite like work which is steeped in tradition – something that tells and preserves a story is quite important to me. I’m always up for a different challenge as well – I don’t want to be illustrating milk cartons and book covers all my life.

“By and large I had quite a lot of freedom to come up with my own idea. Alan wanted the finished piece to have two panels which text could be dropped into, so effectively I created a decorative border representing piping through different parts of history. The result was a combination of what I was able to source from the internet and his advice, knowledge and expertise.”

This is not the first time Owain has depicted pipers in his artwork. His service in the Army Reserve with the Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders, whose regimental museum is in Stirling Castle, adds a personal connection.





# BURGH PIPERS

## The Town Piper of Stirling

*15 July 1672* - The magistrats and counsil has agreed with John Innes, piper, to be common piper to the said burgh, and to accompany the drum every evening and morning as the custome was formertie; and for his service they allow him twentie four pounds Scots yearly for fee and cleathes, with one hous to dwell in or the meale of an hous; and grants him the priviledge of playing to all penny brydells within the said burgh.

*29 March 1687* - The counsell talking to their considerations the great debt and burdein contracted upon the towne by the former magistrates, quhairby without augmenting of the said debt they cannot allow the sellariss underwritton, thairfor they have unanimousely discharged and hereby discharges the officers of towne drummer, piper, and post, in all tyme hereafter during the counells pleasure, and Syfwayes discharges the payment of their former sellariss to them or any of them during the space foresaid.

*4 November 1691* - Item, to Duncan Stalker for playeing with his pypes, £0 14 0

*12 August 1727* - The counsell appoints Alexander Glass, piper at St. Anians, to be town piper of this burgh during the counells pleasure, and to go thro' this burgh playing with his pypes every week day at four adlock in the morning and at seven adlock at night, and allows him thirty six pound Scots of sallary yearly; and declare they will allow him a meel bedded coat with the towne's livery thereon, and a blew bannet with a cock of ribbons on it, once every two years during his continuance in said office; providing that the said Alexander Glass be obliged not to go out of this burgh without liberty first asked and obtained thereto from one of the magistraths from time to time, and that only to be absent to go thro' at seven at night when his absence is absolutely necessary, but declaring it shall not be in the power of any of the magistrates present or to come to admit of the pypers absence to go thro' at four adlock each morning.

© Stirling Bagpipes 2015

Davey J. King 2015

# Stirling Bagpipes

He said: “Nothing beats marching behind the pipes – there’s something quite special about that, certainly on Remembrance Sunday and other parades I’ve taken part in. It’s just something that stirs the spirit and you feel part of history, part of this timeline that extends into the current era as well.”

Some of the six pipers in the artwork will no doubt look familiar. The figure on the top left is based on Richard Waitt’s 1714 painting of William Cumming, piper to the Laird of Grant, which adorns the front cover of Professor Hugh Cheape’s book *Bagpipes: A National Collection of a National Instrument*. In a mirror image of the employment of pipers by the Lowland burghs, generations of pipers in the Highlands were kept in high social standing thanks to the patronage of clan chiefs – the MacCrimmons of Skye being perhaps the most famous such family.

The bottom-right figure is the equally recognisable Dalkeith town piper Geordie Sime, drawn by John Kay in about 1770. Significantly he plays the Lowland rather than Highland pipes, with the three drones in a single stock, and the image is now closely connected with the Lowland and Border Pipers’ Society.

As well as town records, burgh pipers are also depicted in prose and poetry. Piper Neil Blane is a character in Sir Walter Scott’s 1816 novel *Old Mortality* set in the 1670s and 80s, and according to the author receives a salary, a coat similar to that of Alexander Glass in Stirling, and a piper’s croft with an acre of land. While Scott’s description of Blane riding through his unnamed burgh carrying a chanter covered in

ribbons might well raise a few eyebrows, there is more evidence that burgh pipers were provided with accommodation as part of their payment. The home of the Hastie family, hereditary pipers to the Borders town of Jedburgh for more than three centuries, still stands as the Category B listed building the Piper’s House on Duck Row.

The Kilbarchan town piper Habbie Simpson received his own memorial in the form of a poem by Robert Sempill the Younger, composed upon Simpson’s death at the time of the English Civil War. While cringeworthy in its quality of verse, the elegy gives us a tantalising glimpse of the repertoire the burgh pipers might have played as they traipsed through the far-from-clean streets of their home towns in receding and emerging darkness:

*Now who shall play ‘The day it daws’  
Or ‘Hunts Up’ when the cock he craws?  
Or who can, for our kirktown cause,  
Stand us in stead?  
On bagpipes now nobody blows  
Sin’ Habbie’s dead.*

Peebles piper Jamie Ritchie, who died in 1807, is said to have composed his own tunes that were not commonly played after his passing, including *Salmon Tails*, *Lyne’s Mill Trows* and *The Black and the Grey*. The Dalkeith piper Geordie Sime also evidently had a favourite tune to play for the Duchess of Buccleuch when she was among his audience – *Dalkeith has got*

*a Rare Thing*. How many of the other burgh pipers played tunes with similar sentiments towards their home town can only be guessed at.

Next to Sime in the background in Owain’s artwork is an important Stirling landmark with close ties to Alan’s business, the Mercat Cross that traditionally designated a settlement’s right to hold a market.

Owain said: “Stirling is not my home town, but it’s been my adopted home for quite a few years now, and I certainly like having something in the piece that anchors it in Stirling so it’s not just a place on a map, there’s a bit of longevity to it. The Mercat Cross is just outside Alan’s shop door, so it’s quite important I think to have that recognisable thing in the artwork and keep the tradition and continuity going.”

Alan is delighted with how the print depicts an important cultural aspect of a part of Scotland perhaps most famous for Bannockburn, William Wallace and the film *Braveheart*, and customers coming into his business have taken them home to destinations as far afield as California and Moscow.

He said: “I didn’t expect it to come up so bright and punchy. There’s a lot of yellows and reds, creating a lot of energy. I was really over the moon with the end result. I couldn’t ask for anything better than what Owain has done. It’s a Stirling artist, a Stirling printer, a Stirling subject and for a Stirling shop. Having all that information from the archives and not using it for anything would have been a shame. I thought it would be great if I could make it into a print that hopefully people will keep for a long time.” ●

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## CD REVIEWS

## National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland

### Thunderstruck



**MUCH** has been said lately about the stifling effect of competition on creativity in pipe band music. With no prizewinning agenda and an ethos geared primarily towards concert performance, the National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland's first album for six years promises to be a most enjoyable earful, and it is.

*Thunderstruck* is a live recording of the band's February 2017 concert, and begins with a head-banging rendition of the AC/DC hit famously adapted for the pipes by Gordon Duncan, complete with full drum corps and folk/rock accompaniment. A deft bridge on low whistle transitions to two of Gordon's jigs, *The Jig O' Beer* and *The 98 Jig*, before the electric guitar slows down *Thunderstruck* to its close.

It's an attention-grabbing start – any piper who has ever attempted *Thunderstruck* will appreciate just how difficult it is to pull off this tune with such confidence, and *The 98 Jig* is no *Amazing Grace* either. Many youth band members also compete with Grade 1 outfits – some already have World Championships under their belt – and it shows. As part of the NYPBoS, they have the added benefit of collaborating with some of Scotland's finest musicians working on the trad scene, including Fraser Stone, Euan Malloch, Al James, Alistair Paterson, Scott Wood, Andy Lamb and Ron Jappy. Throughout the recording, the excellent mixing allows all instruments to be heard in good balance.

This is the first time the development band have featured on an NYBPoS album and, along with the backing musicians, they take on responsibility for the next four tracks. These include a delightful set of jigs following another Gordon Duncan composition, the

2/4 march *Pipe Major Sandy Spence*, *Atholl Highlanders*; a couple of 9/8 marches; the hornpipes *The Three Devils* and *Up and Adam* by Ryan Canning and Murray Blair; and Thomas Walsh's beautiful slow air *Innisheer*,

the only reprise from the previous NYPBoS album *Illumination*.

Most pipers could probably bash out the first few parts of Alex Duthart's familiar drum salute to Max Rayne, but have probably never heard it played with a kit drum supporting a drum corps before, and it sounds awesome. There's an equally original twist to Lincoln Hilton's badass suite *400%*, with a whistle, guitar and percussion interlude building up tension as the pipers strike up again in small groups to reach a stirring finale.

The backing group sit out the next two sets: a competition MSR and a brace of rounded hornpipes, *The Germanator* and *John*

*Cairns' Double*. While the former is one of only a few tunes on the recording without a particularly catchy melody, listeners who fondly remember the 78th Fraser Highlanders closing their 2007/08 medley with *John Cairns' Double* will be dazzled by this dizzyingly complex bottom-hand workout all over again at the same lightning speed.

Then comes a real treat of an altogether different kind: Phil Cunningham's delicate slow air *Lightly Swims the Swan*, which showcases the full talents of pipe corps and backing band. Given a gentle introduction on electric guitar and low whistle, the tune is treated with the grace and dignity demanded by its title, before a specially arranged crescendo passage picks up the pace and then brings us back down to earth. It might be the most sophisticated track on a pipe band album for years.

Next up is an enjoyable tag-team solo from Luke Kennedy, Harris MacLennan and Danny Hutcheson. Young pipers are sometimes criticised for playing repertoire of questionable musicality far too fast, but these are all good tunes, well played, with just the right amount of showing off.

The album reaches its closing stages with a most impressive march and jig set, not least the mighty *Cameronian Rant* finale, and a set of strathspeys and reels, before finishing with a suite composed by the band members, aptly titled *Our Musical Journey*. The piece begins with the band singing the theme in canntaireachd, before bringing in the pipes, drums and backing instruments to transport the listener through an immensely satisfying emotional arc – except for the sole downer that this is the end of a terrific album.

● BY STUART MILNE

## James Duncan Mackenzie

### Sròmos



**JAMES** Duncan Mackenzie's second album has a rather different character to his first. While much of the Breabach piper's self-titled debut comprised his own compositions, the entirety of *Sròmos* is self-penned, named after a cleared settlement on Mackenzie's native Isle of Lewis. The island, already a strong theme in his earlier work, is the main subject, with the tunes inspired by notable islanders, landmarks and events in Lewis history, the latter often inflicting great hardship on its people.

The presentation of the music is different too. Although the tweed and horsehair sporran neo-kitsch outfit adorning the cover of Mackenzie's previous release might have created the illusion of an unaccompanied solo piping album, it was anything but. As he has long done with Breabach, he switched readily between pipes, flutes and whistles, usually accompanied by several supporting musicians, and in *Sròmos* the focus moves further away from the Great Highland Bagpipe, with Mackenzie playing most of the material on flute. This may be a disappointment to some pipers, but the contributions of the six-strong supporting ensemble, including familiar names like Mackenzie's Breabach bandmate James Lindsay on bass, RURA's Jack Smedley on fiddle and Innes White on guitar and mandolin, are a major selling point.

The album begins with its title track, a gentle melodic march on flute evoking a walk to a township whose people were forced to abandon their homes to make way for what 19th century landowners saw as more profitable inhabitants, namely sheep and deer. The opener blends nicely into the jig *The Lazy Beds of Rias*, enhanced by the delicate string playing of Smedley and Alasdair White.

The pipes make their first appearance for the reprise of *The Garron*, a tranquil melody played first on flute, before moving into a pointed version of the reel *The Plough on the Cross-beam*, originally written for the piping supergroup Tryst.

Indeed, "tranquil" is a fitting description for most of the album, not least the middle pairing of *Next Tide* and *Alick Campbell's Walk*. They both commemorate the sinking of the troopship *Iolaire* off Stornoway on New Year's Day 1919, an event also memorialised in Mackenzie's previous album in the form of Donald

continued on p. 41

## A Jack MacArthur Serial

BY DAN NEVANS

# A Lament for Lady Frances Minto

PART VI • FINALE

March 17, 1786 mid-afternoon

**J**ACK MacArthur and the giant Duncan Cu are held in the old town jail in Edinburgh for crimes they did not commit. Having realised they were being set up by the very body-snatching ring they had set out to bring to justice, the intrepid pair had hatched a plan to jump the guards taking them off to the magistrate for likely a quick sentencing and a very, very short drop from the gallows at the Grassmarket.

The air in the cell grew thick with import as the prisoners took their places, Jack hard up against the wall next to the door and Duncan straight in front of it. Once the jailer unlocked the door, Duncan would tear it back from whomever had a grip of the handle and in the moment of shock, Jack was to pounce upon the group, bottlenecking them in the door and making any firearms too dangerous to themselves to be used. Footsteps echoed down the stone flag floor, “five”, Duncan grunted at the door, “maybe six”. Jack nodded and readied himself. The key turned in the lock, crunching along smoothly but slowly and on its last grinding turn Duncan heaved at the little grip he had. The heavy oak door of the jail cell swung open nimbly on well oiled hinges. Time stopped as Jack and Duncan’s plan fell to pieces. Before them did not stand the group of aged Highland guardsmen they expected but red-coated soldiers from the garrison at Leith and at their head, Lord Sir Alexander Minto, white as fresh snow and stern as a mountain in a storm, standing rigid and formidable.

“I trust you have enjoyed your stay gentlemen but I have urgent matters for you to attend to.”

Jack finally breathed out. Duncan relaxed from his bear-like attack pose.

“We have an appointment with a very important person, so smarten up and follow on.” Lord Minto spun upon his heel and marched through the soldiers up and out of the basement where the jail cells were hidden. The Redcoats, Jack and Duncan were dragged along in his wake.

Upstairs, Alec the jailer stood looking every inch the naughty child. The Redcoats had “jurisdiction to do what they needed”, they said, and pushed him aside relieving him of his keys. Alec was now taking the time to gaze unflinchingly at his boots.

“You there,” called Lord Minto to Alec, “Where is your commanding officer, where is Cpt. MacKay?” The old man did not look up. A Redcoat sergeant stepped over to Alec and craned his head down down to ear height: “The gentleman asked you a question.” Alec’s back stiffened at the broad Yorkshire accent of the sergeant. “Ah’ll no be intimidated by the like o’ you.” At his full height, the crowd could see the man hidden under the drab uniform and scraggly beard. The ’45 was 41 years before and if Alec was under 60 then he made a poor showing of it. Once there was a proud Highlander in there. Crushed by the loss of the rebellion and living out a castrated existence thereafter in a country still reeling from the devastation of war. Old Alec was upset and had been most of his life, now this toff and his English thugs were breaking prisoners out of his jail and what’s more, his commander, that coward MacKay, had run out the back door as soon as the Redcoats appeared outside. The old man took all of that anger and turned it into a brutal uppercut that caught the sergeant in the throat. The bigger man dropped to the floor and the other three soldiers raised their muskets to fire. Alec drew a short knife from his pocket and yelled a horrendous cry of blood and battle. He made it almost four steps before a musket round dropped Alec lifeless to the floor.

The young soldier that had fired stood shaking on the spot. “God forgive me,” he said, his voice straining.

The rest of the participants stood shaking their heads, trying to remove the ringing from their ears and the image of the past few moments from their minds. Jack thought to himself then that it would be many a night before the old man’s bold defiance and defeat was washed from the inside of his eyelids. This whole endeavour had been

marked with death, Lady Minto herself seemingly the beginning and then the Resurrection Man, Hamilton Brody, had followed. Now the old jailer too. Where would death reach its fill? How many more had to fall into the black vale before some kind of justice was meted out? Jack's stomach churned. The sergeant gathered himself to his feet and croaked a "well done" to the young soldier who was transfixed by the fruit of his deed. The boy was maybe 17, his bottom lip quivered.

The seven stepped out into the late afternoon sunshine. Minto's carriage was waiting for them, Donald MacDonald had hold of the two horses by their harnesses. "What happened? The gunfire near spooked the horses."

"Nothing good," replied Jack. "Why are you here Mr MacDonald?"

Lord Minto clattered to the ground. His face now green and gaunt. Duncan and Jack lifted their Lord into the carriage. "Poisoned," his Lordship exhaled.

"I arrived fur our lesson today and fun him lying in front of the fireplace lookin' even worse than this. There was a dart of some kind next to him," Donald explained.

"Good God!" exclaimed Jack.

"Aye, his Lordship pulled himsel up aff the floor aifter I forced some water intay him. Transformed so he did, like a living ghost, aw pale and terrifyin'. I wisnae to say no to ony request. Took us tay Leith garrison an' requisitioned thae soldiers. Told the officer in charge something I didnae dare imagine judging by the look on the man's face hear and then we drove the carriage straight here."

Lord Minto seemed to drift out of his delirium for a moment. "Jack, Brody? Where?"

"Brody's dead, I'm afraid, your Lordship." Jack felt himself sinking, everything had gotten out of control and there was no path to follow.

Minto's hand shot out and grabbed Jack by his shirt. "Information." His eyes were wild, he was giving everything to ask this question.

"Very little sir, something about a man named Fisher." Jack was terrified. He had known Lord Minto since he was first brought on to the estate at the age of eight. To see the man so pale and weak chipped at the very foundations of Jack's universe.

"Fisher..." With that Minto passed out completely. There was shouting in the yard outside the carriage and Jack turned to see city guardsmen surrounding the carriage. Old but ferocious, they carried hooked halberds and a few were carrying pistols. These men had survived the end of the Jacobite rising, no fear or remorse haunted their eyes.

"That's enough, yer fancy connections won't save you from the gallows, MacArthur," Cpt. MacKay called out. "Come out of the carriage and we'll take you straight to the magistrate."

"You liar, MacKay. You and your black-cloaked friend have set us up." The guardsmen surrounding the carriage chuckled. They were all in on it. The red-coated soldiers had been ambushed and tied together. There were just the four men in the carriage left. They were inviting an excuse to attack the carriage and relieve themselves of the interlopers.

The guard captain visibly balked and revealed this was the truth with the flustered expression sweeping across his face. He exclaimed: "Clap them in irons!" On the order, the circle round the carriage began to tighten. The carriage shook and Jack was pushed out of the way by the monstrous Duncan Cu. With his bear-like hands,

he pulled the halberds out of the hands of the old men before him and stalked towards their captain.

"No one else, you and me, no knives, no guns."

Cpt. MacKay snarled and charged the giant. Two huge men were now brawling in the courtyard. Locked into one another's shoulders like Grecian wrestlers of old, their feet planted and each man matched in power. Sheer brute force would not win this contest: guile and skill would make the master out of one man.

Duncan broke the hold by swinging his great bearded head forward into MacKay's face. There was a tremendous crack and the two split apart. MacKay had dropped his head at the very last second and Duncan had slammed his forehead into the top of MacKay's head. Now on the offensive and trying to catch the giant on his back foot, MacKay rushed forward with his hands stretched overhead to drop a devastating axe handle into Duncan's neck. The big man hit the ground hard and Jack heard the crack of bone as Duncan fell back. MacKay was on him in half a heartbeat, his army style boots thudding into Duncan's chest, THUD! THUD! THIP! Duncan caught the captain's boot on the third kick and pushed it upwards and away knocking the villain off centre and back towards the door of the jail. Sudden with almost preternatural speed, Duncan Cu leapt up from the ground, blood dripping from his face and chest.

"My turn."

Duncan's huge fist collided with the captain's face like a lightning bolt. MacKay's lips burst in a crimson haze of blood and spit. Still staggering back, Duncan hit him with a classic one-two combination and pulled the dazed guard captain into him raising him over his shoulder in a caber tossing fashion. But instead of propelling MacKay forward Duncan dropped his whole body backwards, dropping MacKay on his face and spraying teeth across the cobbles.

By now, the old guards had seen what way the wind was blowing and disappeared with the confidence of a career soldier. Jack stepped away from the carriage and, thinking quickly, sped across and turned the now-unconscious Cpt. MacKay on his back and grabbed him by his now brutally broken nose.

"Fisher. Who is he?"

The big man writhed in agony, the pain of his shattered nose suddenly making him awake and sharp. "Dr Fisher! Dr Fisher. It was all him. I just kept it quiet." Jack let MacKay's nose free and looked across to Duncan Cu, who had by now dusted himself off and was catching his breath like a big dog just back from a long walk.

"Looks like we're going to see the magistrate after all, Duncan."

The Right Honourable William Forsythe was not pleased to have been disturbed from his afternoon's studying. For years he had been cultivating a library of classic Gaelic poetry and now as he swept towards his retirement from legal service, he was settling into a reduced workload and warm, comfortable afternoons imagining the romantic world of the ancient Gaels.

"What is the meaning of this?" Suddenly, Forsythe was confronted by the situation. In his office was Lord Sir Alexander Minto, mysterious hand of the civil service. Known but unknowable. With him, two giants in various states of disrepair and a two terrified-looking men holding his lordship up.

The air grew cold. Forsythe was not a man to be trifled with and this motley crew had the air of serious trouble.

"Someone start talking." Duncan nudged the bloodied guard captain and he began to talk. MacKay told the magistrate everything; the terrifying Dr Fisher and his seemingly endless supply of crowns, the street urchins and Brody, and finally his part in the



## PART VI FINALE

whole business now reduced to a bit part in the grand play.

Now seated at his great leather chair behind the desk, William Forsythe took in the whole tale. A warm silence settled in across the room. Minto was now eyeing Forsythe from his prone state in the opposite chair. The two men exchanged glances a few times as the magistrate made up his mind. He popped his head up to Jack and Donald MacDonald.

“Take 30 soldiers to the university once the sun sets and find Dr Fisher. He is to be taken alive and any and all evidence brought to the crown.”

### March 17, 1786, evening

THERE was the muffled sound of someone talking from behind the door. Jack was nervous, he had never raided anywhere before. He had broken into places, ambushed people in the shadows, done all the clandestine acts his lordships asked of him, but to be at the head of 30 Redcoats about to burst in and make an arrest was a different kind of pressure. Duncan was with the nurses at the church hospital in the west end and the only person Jack knew was Donald MacDonald, who had tagged along for no other reason than wishing to see the end of the tale.

Looking over his shoulder one last time, Jack raised his foot and burst through the door. The room he entered was a lecture theatre, a square of raised seats over a central operating floor. At one end was a main door leading outside to the courtyard and up at the top of the raised seats, the door Jack and the soldiers were coming through. He shouted something but in the aftermath Jack could never remember. He hoped it was witty.

The theatre was full of children and the white aproned spectre looming over a body on the operating table. The urchins sped for the opposite door and ran head-first into the waiting wall of Redcoat soldiers who promptly gathered them into a circle.

Dr Fisher spun into action as Jack hopped on to the operating room floor. Jack brandished two pistols at the maniac doctor: “Dinnae move Dr Fisher. We have the place surrounded.” Jack edged closer to the scientist and uncocked a pistol, “Put the scalpel down, Doctor, it’s over.” Fisher lunged forward and slashed at Jack wildly, bursting away from him towards the Redcoats now filling the short staircase leading to the door. Packed together, Fisher had the drop on the soldiers and managed to muscle his way through the throng. Somehow not one of them managed to get a hold of Fisher as he fought his way past. In a moment, Fisher was up the stairs and out into the dark corridor beyond.

“Damn and blast!” cried Jack, as he sprinted upwards past the soldiers who were picking themselves up off the ground. The corridor led out through the university buildings into the streets and Jack made it just as he saw a figure in white tear off round the corner uphill. Jack’s terrier, like instincts kicked in and he stormed off in chase. Fisher was smart, he ducked down alleyways and took shortcuts. Jack MacArthur, however, was always just out of range, but he had caught up so quickly

that Fisher had been driven into a state of panic. The pair rushed through the night-time streets of old Edinburgh, The white-clad Dr Fisher standing out amid the smoky, dirty streets and the sleek shadow of the black-cloaked Jack MacArthur closing in.

Finally, at the foot of the Fleshmarket close after a chase spanning almost all of Edinburgh’s city centre, Dr Fisher finally spun on Jack. “IMBECILE! IGNORANT FOOL!” His scalpel sped out into line with Jack’s face, MacArthur stopping just in time to avoid the tip of the blade.

“Come on, Fisher, you know you’re done. No one else has to get hurt.”

“I’ve come too far now. I’m close to something fantastic.”

Jack hoisted a pistol up with his left hand near pointblank to Fisher’s head. “This is the end. Dead or alive, you’re coming with me.”

This was the moment where life and death converged. Fisher in white became the avatar of death, leaping forward to Jack’s throat, arm extended, bloodlust filling his eyes. Jack rolled his right shoulder back, letting the blade pass, him before bringing the handle of his pistol down hard on the back of Dr Fisher’s head. Jack could have easily pulled the trigger and pulled a black veil down upon this whole sorry affair. In this vital moment, Jack MacArthur had chosen life, justice and more full nights of sleep.

In the end, Fisher swung from the gallows in the Grassmarket. There had been rumours of government connections but ultimately, once in court, the evidence found in Dr Fisher’s home and office was too damning. Not only had he items in his home obviously belonging to the dead but a testimony from a now-former Cpt. MacKay about the death of Hamilton Brody sealed Fisher’s fate.

THEY had been there that morning. Jack, Duncan and his Lordship. It was October now. The three of them had stayed in Edinburgh the whole spring and summer until the trial had finished. Jack even received more lessons from Donald MacDonald, finally learning to the older man’s standards the tune he had written for Lady Minto.

The Old Calton was shining in the autumn sun. His Lordship had visited the grave everyday since he had recovered. The poison took three weeks to leave his system and, at times, Jack had wondered if this might be the end for his master. Now though, looking his years yet holding himself with a dignity, Lord Sir Alexander Minto stood at the foot of his wife’s grave.

“I’m sorry, Frances. I had hoped to give you some rest but only God knows what that monster did with your body. I hope this plot will give you some solace in heaven. Until I see you again, this place, here in the shade of this tree will stand as my monument. I love you, Frances.”

His Lordship bowed his head in prayer and Jack struck up his pipes.

It was finally time to play a Lament for Lady Frances Minto. ❧

## CD REVIEWS continued from p. 37

MacLeod's piobaireachd *Lament for the Iolair*. Next *Tide* is a brief interlude featuring string chords and quiet guitar notes similar to a piobaireachd ground, evoking the stillness, beauty and peril of the sea that one newspaper report declared would give up more of the 205 men killed in the disaster "on the next tide". The following tune picks up the pace only slightly, commemorating a survivor of the sinking who walked some 50 miles to his home in Harris.

There's a spark of greater energy in the jig *Loch Langavat*, with keyboards, electric guitar and drums giving sophisticated support to the pipes as they move into strathspey time for *The Old Woman of the Moors*, and in the final track, Allan Nairn and Innes White perform a pleasing banjo/guitar duet to set up the closing reels.

These are just about the only toe-tapping moments on an otherwise very chilled-out album, and there is no one tune to match the smash-hit reel *Smelling Fresh* from Mackenzie's first album for sheer memorability. That said, Mackenzie has crafted a highly mature and immensely enjoyable second recording with as keen a sense of place as any piping album you will ever find.

● BY STUART MILNE

## Geza Frank & Jean Damei

### *Event Horizon*

**T**HINK "concept album" and "outer space" and the first example to enter your head might well be Jeff Wayne's musical adaptation of H. G. Wells' sci-fi classic *The War of the Worlds* from 1978. With *Event Horizon*, Austrian piper Geza Frank and French guitarist Jean Damei have taken their inspiration not from imagined Martian invasions of Earth but from bona fide astrophysics – the title coming from the name for the edge of black holes.

To further their aim of creating "a new sort of music" combining the Scottish and Irish acoustic traditions and the modern dance scene, inspired by mankind's attempts to better understand the universe, they combine their talents on whistle, uilleann pipes and guitar with electronic music producers Jake Birch and Tyler Duncan and violinist David Lombardi. When such combinations of instruments have been tried before, they tend to be either sublime (see the complete works of Martyn Bennett) or cheesier than the surface of the moon explored by Wallace and Gromit in *A Grand Day Out*.

Happily, this album definitely belongs in the former category. Each track takes its name from a particular celestial phenomenon, beginning with *Proxima Centauri*, named after the star nearest our own solar system. We begin on familiar ground with a pleasing strain from Damei's guitar, gently accompanied by Birch's synth arrangements, which progressively build into more of a dance atmosphere before Frank's whistle adds to the mixture. The result is a cheerful blend of styles, with Frank and Damei's acoustic playing bringing back fond memories of Treacherous Orchestra in parts of their superb *Grind* album, with Birch adding just a hint of a Daft Punk vibe.

The next track, *Photon Wave*, is a tribute to light itself, and here we are treated to the first contribu-



tions of Lombardi's violin. Classical music has been an integral part of our artistic relationship with the cosmos since Gustav Holst's suite *The Planets* from a century ago, and the combined effect of instruments here is as beautiful and evocative as the famous *Blue Danube* sequence in Stanley Kubrick's film *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Frank's uilleann pipes make their sole appearance later on for the jig *Type 2 Civilisation*. The term denotes a civilisation able to travel between planets within its solar system, and the two contrasting halves of this track evoke the twin feelings of frustration that mankind has not yet found the unity to reach this stage and the optimism that we can forge ahead and make it so – at the time of writing, Elon Musk had just launched

a car into space playing David Bowie on its stereo.

The great success of *Event Horizon* is that the individual tracks really do convey the essence of the subject matter outlined in the sleeve notes, with the electronic music adding a sense of otherworldliness that never overwhelms or distracts from the musicality of the leading duo.

In the notes for *Photon Wave*, they write: "Light, just like music, can also influence our mood and emotions." The listening experience by the end of this album should be akin to that moment in a stargazing experience when you open your eyes and mind to the wonder of the cosmos, stumble across a remarkable surprise and say with a smile: "What on earth was that?" ● BY STUART MILNE

by Timothy Cummings



# Theory Top-Up: Harmony writing (Part 6)

## Chord-based harmonies for slow airs

**T**HOSE of you following along with this mini-series on Harmony Writing may remember the project from the previous issue, which involved developing a more involved harmony for the first part of John Walsh's *The Korgi* (a reel in the key of A-Mixolydian). You may or may not have liked that harmony, but perhaps that's beside the point. The point may have been more about having the conversation and offering an exercise for crafting harmonies for pipe tunes. And I'd like to keep this particular conversation going and offer another exercise: harmonising a slow air.

It's been a couple months since you furiously devoured and deeply pondered the contents of *Piping Today* #89, so why don't I offer a quick refresher on the approach I'm promoting for composing harmonies:

**Step 1:** Determine the key of the tune that you'll be harmonising [as per *Piping Today* issues 70 to 79]. (Feel free to ask an accompanist friend for assistance.)

2. Determine the chords that best match the melody [as per PT#87]. (Ditto the above, regarding assistance.)

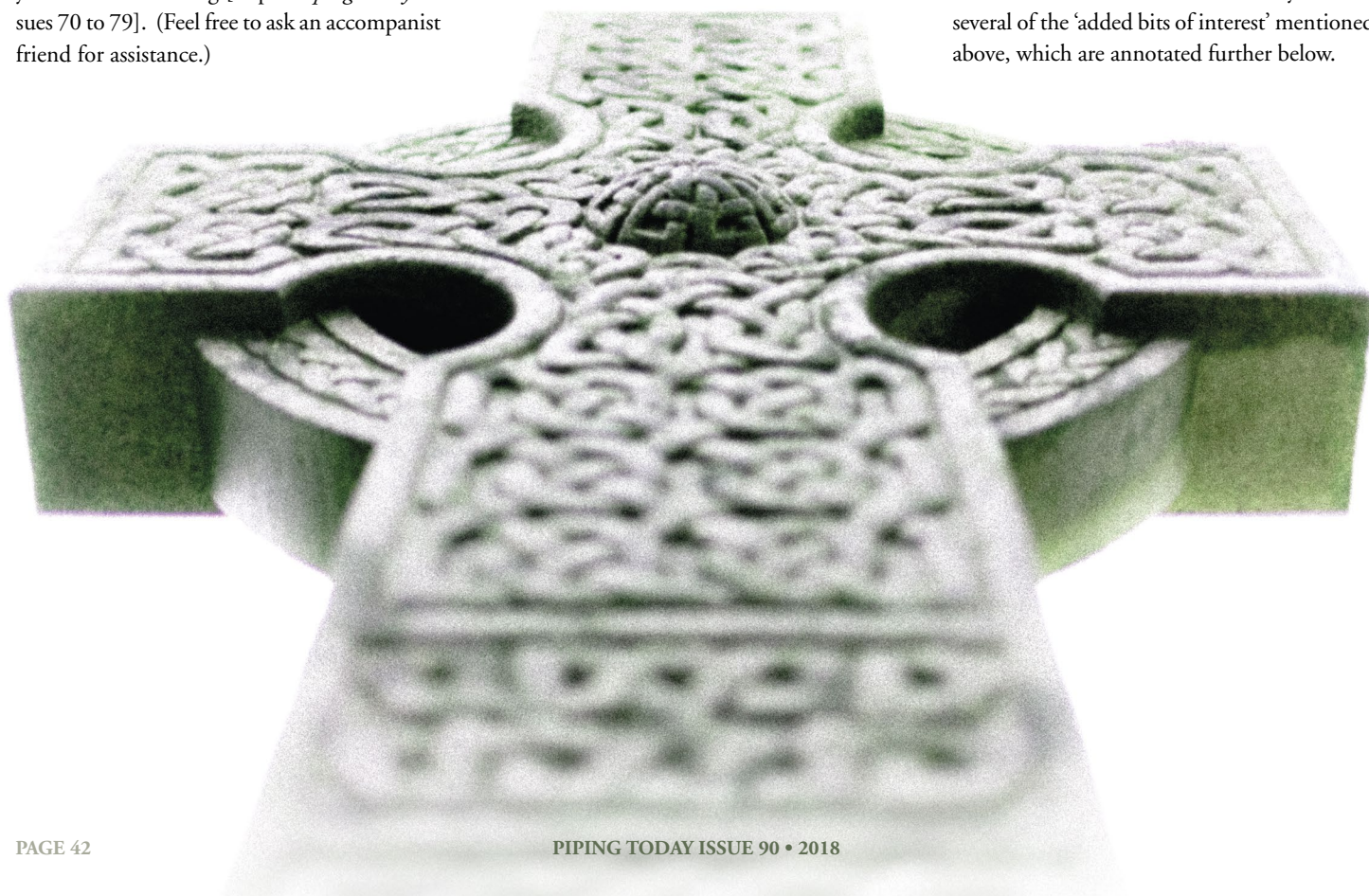
3. Choose from the three or four notes of a particular chord to craft basic harmony notes to the corresponding section of music [PT#88].

4. Experiment with the different note options available for each measure, and enhance the main harmony notes with added bits of interest: pedal tones, contrary motion, passing tones, octave jumps, unison playing, additional harmony parts, independent rhythms, and so on. Consider crafting a harmonic line that begins to enjoy its own shape and melodic independence [PT#89 and this issue].

The fourth item above may need the most discussion and practice at this stage in the series. And this is why I'm voting to try our

hand at harmonising a slow air, for something new that allows some extra wiggle room for an expressive harmony part. Given that many pipe bands enjoy slow airs in 3/4 time (essentially a waltz), and that we are nearing St. Patrick's Day, I hope you'll permit me to conjure up *Lough Erin Shore* (a.k.a. *Paddy's Green Shamrock Shore*). My guess is that it's already a familiar melody to most; and if not, it will be a quick study for the rest of you.

What follows opposite and over the page are two full versions of the tune. The first includes the melody plus a second harmony part containing all of the possible candidates for harmony notes in each bar, based upon the given chord symbols written above the melody (as per the chart last published in *Piping Today* issue 88). The second version over the page features the exact same melody, and a more considered harmony part extracted from the chords of the first version. This 'distilled' harmony features several of the 'added bits of interest' mentioned above, which are annotated further below.



# Lough Erin Shore

with chord-based harmony options

A - modal:  
Mixolydian

trad. Irish

setting & arr. Timothy Cummings

## Air / Waltz

The musical score consists of four systems, each with a melody line and two harmony options. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the mode is Mixolydian. The time signature is 3/4. The score is divided into four systems, each with a melody line and two harmony options. Chords are indicated above the melody. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the mode is Mixolydian.

**System 1 (Measures 1-8):** Chords: A, G, Em, D/F#, A.

**System 2 (Measures 9-16):** Chords: D, A, D, A, Em, D/F#, G.

**System 3 (Measures 17-24):** Chords: D, A/C#, Bm, A, Em, D/F#, G.

**System 4 (Measures 25-32):** Chords: A, G<sup>9</sup>, Em, D/F#, A.

This exercise will be the most effective if you can hear the two examples provided here. If you visit <https://tinyurl.com/lougherinshore> you can hear two demos generated by the Sibelius music software. One of the audio samples is designed to imitate Scottish smallpipes (file name with “SSP”), the other, Highland pipes (“GHB”). Though they use synthesised sounds of orchestral instruments, these samples nonetheless provide a good first impression of the music printed here. (They also include a simple accompanying bass line for added interest.) Listen to both examples, and make note of which parts are the most successful to your ear. Take a moment to analyse those sections and understand why they might be the most pleasing to you. Then try borrowing those ideas in your own writing. (And if you don’t like any of it, try to determine why not.)

Here are the ‘added bits of interest’, annotated for your inspection and consideration (noting the bar numbers that appear at the beginning of each line of the music):

- **bars 1-3:** feature a low-A *pedal tone* (i.e., a long, held, drone-like note on the chanter [as per Piping Today issue #85]).
- **the last beat of bar 3 through first the two beats of bar 5:** features *contrary motion*

for Piping Today Magazine

# Lough Erin Shore

*with composed harmony part*

trad. Irish

setting & arr. Timothy Cummings

A - modal:  
Mixolydian

**Air / Waltz**

Melody

2nd

9

1

2

17

1

2

25

1

2

Chord symbols: A, G, Em, D/F#, A, D, A, D, A, Em, D/F#, G, D, A/C#, Bm, A, Em, D/F#, G, A, G<sup>9</sup>, Em, D/F#, A

This arrangement copyright © 2018 Timothy Cummings | Birchen Music & Publishing.

(where the harmony moves in the opposite, or contrary, direction to the melody—down vs. up—often a very pleasing compositional tool).

- **bars 9-13, among several others:** feature several moments involving a harmony-of-thirds [PT#86].

- **bars 17-19, among several others:** feature *passing tones* (brief notes that help connect, or bridge two notes of a greater interval). Compare these four bars to bars 9-13.

- **bars 25-26:** the harmony part temporarily doubles the melody in unison, effectively removing any harmony and providing some contrast—a brief harmonic respite for the ear.

- **bar 27, second beat:** features an octave leap from low- to high-A, as a means of gracefully clearing new space for higher harmony notes. (Jumping up or down a perfect octave is generally easier on the ear than jumping from low-G straight up to F#, for example.)

- **bars 27-end:** features an additional harmony part for more players, thereby enriching the overall harmonic impact and adding a greater sense of energy and excitement. (Having three-part harmony throughout the entire arrangement may become tiresome for the ear, but introducing three-part harmony for a shorter segment will likely prove to be more effective.) The three-part harmony also immediately follows the brief section without harmony, thus providing even more contrast.

- **bar 29-end:** again features contrary motion

- **throughout the entire arrangement:** features a harmony part that is heavily based upon the notes prescribed by the given chord symbols. Also, the harmony part enjoys varying degrees of rhythmic independence from the melody, as well as some semblance of its own melodic 'shape' (as opposed to notes that randomly jump up and down without any consideration to shape or flow). As a general

rule, the easier a harmony part is to sing, the more pleasing it will be to the ear. Ultra-jumpy parts are usually much harder to sing and learn.

With any luck, all of the above combines to help make our harmony part more enjoyable and stimulating for performers and audience members alike.

Please remember this approach to harmony writing is generally not something that can be learned overnight, but rather takes practice and soliciting feedback from others. Many aspects get much easier over time, I have found, including the intuition about what key a particular tune is in, what chords will best match it, and what type of harmony lines will be most successful for a particular tune (or group of musicians). It is also helpful to listen to the harmonies used by other pipe bands, ceilidh bands, and the like. Don't be afraid to borrow good ideas and tweak them to make them your own! The very best composers do this kind of thing all the time. ●



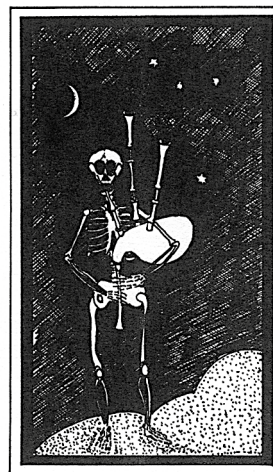
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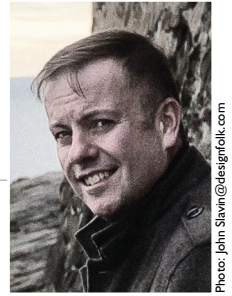
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# Grey's Notes

by Michael Grey



## It's big. It's bouncy. And it's spectacular

**I** think it was this past January when it came to me. It was one of those crisp, cloudless and cold sunny days, a kind of winter's day so familiar to those of us who live in my part of the world. The sky was screaming an indescribable deep blue. And why? Why blue? A short simple question – surely the archetypal young child's question, one asked just as a glimmer of awareness of the world beyond the back garden begins to show itself. Blue sky? Something to do with refracting light, I thought. Why blue? And *this* blue? Um, the temperature. Yes, it is the cold temperature and the universal prism...

At the time I didn't know, really. I had an idea and could babble out something that might shut a kid up and get a C- on an elementary school test. Maybe. In the off chance you don't know NASA tells us "blue light is scattered in all directions by the tiny molecules of air in Earth's atmosphere. Blue is scattered more than other colours because it travels as shorter, smaller waves."

Phew. When you start thinking of all the questions that might easily be asked of the common things around us it is awfully humbling to acknowledge what you don't know. There are not many questions more fraught and charged with potential risk and fall out from a faulty answer than the simple: why or what? Why is it that at street crossings the man is green – when he's not red? Why do we sometimes say "noon" for 12 o'clock? Why do things like fingers and toes wrinkle when left in water?

Again, we look to one of the brightest to ever live to remind us. Einstein: if you can't explain it simply, you don't know it well enough.

Aligned with my blue Ontario sky was a grey January Glasgow visit and a panel talk on piping innovation – and tradition. Dr Gary West facilitated the discussion – one where I was very happy to be a participant. The talk was lively and left me with the sad realisation that I'd again be the fair recipient of a C- if anyone asked me the simple question: what is traditional music? Or, even, what is "traditional" piping – which is more precisely the question I am talking about today.

Since that day in January I've asked a boatload of accomplished pipers (about six to a boat) and

one professor of anthropology that question. To the person, variants of these words quickly follow, "that's a really hard thing to answer". And, after 20 minutes or so, usually in a place with air a little hotter than at the time of the question's asking, there sits a couple of thousand spoken words (sort of) addressing the questions of what and why. Hell's bells, even The Piobaireachd Society precedes its definition of piping's big music with the words, "to describe a piobaireachd is not easy".

It must be said that a simple explanation does not necessarily translate to something that is not complex. People spend their lives examining simple questions of knotty subjects. People like Drs. West and Simon McKerrell, for instance, have done yeoman's work in the area of piping and Scottish traditional music – as both musicians and academics. Once more, Albert E. shines a light: everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler. I'm not an academic and as a person who has spent a lifetime paddling though the waters of piping, it annoys me that an easy explanation of "what is traditional" doesn't easily come to me.

It seems, too, we use the word traditional a lot in our lives – beyond any musical or arty connotation. To the new guy at work: "Come along to the Station Bar, we all traditionally go there on a Friday night." Or "the band traditionally tune up at the Green on the Barras end of the Greendyke Street entrance". Simple language. And these "traditions"? Three or four years old – maybe?

If you live long enough, you might be lucky \*cough\* enough to see one of your tunes be called "traditional". This has happened to me more than once – and I don't consider it luck, especially. For instance, a reel I made in 1985, *Fleshmarket Close*, is played by people from time to time – which pleases me – but it's frequently labelled "trad". Carnaptious feelings aside, this is interesting in the context of wrestling with an easy definition of traditional. In piping terms, where does "traditional" fit on a time continuum? Is it possible to set precise parameters?

Well, using my *Fleshmarket Close* example, it would appear, no, is the answer. And, yet, in all efforts I have encountered to define traditional music, a time element is almost always used as

a marker. Tunes performed over a long period (usually several generations), says the International Council of Traditional Music, an NGO associated with UNESCO. Their definition continues: "They are most often folk songs, country dance or similar types of folk music but they can also be pieces from known early composers and may have been the 'pop music' of their time."

In anything I've come across related to a clear definition of traditional music, a few words and phrases do burble up: the tradition is alive, it changes and there is an evolutionary dynamism to the music. There is a strong oral element with the music passed down from player to player (certainly this would have been integral to the survival of music before recording technology). In fact, it is the oral element that has allowed a broad variance to settings and styles – this is especially true in the time before the radio and Victrola. Traditional music, too, is reflective of culture – especially local culture. It reflects the vernacular where it was incubated. And, finally, the form is the music of the people, of folk.

It's this and – I know – so much more. I've come to think of all piping as traditional, regardless of if you're seated in a chair playing in a church hall, in a pub with a bouzouki and MacBook or in a castle drawing room. As a living tradition, innovative changes push and pull and ricochet around what is believed to be the foundational tradition. Some changes become part of the never-ending life of the tradition, some influence and some fall away. And what is believed to be traditional is in the ear of the listener: it is the experience of the listener that stands as a traditional filter – or definer. Their experience and their local view defines what is traditional music – to them. Their geography, kin and, yes, language will surely inform what music is sensed as traditional.

On that, to the promised punter's definition, I look to pornography and the famous 1964 US Supreme Court ruling in the case of *Jacobellis v. Ohio*. Said Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart in his judgement: "... But I know it when I see it [pornography], and the motion picture involved in this case is not that."

Traditional music? Traditional piping? I know it when I hear it. It's big. It's bouncy. And it's spectacular. ●

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