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by Tim Cummings
The signature of time

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Nine Notes with Hamish Hepburn

Youngstars
NYPBoS Newsletter No.90

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FRONT COVER:
Ross Ainslie (left) **and Ali Hutton**
See feature on pages 8-14.

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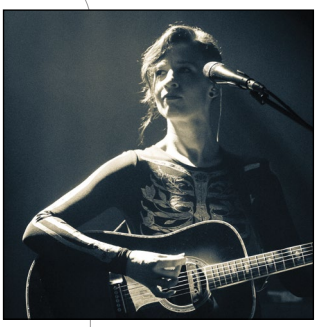
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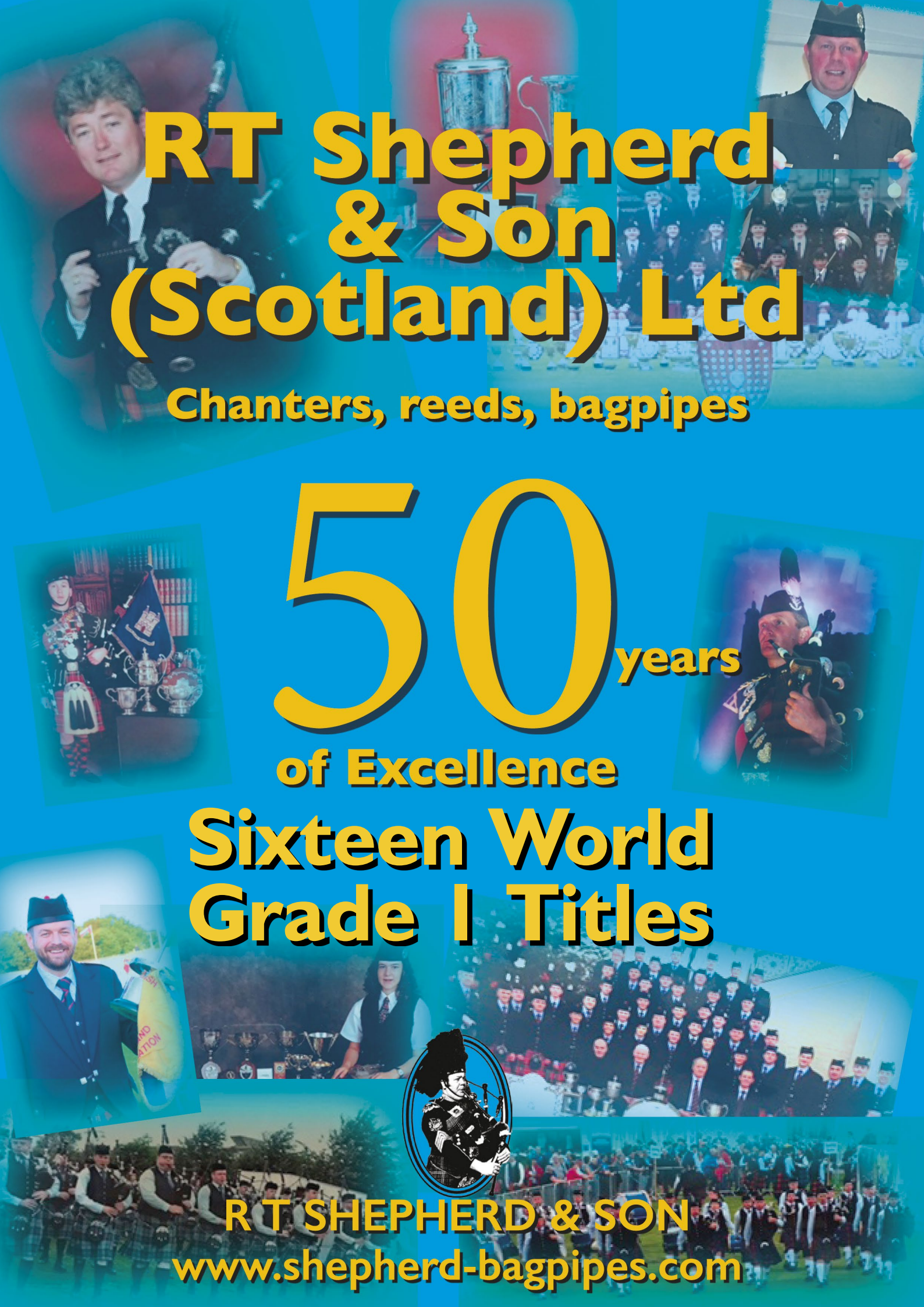






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Editorial



WE held the 23rd National Piping Centre Junior competition on February 16. It was a fantastic day of piping and I believe one of our biggest entries yet. It is very hard to believe that this was actually the 23rd version of the competition and it reminded me that when the Centre opened in 1996, one of our first priorities was to start this event. The reason being that we needed to get young people into the new Centre, show them what a fantastic facility for piping it was and try to get their interest to come back for future events and summer schools.

And so it remains to this day that we try to engage with young people through as many projects as we are able. Looking back through the winners of previous events, we can see that many of the youngsters whose names are inscribed in the trophies are now teachers, pipe majors of top bands, Gold Medallists and Glenfiddich Championship prizewinners. That is very pleasing to see.

What that shows is that there are good pathways for progression in piping. We also see this regularly in the flow of youngsters coming through The National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland programme and following through into further education at The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland for the BA (Traditional Music – Piping).

The standard at this year's Junior competition was very high and proved that there is lots of good teaching going on. Indeed, the prizewinners would not have been out of place within some Competing Pipers Association senior graded events.

With ever-increasing job opportunities for teachers in piping, there does need to be some benchmarking of qualifications. The Piping and Drumming Qualifications Board has for some years offered a Tutor's and a Teacher's certificate which required competency at SCQF Level 6 and 8 respectively, as well as a demonstrable track record in teaching which needed to be diarised. In addition, candidates have to be assessed while giving lessons in a variety of circumstances.

This is reasonably sufficient to measure competency as a piper and to some extent competency to teach piping but perhaps it is time to review these qualifications again and supplement them with further training in the broader aspects of teaching.

Professional development for teachers has to be a continual process as thinking and new approaches are developed to meet with the ever-changing ways of learning and working within our constantly evolving world. The way in which we utilise technology in every aspect of our lives these days is a clear example of that evolution. I recall seeing a cartoon recently about a mother saying to her children to go outside and play. The next caption showed them sitting on the step outside the front door playing with their iPads. Perhaps the younger generation will not even understand the humour in that – if not, ask your elders!

So the challenge inevitably remains, which is to continue to engage our young people in our music and review and adapt our approaches to teaching and learning so that the standards continue to rise as they have done in the past 20 years or so. To do this, we need teachers to come together through in-service collaborations, to share new ideas and learning experiences so that we can keep the momentum going. This will be an area that The National Piping Centre will continue to give commitment to and welcome collaboration on.

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



Junior Piping Competion winners and results

THE National Piping Centre Junior Competition was held on Saturday, February 16 in the main auditorium at McPhater Street.

The overall Junior Champion (age 15-17) was Luke Kennedy, who also won the Jig section, and was presented with a set of pipes generously donated by RG Hardie & Co. The prize winners pictured above are (from left), Jaz Scott (Chanter Champion), Eala Niamh McElhinney, Luke Kennedy, Fraser Hamilton (Novice Champion U-15), Ruairidh Brown, Kyle Cameron and Hamish Drennan.

The full results were as follows:

CHANTER SECTION

March: 1. Archie Johnston, 2. Jaz Scott, 3. Archie Hopley, 4. Ceara Gow, 5. Flynn Porter, 6. Owen McReadie

Slow Air: 1. Calum Webb, 2. Clara Hinchcliffe-Martinez, 3. Jaz Scott, 4. Flynn Porter, 5. Fergus Beattie, 6. Ellis MacDonald

NOVICE SECTION, U15

Piobaireachd: 1. Fraser Hamilton, 2. Kyle Cameron, 3. Brodie Cunningham, 4. Fraser Robson, 5. Euan Lindsay, 6. Gregor Grierson

Piobaireachd Ground: 1. Eala Niamh McElhinney, 2. Finlay Gray, 3. Archie MacFadyen, 4. Calum Robertson, 5. Ewan Allen, 6. Callum Brown

March: 1. Fraser Hamilton, 2. Kyle Cameron, 3. Euan Lindsay, 4. Liam McElhinney, 5. Finlay Peden, 6. Ewan Allen

Strathspey & Reel: 1. Kyle Cameron, 2. Fraser Hamilton, 3. Liam McElhinney, 4. Euan Lindsay, 5. Robbie McCutcheon, 6.Finlay Peden

JUNIOR SECTION, U15-17

Piobaireachd: 1. Hamish Drennan, 2. Christopher Happs, 3. Gregor MacDonald, 4. Eosaph Caimbeul, 5. Luke Kennedy, 6. Ruairidh Brown

March, Strathspey & Reel: 1. Ruairidh Brown, 2. Luke Kennedy, 3. Bobby Allen, 4. Hazel Whyte, 5. Hamish Drennan, 6. Christopher Happs

Jig: 1. Luke Kennedy, 2. Cameron May, 3. Bobby Allen, 4. Ruairidh Brown, 5. Christopher Happs, 6. Gregor MacDonald



The Italian Pipers' Association Spring School 2019

THE dates for the Italian Pipers' Association spring school in Calambrone near Pisa in Tuscany have now been confirmed as April 25-28, 2019.

Teachers include NPC Principal Roddy MacLeod and tutor Wilson Brown, who will teach alongside Alberto Massi.

Costs for the school start from €350 for all tuition, accommodation and full board, and there will be the opportunity to sit PDQB examinations over the course of the four days.

The school will be held at the Regina Mundi holiday house which has a beach on one side of the hotel, which could be an attraction for friends or family of pipers who are attending.

Find out more about at http://www.bagpipe.it



NPC CLASP Otago Street competition



Overall Winners, from left, David MacKenzie Grade 1, Bill Copland Grade 3 and David Robertson Grade 2. Judges were Dr. Simon McKerrell and Alastair Dunn.

OVERALL WINNERS
Grade 3: Bill Copland
Grade 2: David Robertson
Grade 1: David MacKenzie

GRADE 3
Piobaireachd (Full):
1. Bill Copland, 2. Dorothy Moodie, 3. Robert Thomson

Piobaireachd Ground:
1. Dorothy Moodie, 2. Robert Thomson, 3. (Joint) Stephen McClusker + Bjorn Frauendienst

2/4 March: 1. Bill Copland, 2. Jeremy Levif, 3. Lachlan MacDonald

Strathspey and Reel:
1. Bill Copland, 2. Joris Panis, 3. Jeremy Levif

Jig: 1. Bill Copland, 2. Joris Panis, 3. Jeremy Levif

GRADE 2
Piobaireachd:
1. David MacKenzie, 2. Dugald MacLeod, 3. Dagmar Pesta

2/4 March: 1. Douglas Maxwell, 2. Stewart Allan, 3. Iain Kirkwood

Strathspey & Reel:
1. David Robertson, 2. Douglas Maxwell, 3. Iain Kirkwood

Jig: 1. Iain Kirkwood, 2. David Robertson, 3. Douglas Maxwell

GRADE 1
Piobaireachd:
1. Robert Wilson, 2. Stewart Gaudin, 3. Andrew Park

2/4 March: 1. David MacKenzie, 2. Janette Greenwood, 3. Con Houlihan

Strathspey & Reel:
1. David MacKenzie, 2. Con Houlihan, 3. Janette Greenwood

Jig: 1. Robert Wilson, 2. David MacKenzie, 3. Con Houlihan

Further update to Silver Medal qualifying process

FOLLOWING the announcement by the Competing Pipers' Association, the committee have addressed a number of issues that were raised by members and have announced some changes.

There are three new events which will act as qualifiers for the Silver Medal events in 2020 and these are: the Metro Cup which was held in February, a PPBSO-run event on June 7 as part of Georgetown Highland Games and a New Zealand event which will be around the second last weekend of October.

These events will be run by organising bodies in the area and entries will be taken through them, so all questions should go to them for further details.

To clarify the full process, there are four ways players can qualify for the Silver Medal in 2020: 1) Silver Medal placed competitors from the previous year; 2) A- players; 3) Winners of B Graded Contests throughout the summer; 4) B Grade League table placings.

The qualifying events are now: Duncan Johnstone Metro Cup, BC Indoors, Highlands and Islands, Blair Atholl, Georgetown, Roseneath, Inveraray, Perth, MacGregor Memorial (AG), Cowal, Blairgowrie Captain John MacLellan Memorial, New Zealand, and the London Championships

Once these events have been run and winners announced, the remaining spots will be made up from league table positions, with points gained throughout the year going towards these final standings. The overseas events placings will be included in these league table points.

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Ali on pipes and Ross on whistle performing their Symbiosis II album at Celtic Connections this year

Ross Ainslie & Ali Hutton:

Photo: John Slavin@designfolk.com



musicians joined and hip

ROSS Ainslie and Ali Hutton are two of the most talented all-round musicians on the planet. To know that it was the bagpipes that brought them together makes what they do even more remarkable.

They started their life-long musical journey as kids in the late Gordon Duncan's Pitlochry-based Vale of Atholl Pipe Band, the Novice Juvenile feeder band to Gordon's brother Ian's champion grade one team. It was Gordon who would stand as their biggest and most formative influence. His vitality and approach to music-making marked an inflection point for both Ross and Ali. The variety and possibility of multi-instrumental music-making, like that demonstrated by Gordon, proved a magnetic draw for the two pipers. By they age of 15 they were both well into instruments beyond the pipes. With guitars, whistles, bouzouki, cittern and banjo in hand to support the pipes, Ross and Ali never looked back.

Their careers have seen them play in many leading Scottish bands including Treacherous Orchestra, Old Blind Dogs, Salsa Celtica, Dougie MacLean, Shooglenifty and Capercaillie. It was only in the last few years that they decided to zero in on creating music together. Their compositions, arrangements and technical virtuosity have brought them a devoted fan following and hugely successful recording projects, including last year's, Symbiosis II. Awards, too, have come their way. In 2017 they were winners of the Best Duo category at the BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards; they followed up in 2018 with yet another nomination.

Over a coffee and the clatter of banging plates in a busy cafe in Glasgow City Centre, Ross and Ali talked to *Piping Today* about their collaboration, their music and a candid peek into a musician's life. *continued on p. 10* ☛

PT: Can you talk about how you support each other and your collaboration?

Ross: Every musician has strengths and weaknesses and I think that's why it's great to work with other people. Other people can fill the gaps and bring it to life in a way you can't on your own.

PT: So Ali, can you give one example where Ross supports you and makes you better?

Ali: Ross has always been a brilliant tune writer and that is something that has taken me a long time to be confident and reasonably good at.

PT: Ross, what about Ali?

Ross: Ali is one of the best accompanists in Scotland.

PT: What makes him the best? Is it chops, an ear, a great sense of rhythm?

Ross: It's all those. He's also creative with his choice of chords. Ali likes to take time and make sure it's the absolute right choice. I always like to use the first thing and I don't want to hear anything else.

Ali: Yes, that can be one of the positive differences [between us]. We always try to incorporate each other's way of doing things and incorporate views and ideas. It makes you more open.

PT: It takes a lot of maturity to do that. Do you think your collaboration works because you've known each other since you were very young or is there something in your personalities that lends itself to a collaborative spirit?

Ross: We've been playing music together – pipes with other instruments – since we were maybe 14. And we listen to the same stuff and are really into the same stuff. So it's surprising it has taken so long to come together as a [professional] duo. Obviously we've played together for years on different projects but never worked as a duo. There's a piece that we did on the Gaelic set on our first album. We wrote this bit of music when we were 15 but it's always been in the back burner. We've been doing it so long, that collaborating was a natural thing.

PT: Would you say there are influences beyond trad that have leaked into how you work? Pop influences?

Ali: I was thinking about this the other day and actually in both of the albums you can hear bands, you can hear albums, I think you can even hear references from films. I think you can definitely hear all kinds of cultural references.

PT. Let's make no assumptions. Give us one.

Ali: There's a series of films called *Friday* and *Friday After Next* that are just funny films. We used to laugh at these all the time. There was always this kind of hip-hop intro music. There's an intro in the second album that references that kind of hip-hop – a pizzicato string thing. And I remember, when we were thinking about it, sending Patsy [Reid, fiddle player] these references, and told her about this film and she came up with this thing. It was exactly perfect. I think that is the thing about this album [*Symbiosis II*], there is a nostalgic element to the music.

PT: Anyone reading this will have a good idea of your ages when you refer to anything hip-hop as nostalgic.

Ali: (laughs) Well, of course, it's just what we grew up listening to. The main idea is we used to spend a lot of time together: the pipe band, learning instruments. There was no one around to have a tune with. Ross bought a bouzouki and I bought a guitar and we just listened to albums and tried to figure out chord sequences. That is how we built up our understanding of chords and keys. It took a lot of years to understand it all.

PT: So, Ross, you spent a lot of time investigating the mysteries of chord sequences. How is it that you didn't investigate the mysteries of piobaireachd? How was it you drifted from that world?

Ross: (laughs) It was listening to Gordon's *Just for Seumas* album. It did something to you in hearing that bouzouki along with pipes. It was a wild sound.

Ali: Aye, that's something you really can't choose. I used to compete. I played piobaireachd for a while. I just shut off when I played it, just because you had to. You get to a certain point where you just have to do it., where it just grabs you. There was that moment listening to that album, for sure. And hearing Wolfstone albums or Bothy Band albums – things Gordon used to play us – and, yeah, it grabs you.

Ross: I'll give you the track [that hooked me]. The strathspeys and reels that starts with *The Brig of Perth* and then *Ramnee Ceilidh*. It was when the bouzouki came in with *Ramnee Ceilidh*.



Photo: John Slavin@designfolk.com



At Celtic Connections 2019

PT: That is great you can identify the moment that changed you.

Ross: I remember it, being in the car coming back from pipe band practice. We were fortunate that Gordon was our pipe major.

PT: What's your take on the mainstream piping world?

Ali: It is so competitive on every level. It's very different for us. I always find it funny that pipers can go to gigs and find it hard to tell another piper they played well. There is always that want to be better than the next person.

PT: Ross, are you competitive?

Ross: No, not really.

PT: You had to think about that.

Ross: (laughs) I like to do well. I wouldn't say I am competitive. Maybe that is why I never got into it when I was younger. In sports I am competitive (pauses). I don't know. I never really thought about it. Maybe I am (laughs).

PT: What about you, Ali, are you competitive?

Ali: I don't know. I think I've come to a point in my life where I want to be more encouraging and appreciative of other people's things. Maybe I've gone through ups and downs depending on what's going on – and my own self-confidence as a musician. I think it's an environmental thing or situation. I'm not competitive. I can be down on things; but not because I want to be better. But I can be quite opinionated.

PT: So you are a piper.

Ali: I'm always trying to work at sharing; where everyone has a chance, has a voice. When I used to do solos, I always found it very weird that everyone – and their parents – would take it so seriously. Even with the pipe band: It was nice to win but I never ever felt seriously competitive against people. It was about the music.

PT: You play a lot in public. Do you ever get nervous?

Ross: Aye, definitely. More so now than ever.

PT: Why is that?

Ross: (pause) I don't drink any more so I'm really aware of situations. To be honest, it's not nervous about the actual playing, it's the speaking part I get really nervous about. If il don't have to speak I'm quite happy on stage.

PT: What about you, Ali?

Stuart Easton

Ali: Recently I have been getting really nervous. I never used to. I think I'm having a confidence thing quite a lot.

PT: Have you had time to think about what might trigger that?

Ali: Yeah, I think over the last year I haven't been doing a lot of gigs with people. Even with my guitar I haven't been doing a lot of gigs. And so in a guitar gig recently I felt a bit alien doing this thing that I haven't been doing.

PT: So how do manage it when you do get nervous?

Ali: (laughs) Just get on with it.

Ross: There's no other way really to deal with it because you've got yourself in this situation.

PT: Any advice for pipers reading this who get nervous when they perform?

Ali: For me, before the gig I stay away from everything, stay backstage.

Ross: I think what can help is being prepared. If you're not prepared, of course, you're going to get nervous. If you do a lot of work before you won't be nervous about the actual playing.

Ali: Yes, I think preparation is the best thing. A little bit of nerves is a good thing.

PT: Do you two ever fall out?

Both: (laugh together). Aye.

PT: So when you're collaborating, what triggers a fall-out?

Ali: Music is an intense experience. It can be amazing, it can be frustrating and you have no say in how that is going to play out. It unfolds. Everyone has their preconceived ideas of what something should be. Everyone has that battle. Everyone has their own idea. Depending on how intense you are as a person determines how easy it is to bounce ideas off another person. Sometimes it can be a brick wall.

PT: Anyone in pipe bands will relate to this.

Ali: That's why you need a pipe major. You need a person saying: "You're doing that, and that's it."

PT: So are you guys co-pipe major?

Both: (laughter)



Ross and Ali with Treacherous Orchestra at Celtic Connections in 2015

Photo: John Slavin@designfolk.com

Ross: We were in Treacherous Orchestra and there were 12 of us and no pipe major. It was a nightmare. People took roles because that's the way people are but it was a tough situation to be in.

Ali: You have to be fine knowing that not everything you do is brilliant. You have to be OK knowing that this is the case.

PT: Can an audience effect a performance?

Ross: (laughs) That's the main thing for me. If I sense a negative vibe from an audience, that's the gig done for me. I love when it's easy and everyone is there for a good time. I'm just not good at achieving a good vibe. It needs to be there before I start. I can't create it. I know that, so I really struggle if it's not there.

Ali: I think it's a weird thing because an audience can sit and say nothing and then you feel annoyed but for that audience it might be the preferred thing to sit and not make noise. You can feel they're not really into it. But then you come off and they've loved the gig.

Ross: There is a feeling. You can get quiet gigs but there is a vibe that is good. It's unexplainable.

Ali: You always want an audience to be with you straight away.

Ross: The [Rolling] Stones must be the easiest band – or any of these bands – to play in. I went to see Ben Howard in Glasgow. He said like three words the whole night. It was so easy.

PT: It makes you wonder what competition piping might be like if the audiences made noise, maybe held their lighters in the air at a crunluath doubling.

Ali: (laughs) It would be brilliant!

PT: Ross, what's your favourite material possession?

Ross: My instruments, I suppose.

PT: Is there one?

Ross: I love the whistle. Then, I love playing the pipes as well.

Ali: I think instruments are just a tool. You know, a guitar, or a good set of pipes, can feel irreplaceable. But if they break, you can get another one. But I would say I've got a comic.

PT: So what comic?

Ali: (laughs) It's such a geeky thing. I've got a lot of stuff like that. It's a Marvel comic. It's the first appearance of Wolverine, and that all I'm going to say.

PT: Is it going to pay for your retirement?

Ali: This is the thing. It actually might. It's sort of a musician's pension fund.

Ross: I like cooking. I have a great Le Creuset pot that I always use. That will stay with me till I die.

PT: OK. So what's your last supper?

Ross: Dumpling, mince – pretty amazing. I'm going to make them tonight. I like trying new stuff, pastas. I like cooking desserts, custard tart, Creme Brulé.

Ali: Ross is a very good cook.

PT: What about you, Ali?

Ali: Mine's Beef Wellington. Ross showed me how to make it.

Ross: Most musicians are good cooks. I don't know why.

Ali: I think it's a good thing to shut your brain off.

PT: Is there a song, tune or musical passage that brings a tear to your eye?

Ross: I like The Brecker Brothers', *Song for Barry* or *Big Country* by Bela Fleck and the Flecktones.

Ali: It's Sigur Rós albums for me. I'm really into Icelandic artists. Ólafur Arnalds' *Living Room Songs* – it's just him playing the piano and a few strings. You can hear it creaking like you're sitting next to him. That is amazing.

Ross: Also that [Moving Hearts] track, *Tribute To Peadar O'Donnell*. I just love it.

PT: Is there a song or tune you'd be quite happy to never hear again?

Ross: *Glasgow City Police Pipers*.

Ali: That's a good answer.

Ross: How about *Pumpkin's Fancy* (laughs). I loved it when I was younger.

Ali: That's tough.

Ross: *Highland Cathedral*.

Ali: Now that's a pretty good answer.

PT: What do your friends appreciate most about you?

Ross: My cooking.

Ali: Oh, I dunno. Ask them.

PT: Doing all the things that it takes to be successful professional musicians can't be easy. How does that impact you on a personal level?

Ali: It's interesting that talk of mental health is quite prominent now, especially as it's associated with music. We were talking a wee bit about this the other day – unexpectedly – when we were talking about Gordon. It was quite nice to talk about things that we often shy away from.

PT: Mental health is a much more open subject now. Do you think we're in a different place as a society when it comes to helping people who struggle?

Ross: Because we're more open and a lot of people talk about addictions and mental health problems, I think there's more help there now than even 10 years ago.

Ali: It's the talking about things. That's what's important. On whatever level it's good to discuss things. When you're in close relationships in bands and all that, it's better to be open because it makes for an easier situation for everyone – more comfortable and more productive. If people are aware that they can speak to each other, it's important for people and the working environment.

PT: There's no doubt that alcohol, for example, is a common thing around us – especially in the piping world.

Ali: A nice thing to understand: we did one tour when I decided not to drink at all to try to help Ross. And it was great. It was a realisation for me that you really don't need it to have a good gig and feel good about the music. There's a reason you play music and that happened before you had a drink.

PT: You're busy in March, touring away. What else have you got planned?

Ross: We'll have another album next year and a couple of singles this year.

Ali: We quite enjoyed doing the songs at the [Celtic Connections] gig. So maybe more of that. It's nice to try out new things with people

PT: So the sky's the limit – not talking Portree.

Ali: (laughs) Skye is the limit! That's our first gig!

PT: Well, thanks to you both and break a leg. ●

Tribute to Jack Lockhart

1933 – 2018

JACK was a friend of mine, and a great but very kind teacher of the musical side of the instrument. He introduced me to the CLASP, which encouraged me to improve my piping.

At our band practices, when he voiced his opinion on the musical aspect – sometimes he would even wait until he was asked – everyone listened. Most understood what he was saying and tried to comply.

In the CLASP, for his light music, his tunes would be old ones or old settings, but always musical. It was amusing to watch the judge's face, if they were under 70, when Jack announced his tunes. But he won many prizes with the old tunes.

I remember in the bar at The National Piping Centre after one CLASP event, Con Houlihan and Jack swapping piping stories with tunes being written out on napkins. Great times! ●

BY ROBERT THOMSON



At Jack's funeral, the minister's eulogy covered much of his piping and musical exploits. It was written with the help of Jack's family and Graeme Gauld who helped with the details of Jack's time with the Bucksburn Pipe Band. *Piping Today* would like to thank the Lockhart family and Reverend Kenneth Petrie for permission to print part of the eulogy here.

JACK was born on June, 11, 1933 in the Hilltown area of Dundee. The Boys' Brigade was an important influence on the young Jack and introduced him to piping. At the age of 12 he joined the 6th Dundee (Lochee) Boys' Brigade as his father always wanted him to play the pipes and the 6th was one of the most successful Brigade bands at that time.

In 1948 he joined Underwood's in Dundee where he served his apprenticeship as a mechanical engineer. He remained at Underwood until 1964, when they were taken over by Olivetti, during which time he was called up for National Service between 1954 and 1956 serving in Cyprus with The Royal Signals. It was when he returned from Cyprus that he discovered his mother, not realising their future significance, had used his treasured bagpipe drones as fire kindling in his absence. This story took a more dramatic twist when in later years he discovered that those very pipes, which he inherited from his Great Aunt Agnes Stewart, had been played by members of the Stewart family during the Napoleonic wars and should now have been a national treasure. Following this discovery he gifted what was left of the pipes and chanter to the museum on the Isle of Lismore where they are now on display.

Jack was a keen curler, something that runs in the family, playing with the Laurencekirk Curling Club winning various prizes, while the club's participation in weekend competitions around the country became a must-attend, especially with his re-enactment of Gene Kelly's *Singing in the Rain* dance routine whilst playing the tune on his pipes. A curling highlight was his participation in the Grand Match on the Lake of Menteith along with 600 other teams on Wednesday, February 7, 1979

Then there were his Friday nights enjoying the banter below the clock in The Clubby, playing and singing at their social events and gatherings at which he will be sorely missed. His biggest regret was his inability to convert the club membership to the cause of Scottish independence. Given the club was the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Club, it was always going to be a challenge, even for Jack. A musical offshoot of the club was the creation of the band The Soggy Bottom Stompers in which he played percussion and whatever else was necessary, playing and singing old hit parade favourites at not only the club's functions but at pubs and halls around the area which gave him great enjoyment.

However it was piping that was the great passion of Jack's life. Following his time in the BB band, he was then a member of The Mcleod, The Bullionfield, Dundee Police, Bucksburn and District and finally The Gordon Highlanders Association Pipe Band. His brother Angus benefited from Jack's membership of The Bullionfield Pipe Band. Bullionfield was a paper mill in Invergowrie and Jack was pipe major when Angus applied for a job there. During the interview when asked if Angus knew a Jack Lockhart, he replied: "Yes, he's my brother." They immediately told him he'd got the job.

Since the family's move to Stonehaven, Jack has been a very well respected member of The Bucksburn and District Pipe Band. He'd admired the band from hearing them

play at various contests over the years. "The Bucksburn" as he referred to the band, was a top Grade 1 outfit at the time and the then Pipe Major Davie Duncan had no hesitation in taking Jack on board, regarding him as one of his trusted lieutenants not only for musical ability but his smartness of dress and as a communicator and fine ambassador for the band. Jack could speak to anybody of any age about all things and was very keen on seeing youngsters brought on. He took several under his wing and for a time was pipe major of the Novice Juvenile Band.

He participated fully in band affairs and had a down-to-earth, common sense approach and was always prepared to give his opinion. When asked for his opinion on whether or not lady members should be admitted to the band he said he "wisna at all keen". When asked if he thought they might not be able to play to the required standard his retort was: "No – bit whinever yet let weemen in tae bands there's aye fechtin."

Despite his views, Jack and Lillian Nicholson, the first female band member, became firm friends.

He thoroughly enjoyed the competition side of piping and set high standards for himself. He travelled the country playing in the five major pipe band championships and all the local events, more often than not being in the prize list. He always gave 100% and would never let the band or other members down by missing an engagement. As bandsman, solo player and all-round entertainer playing at weddings, Burns suppers and other functions, he was always full of youthful enthusiasm. His continuing to compete in the senior section of the Clasp competitions in Glasgow and Edinburgh into his 80s was testimony to that. He was always seeking to improve and started to compete in pibroch at a late age and went out seeking tuition. His dedication to piping led to him being upset on one occasion because the family booked flights for a day he was due to play at a competition – "I ken they thocht they were daen the richt thing, bit how inconsiderate was that as I was playing my strathspeys and reels very weel."

The band trips to Toronto were one of the great highlights of his piping career. Top bands from the UK together with others from various parts of the world were invited to perform at the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto as part of the World Scottish Festival and the Inter-Continental Pipe Band Competition. He was very proud to have been part of this prestigious event. In Toronto, Jack, the party animal, with his buddy Johnnie Summers, were much sought-after by other bands to join them in the dorms at York University for their "concert approach". The late-night performances were legendary. Johnnie tells a story of the two of them being threatened with arrest by the Toronto "polis" for not "piping down" outside the Nag's Head, an Irish pub in downtown Toronto.

Jack wrote his own chapter in the history and folklore of "The Bucksburn" – and will never be forgotten. ●



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by Chris MacKenzie



Highland pipes and so much

THERE used to be a time, back in the early days, when it was possible to go to a concert most nights of Celtic Connections and you didn't have to leave the Concert Hall and would see all the main acts. This year, there were 30 venues, 300 events and 2000 musicians so unless you have a Tardis or Hermione's Time-Turner you can only see a small subset of the artists but that just leaves others to see next year, or the year after that.

Despite the number of events many of them sell out, illustrating just how much Celtic Connections has become part of the Scottish and international traditional event calendar. Long may that continue.

One of the most rewarding aspects of attending Celtic Connections is discovering new artists through the carefully crafted pairings that Donald Shaw and his team put together. This was the case at the long-awaited Deaf Shepherd concert when the Americana/folk trio of Alden (vocals, guitar), Patterson (fiddle, vocals) and Dashwood (dobro, vocals) took to the stage first. Their tight vocals and classy playing was warmly received by the sell-out crowd in the Strathclyde suite in the Concert Hall. Whether reworking old-time, bluegrass, recrafting of folk classics or their own original material, their arrangements were bright and their vocals deliciously smooth. With dobro and fiddle to the fore, this Norwich-based trio sounded more American than *The Star Spangled Banner* at the Super Bowl before switching to their homeland and putting their unique spin on *Ten Thousand Miles*. All in all, it was a very good way to warm up for the main act.

It is a sign of the enduring popularity of both Celtic Connections and Deaf Shepherd that 25 years after they played at the first festival, the band were back in a sell-out concert.

The line-up has morphed a little with Malcolm Stitt, John Morran, Clare McLaughlin, Mark Maguire, Jenna Reid and Finlay MacDonald taking to the stage this time round, for what was their first concert in eight years.

Any doubts that they may be a little ring-rusty were blown away in the opening seconds of the first track, as they launched into their



Photo: John Slavin@designfolk.com

more at Celtic Connections

trademark pipe and fiddle attack on the *4lb Brownie* set. It was classic Deaf Shepherd and had the crowd rocking from the outset. While the band can raise the rafters, they have always had a delicate side and John raided his Burns catalogue, the Lowland mouth music tradition and the contemporary store for some beautifully arranged and delivered songs. The highlight was undoubtedly his rendition of Gavin Stevenson's *Huntin the Buntin'*, which was a delight.

The song interludes allowed everyone's pulse to get back down to non-life-threating levels before the energy level was cranked up and the band powered through strathspeys, jigs and reels. The addition of original members Rory Campbell and Marianne Campbell was well received by the crowd and added kerosene to the fire with twin pipes and a trio of fiddles stoking the flames. The inevitable encore saw the band joined by two more of the original line-up, Gavin Pennycook and Angus McLaughlin, for an emotional version of *Lost for Words at Sea*. The finale could only be the *Gie's a Drink* set and with everyone pitching in, it was a rocking, bouncing, dancing-in-the-aisles end to the night. Here's hoping it won't be another eight years before this band get back on stage.

Like Deaf Shepherd, Breabach follow in the well steeped Scottish folk band tradition of a pipe and fiddle sound that stretches back to the Whistlebinkies, the Tannahill Weavers and Battlefield Band (to name but a few).

Breabach may be relative newcomers in relation to Deaf Shepherd, but they have been around for 14 years and their recording output of six albums does make Deaf Shepherd's three look a little paltry. Breabach have picked up many fans over the years, and they packed out the Fruitmarket.

They did not disappoint as they powered through a set full of energy and musicality. *The Oban Ball* set from their most recent album, *Frenzy of the Meeting*, kicked things off with pipes to the fore. There are very few bands who can boast two pipers of the calibre of Calum MacCrimmon and James Duncan MacKenzie and with both front and centre on pipes, it is a great sound. Of course, Calum and James are both multi-instrumentalists and during this concert you were as likely to hear them on whistle or flute as pipes.



Breabach

The singing duties were shared across the band with Ewan Robertson, Calum and Megan Henderson all taking a turn. Ewan's smooth delivery of *The Birds of Passage* and Calum's *The Iceman* provided the highlights. As well as singing and providing the fiddle backbone to the band, Megan also displayed her step-dancing talents to the delight of the crowd. It is a testament to the musicianship of Megan, Calum and James that their playing is so tight you couldn't get a cigarette paper soaked in oil between them. Add in Ewan's sympathetic guitar playing and James Lindsay's superb double bass playing and it all adds up to a complex, multi-layered sound that stays true to the melody.

By the big finish with the *Knees Up* set and an encore of *The Last March,* followed by a twin pipe-led strathspey and reel set with more step dancing, the band had folk on their feet and earned a standing ovation.

It is beyond argument that Celtic Connections have been a major factor in the changes that have swept through the piping world over the last 20 years. From the outset, the festival featured the pipes in many forms and has always had a piping concert. That concert has always taken a broad church approach to piping and included bellows pipers, pipers from France and Spain, pipers from the folk tradition as well as Gold Medallists and top pipe bands. This approach has undoubtedly helped get the piping world to the place we are now where there is room for everyone.

This year, the concert was billed as *The Conundrum: International Piping Night* and was the brainchild of piping virtuoso Finlay MacDonald.

It took the form of an extended "tag team" performance with new players joining those on stage and then staying on while the original players bow out. First up were the father and daughter duo of Philippe Morice (on bombarde) and Enora (on Highland pipes), who played a selection of music from Brittany with their instruments and performances sparking off each other.

They were joined by uilleann piper and 2018 Scots Trad Instrumentalist of the Year, Calum Stewart for a dance set from Loudéac that synced Highland pipes, uilleann pipes and bombarde in a rhythmic fusion that would get even the most wooden feet dancing. As Philippe and Enora left, Calum was joined by Steve Byrnes on bouzouki and for William Marshall's *Craigellachie Lasses* followed by one of Calum's own compositions, *The Phoenix*.

If you haven't had the pleasure of seeing Calum live, then seek him out. His playing sparkles with that rare mix of pace and control which teases every ounce of melody out of the tune even at F1 speed. After a blast through the *Cairngorm* set, Finlay tagged in for *The Angel's Share* set of reels with Calum.



All photos: John Slavin@Designfolk Ltd

The Conundrum concert finale



Ross Ainslie and Mac Morin



All photos: John Slavin@Designfolk Ltd

As Calum left the stage to great applause Finlay was joined by the house band – Ross Martin, Steven Blake and Steve Byrnes – and kicked off with Andrea Beaton's eccentrically named *The Electric Water Boiling Machine*, then by way of *Pipe Major Donald MacLeod* into *Abdul's,* one of his own compositions.

Finlay was joined by his long-time collaborator Chris Stout and they finished the first half in cracking style. Finlay and Chris are so adept as a musical partnership that they could play the kazoo and triangle together and turn it into compelling music.

The second half started with Cape Breton's Matt MacIsaac on pipes and Mac Morin on piano. They launched into Pipe Major Donald MacLeod's *Stornoway Bay* before *The Conundrum* (surprising that it took so long to appear) and then a big set of reels and a set of jigs.

The Cape Breton sound epitomised by Matt and Mac is as infectious as flu but a whole lot more fun to have. They were joined by Brighde Chaimbeul and Ross Ainslie for a set of strathspey and reels which culminated in Mac showcasing some Cape Breton step dancing – classy and very entertaining.

Brighde and Ross then took centre stage for a set of mainly Ross's tunes, followed by a Bulgarian set and in alignment with the theme of the night, they proved a very musical partnership.

They were joined by Galician gaita piper Anxo Lorenzo for a strange but surprisingly effective pairing of *Aires de Pontevedra* and *The Clumsy Lover*. Anxo's set had a bright jazzy feel and he was joined by Ross and Finlay for *Hector the Hero* and a set of jigs. The finale had everyone on stage for a Breton song and then *Ann's March*, one of Finlay's tunes.

All in all, a great night's piping and more evidence, if it was needed that pipers the world over have lots in common and fabulous music occurs when the different strands get together.

A piper who featured in many of the early Celtic Connections concerts was, of course, Gordon Duncan.

It is very hard to overstate Gordon's influence on the piping world and the broader traditional music scene and he still casts such a mighty shadow today that it would take a dozen ethnomusicologists working for a decade to fully unravel his impact.

That hasn't deterred actor and piper David Colvin from putting on a one-man show that looks at Gordon's impact on the tradition through the lens of David's participation in the piping scene and how that changed on encountering Gordon's playing.

The play is both achingly funny (you will laugh hard) and deeply moving (be prepared to have a large lump in your throat), while paying a very personal tribute to the genius of Gordon Duncan.

Sadly, Gordon went to join the great celestial pipe band in 2005 and it is impossible to know what music he would be making now, but his influence is most directly seen in the work of two of the young pipers he took under his wing in the Vale of Atholl Pipe Band.

Ali Hutton and Ross Ainslie make no secret of how inspiring Gordon was to them, and that his music has heavily influenced the musical direction they are now on. That direction was evident at their concert in the Queen Margaret Union where they played several tracks from both their latest album *Symbiosis II* and its predecessor *Symbiosis*.

While both albums do feature other musicians (who were on stage) it is fair to say this concert was the Ross and Ali big band with a beefed-up strings line-up led by Patsy Reid and including Greg Lawson, Seonaid Aitken and Megan Henderson, and guitarist Jenn Butterworth in a skeleton bodysuit.

The extra bodies on stage notched the Ross and Ali sound up to epic in scale and if a little of the subtlety of the albums got lost in the mix, this was more than compensated by the great sweeps of sound that resonated across the venue.

There were also songs from Ross Wilson (Blue Rose Code) and Fiona Hunter, with Ross's version of his own song, *On the Hill Remains a Heart*, being the standout. Another highlight was their version of the Gordon Duncan classic *Pressed for Time*, with Ali on pipes and Ross on whistle – I think their mentor would have approved.

This year's pipe band concert was performed by The National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland.

The band are, to quote the programme, a non-competing cutting-edge performance pipe band for 10 to 25-year-olds in Scotland.

Actually, they are two pipe bands – development and senior – and both are terrific. Indeed, they are so good that the development band are probably in the top 10 per cent of bands in the world and the senior band (who are crammed with Grade 1 players including some World



Champions at that level) are in the top five per cent. That is seriously good.

The development band were up first and showed all of their skills with a delightful programme that included a glorious *The Beaches of Harris*, a skilfully executed *PM Sandy Spence* march, and jigs (including *Caber Feidh*), an evocative *Hector the Hero* and finished with *The High Drive*.

After the break, the senior band got straight down to business with *The Annihilator Suite*, which mixes guitar rock riffs with a driving pipe score to great effect. Then in complete contrast, and as testament to their ability, the band tackled a hefty MSR of *The Argyllshire Gathering, Caber Feidh and McAlister's Dirk* and their playing would have stood them in very good stead in many a competition ring.

That said, the MSR is not really what the NYPBoS is about, and we were soon back to a big set of jigs followed by some tag-team solos. Well done to Kenneth MacFarlane, Lewis Russell and Ciaren Ross for having the nerve to perform solo on the main concert stage and acquit themselves so well. After a beautifully arranged *A Tune for Lottie*, it was back to rock riffs and guitar accompaniment for a punchy arrangement of Lincoln Hilton's *400%*. A set of hornpipes set up the finale of Gordon Duncan's arrangement of *Thunderstruck*, a piece that is fast becoming the senior band's signature. It's loud, rocking, very catchy and the band nail all seven minutes of it.

Special mention should be made of the joint pipe majors of the senior band, Andrew Clark and Iain Crawford. They were presented with pipe banners embroidered with their years of service in the band and were thanked by band director Alisdair McLaren for their dedication.

One of the albums of 2018 was *In Praise of Home* by Rura and they performed most of it to a packed-out Saint Luke's during Celtic Connections. Their carefully crafted tunes were skilfully played out with a hint of the extra panache that a live performance gives, sometimes slightly jazzy, sometimes almost transcendental but always melodic. This is another band who fall into the category of: "If they are in your neck of the woods, seek them out."

Another must-see band are Talisk, who stormed a packed Fruitmarket with a set that exuded so much energy that it was in danger of tripping every fuse in a five-mile radius.

With concertina virtuoso Mohsen Amini practically levitating above his seat with the sheer enthusiasm he put into his performance, Hayley Keenan on fiddle and Graeme Armstrong on guitar, the crowd were treated to a trio of superb musicians who got into a groove and sparked off each other until the stage was in danger of igniting. The Fruitmarket is a big venue and the three musicians were seated yet, as the cliche goes, they rocked the joint. A standing ovation seemed scant reward.

Roll on next year. ●

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Youngstars

LEWIS RUSSELL

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

I'm 18 and originally from Livingston, though I now live in Glasgow as I am studying at the University of Strathclyde. I love the place.

Q. How did you get into piping and when?

There was a piper who did a bagpipe presentation at my primary school when I was seven. I thought it was fantastic and decided I wanted to learn the craft. Here I am over a decade later.

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

I have been seeing Andrew Frater, the reedmaker, from Uphall since around 2010. He has been a great support over the years and we are on a similar wavelength.

With regards to pipe bands, I was with West Lothian Schools for nine years and stayed with them right up until I was too old for a Juvenile Band. I have since joined the ranks of Glasgow Police and I'm very much enjoying it.

In spring last year, I also had my first taste of the Breton side of piping – competing with Bagad Kevrenn Alré at Brest 2018 in Brittany. This is something I plan on intermittently travelling to over the years, for both Brest and Lorient.

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

Well, this is something that doesn't quite have an exact consistency for myself, as I like to hammer one focus at a time. I have found this works best, since I can keep my mind concentrated on a solitary task for a few hours without noticing any drop in productivity or performance. This is how I balance my academic studies, piping and other activities. As long as I don't leave anything more than a few days, I can come back to the task with it still fresh in my mind.

I think this is best explained with an example. If I have five mentally captivating tasks to complete in a week, I would have a greater result and accomplishment standard by doing one a day over five days, rather than a fifth of each task each day. It is simply because I can focus on the one problem to a deep level, instead of multiple problems simultaneously to a low level.

That being the case, in a week of little practice, I'd have an average of about 4.5-7 hours at band practices and a further 5 hours self-practice.

In a piping intensive week, I can average up to 4.5-7 hours at band practices, then 1.5-2 hours per day self-practice.

This excludes all other piping events, gigs, extra practices or other commitments. Including them, I can often rack up 30-35 hours a week of piping.

After I have learnt my tunes on the chanter first, I am almost fully on pipes when practising.

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

I am quite well-rounded with my playing,

continued on p. 26 ☛



Lewis Russell playing in the NYBPoS tag-team solos at Celtic Connections 2019

Photo: John Slavin@Designfolk Ltd



ALISDAIR McLAREN
DIRECTOR, NATIONAL YOUTH PIPE BAND OF SCOTLAND

Youngstars

The NYPB Development Band in the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall Main Auditorium at Celtic Connections 2019

Made in Scotland at

JANUARY was a very busy month for The National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland Senior and Development Bands.

Members of both bands used two practice weekends to rehearse for their major concert for the 2018/19 project year entitled ***Made in Scotland***. This year the band were very honoured to have their show featured as one of the events at this year's Celtic Connections festival. Both weekend rehearsals were very beneficial to all members as both bands were able to add the final touches to all the material and also work on refining the band's sound for the show.

On February 2 just over 100 eager members arrived at the Royal Glasgow Concert Hall looking forward to a busy schedule with early-morning sound checks before a very quick turnaround for the midday performance in front of just over 1000 people. After a few technical glitches the band took to the stage to run through some of the feature sets of the afternoon. From the opening rendition of what's become one of the development band's signature pieces









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Youngstars

Celtic Connections

The Beaches of Harris, to the senior band's updated version of *The Annihilator Suite,* you could tell that the excitement was starting to kick in.

From the outset you could feel the brilliant atmosphere building in the main auditorium which is known for being one of the premier pipe band concert stages in world. In front of a very enthusiastic audience, the young musicians put on a superb performance, showcasing the fantastic talents of every individual within the NYPBoS project. Not only did the band perform to a very high standard but they did so in style, performing many fantastic arrangements incorporating solos, duets and quartets featuring an amazing backline team consisting of keyboard, whistle, fiddle, electric guitar, acoustic guitar, bass, drum kit and hand percussion, all helping to enhance the band's musical experience for the audience.

It was a concert that I'm sure all of the members of the NYPBoS and the audience will remember for many years to come.

I would like to say a special thank you to senior pipe majors Iain Crawford and Andrew Clark, both long serving members of 11 years, who led the band for one final time before their retirement from the NYPBoS. The night also saw senior drum sergeant Craig Baxter, senior drum corporal Beth NcNeil, senior pipers Timothy Ness, Connor Jardine, Ross Walker, Angus MacPhee and Alistair McLean perform their last concert with the band. On behalf of all the members of the NYPBoS and The National Piping Centre, I would like to thank them for their dedication and commitment to the project and I wish them all the very best in their future piping aspirations. ●









All photos: John Slavin@Designfolk Ltd



ALISDAIR McLAREN

DIRECTOR, NATIONAL YOUTH PIPE BAND OF SCOTLAND

Youngstars

The NYPB Senior Band in the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall Main Auditorium at Celtic Connections 2019

though I do have areas that are slightly stronger than others. In general, my two strongest points would be piobaireachd, and musical and acoustics theory.

My knowledge of the instrument is what, ultimately, allows me to achieve the sound I desire out of my pipe, and to know what to do when something goes wrong.

My weakest point would be technique, especially when I am frequently swapping between band and solo chanters. I find I need to have a very specific bag, chanter and hole position in order to have strong, consistent, and precise fingerwork.

Q. What do you want to achieve in piping?

Good question. I don't really have an end goal or aspiration as such – I just enjoy the scene, getting in amongt it all, and seeing how it all unfolds.

I would love to master the art of reedmaking along the line though, and I plan on keeping in at the solos, improving on my personal standard of playing.

Q. What is your favourite tune and why?

Hmm… I think there are too many cracking tunes out there to choose a favourite.

Q. Have you written any tunes?

I have once or twice in the past but not in a long time. There are plenty of tunes for me to be learning and that keeps me plenty occupied. I do, however, like to create arrangements and harmonies for existing tunes.

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

I have quite a few set-ups. There are my solo pipes, 1920 Lawries: synthetic, Bruce Hitchings' Highland Reeds in the drones. An old (maybe 15 years) Neil chanter with one of Andrew Frater's reeds. This balances around 448-449Hz.

I have a set of 1980 Hardies. At this time, everyone naturally played at Bb, which means these are great whenever I am playing with other musicians and are required to perform at this pitch of A440Hz/Bb466Hz. For all these drones don't have the best resonance off them, the original chanter has some fantastic harmonics.

Then, there are my band pipes. I have no clue what make they are but their sound is phenomenal. They are ebony, with ivory mounts – and look to be about a century old. This is a sheepskin configuration. I am considering trying out the full cane but for now, I am on a cane bass with two synthetic tenors.

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

We have had quite a few good experiences. The Avenches Tattoo in 2016 was a good one and we had a great team go out. The *Thunderstruck* concert in 2017 was great. I would say it was the best concert we have put on yet. The sets and arrangements were well done, tuning was quite



precise and we played well as a band on stage. This was also the band's debut of our *Thunderstruck* set, hence the name.

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

The social side by far. It's always a good catch-up with people you haven't seen in a while, or even with those who you see quite regularly.

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

I thought I'd best ask some of them for this one, answers included: "You're wild", "Dressing like a 65-year-old man", and "Carrying a water bottle everywhere".

Q. What is the secret of your success?

There is no secret formula here. It's mostly just hard work. Listen to and learn from those that know what they are talking about, work hard on your tunes and analyse what you are doing. Recording yourself is a great way to do this, and metronomes can be handy tools for keeping your tempos on track.

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

Burgundy tweed jacket and waistcoat with brown brogues. Much like my solo outfit.

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

If you can get yourself through the learner phase, and have a good passion for piping and the scene, it is well worth the reward.

You meet some great people, build long-lasting friendships, learn some life lessons, have a good laugh along the road, and get to travel the world (mostly Europe, I will admit).

Don't be put off by the hard work if that is your only concern.

It took me months before getting on the pipes and then a solid week before I could play just a single low A on them. It was a few years before I could even crack out a tune to a standard that was enjoyable to listen to.

Every top piper has had to go through that and it is perfectly normal to struggle with certain embellishments or timings even as a professional player, let alone a beginner.

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

Not at all. It is all in the preparation. I do finger exercises as I found after a few years of piping, I was developing random issues with my technique that shouldn't have been happening – crossing noises, or tight crunluaths, for example.

These seemed to get worse the more I practised them, so something was not right.

I realised that this was simply just down to the fact I was piping so much, causing my muscles to over-tighten in my forearms, wrists and hands.

I now frequently stretch off these muscle



Retiring pipe majors of the NYPBoS Senior band, Andrew Clark and Iain Crawford, at the end of their final concert

groups and it is all good. On a real extravagance, I even enjoy a good deep tissue massage.

Q. Who is your pipe idol?

I wouldn't say I have one. There are many good names out there, each with their own unique playing styles – I enjoy listening to them all.

Q. What are your interests outside of piping?

Well, I have a few. To be honest, if it gets my mind working away, I generally will pick up an interest in it.

I am quite wrapped up in the tech world, and run my own cryptomine. This is a behemoth computer system I built on which I am currently running two separate algorithms 24/7. To summarise this in one sentence, it increases the security of certain peer-to-peer transaction networks; and you receive a payout, proportional to the computation you provide to the network. The whole infrastructure of how this works is pretty mind-boggling but it's interesting stuff.

On less serious and professional interests, I am getting quite into my cooking. Since I have moved out from home and flown the nest, this has become something I have had to learn to do myself, and I have a number of tasty dishes I alternate between. Of course, I like to experiment too.

As a typical uni student, I do like a good night out. I have quite a reputation for "hitting it" on the dance floor with some eccentric moves. Good exercise at the very least, I suppose.

Speaking of exercise, I also love a good camping trip. Scotland has some breath-taking sites to offer.

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

I am currently on one of the MPhys courses at Strathclyde. I didn't like the idea of specialising in one field of engineering as my interests and abilities are very open-ended and generalised. This is why I choose to go down the route of physics. I enjoy problem solving so physics is perfect for me.

I can see myself working in various positions related to STEM (science, technlogy, mathematics and engineering) over the years to come.

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

Just piping and folk music really. I tune into *Pipeline* most weeks and listen to *Take the Floor* on occasions as well. Other than that, I don't usually listen to anything.

Q. Who are your heroes?

Heroes? I don't have a clue.

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

I have no interest in sports but I do like a wee swim in the pool – or, even better, wild swimming … when it's not too cold, of course.

Q. Do you prefer sweet or savoury?

Well, I did try putting some mixed berries into curry fried rice last week. It was disgusting.

I like a solid main course so savoury would be my preference of the two. That's not to say I don't have a wee sweet tooth as well, mind you. ●





by Dan Nevans

The motivation myth

HAVE you ever heard of a philosopher called Joseph Campbell? Campbell was an American professor of literature at Sarah Lawrence College in Bronxville, New York, who worked in comparative mythology and comparative religion.

If you have Netflix you might have scrolled past the 1988 documentary series *The Power of Myth* featuring interviews with Campbell himself. Arguably Campbell's most famous and influential work is the book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. This work has inspired television and movie storytelling since its publication in 1949. I would encourage you to seek out Campbell's works as the concepts he puts forth about the shared human experience may give you pause for thought.

The craic is this: Across the globe, from civilisation to civilisation, there is a repeated theme in many of the myths and legends. Specifically in the tales of human heroes and heroines (as opposed to demi-gods or supernatural creatures). Campbell referred to it as "The Hero's Journey". To the right is a brief diagram to explain this process.

After looking at the diagram, ask yourself how many stories you know of that follow this pattern? This concept has been named "The Monomyth".

Let's talk about the movie *Rocky.*

Rocky Balboa is a down-on-his-luck bruiser from the poor side of Philadelphia, knocking 30 with no prospects. He wins the odd amateur bout but seemingly lacks the direction to go further.

Apollo Creed is the greatest boxer alive. An undefeated champion. Creed is to defend his title in Philadelphia on the day of the United States Bicentennial. Five weeks before the fight, Creed's scheduled opponent breaks his hand and all possible opponents at the world-class level are unavailable for one reason or another. Creed puts out a challenge to any pro fighter in Philadelphia but when no one comes forward, Creed's team look to local amateurs.

Believing himself to be able to defeat any boxer alive, Creed and his training team select "The Italian Stallion" Rocky Balboa. A message is sent to Rocky who takes up the offer.

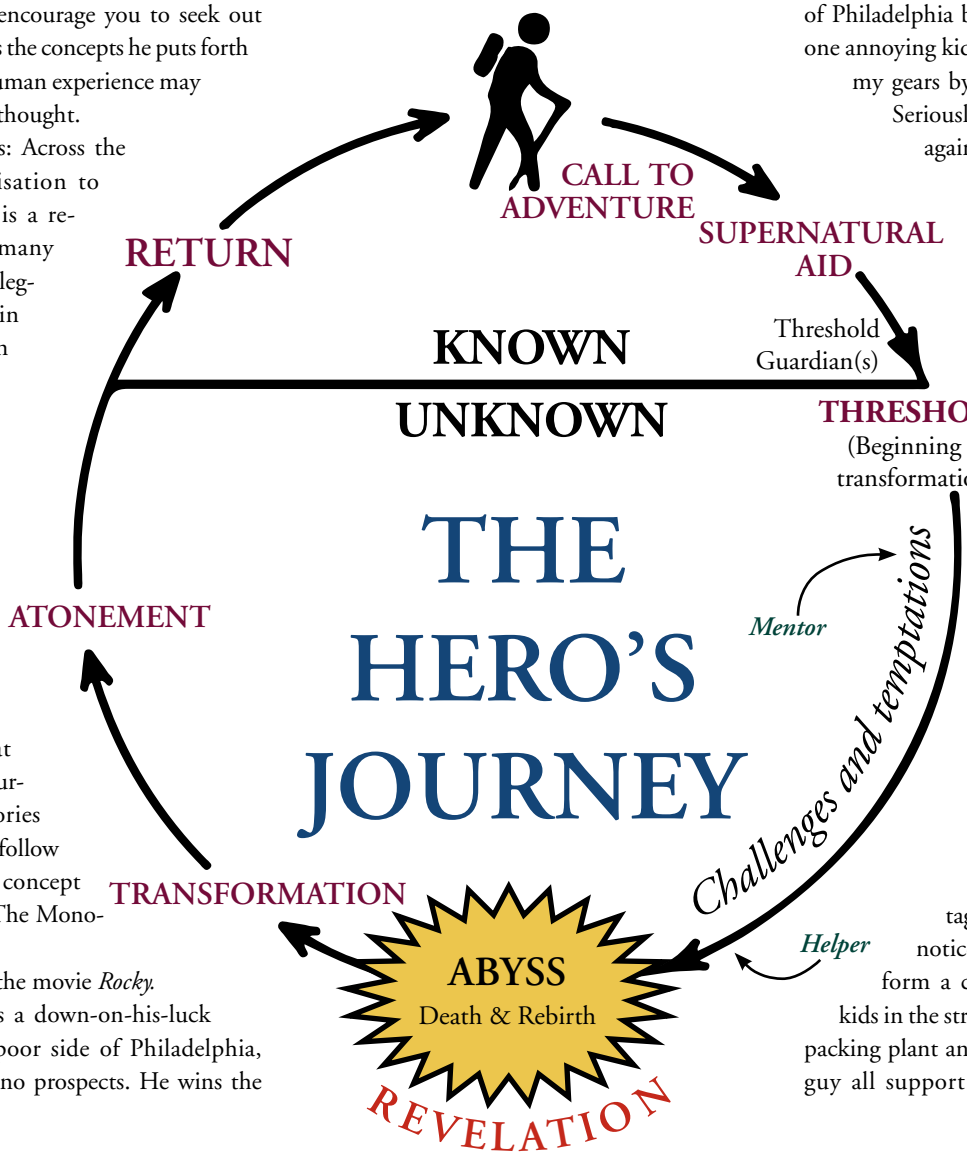
Rocky crosses the threshold into the unknown. Call it, if you will, crossing into "The Supernatural".

Rocky now seeks a trainer (Mentor) in Mighty Mick. Rocky has to prove that he's worthy, after which Mick accepts Rocky and the training begins.

Cue some of the most iconic scenes in cinema: chickens are harrassed; meat is battered to bits; street vendors' early morning set-up is disrupted and Rocky is chased through the streets of Philadelphia by throngs of children. (And one annoying kid on a bike who always grinds my gears by playing up to the cameras. Seriously, watch the montage scene again and you'll see what I mean.)

Through the story Rocky courts Adrianne, the mousey lady from the pet shop, ably played by Talia Shire from *The Godfather*.

Adrianne's place in the tale is to represent what and who Rocky is fighting for. The protagonist really wants a normal happy life, settled in his neighbourhood with his people (the status quo). To get there, he must journey through the trials and challenges to defeat his foe and return "home". Through the montage sequences of the film you'll notice the people of Philadelphia form a character of their own. The kids in the streets, the manager of the meat packing plant and even the dodgy, sunglasses guy all support Rocky as their champion.



Motivation is painting over a crack in the wall. The only way you are ever going to get better at anything is with discipline, patience and forgiveness



Adrianne is the representative of all of these characters.

At the end of the third act of the movie, Rocky loses his belief in himself, feeling that no matter how hard he works, he'll never be able to go toe to toe with Creed. In this abyss of despair, Mick pleads with Rocky to come back to training but with no success as Mick can only extol the virtues of the discipline.

Adrianne then comes to Rocky and not only reciprocates the affection he has shown her but also reveals to him what he is truly labouring for – the downtrodden, the nameless, faceless people doing all the hard work, in short Rocky's people, the people of Philadelphia.

Rocky battles Creed and ultimately loses but takes the undefeated champion to the very edge of his abilities. When the TV reporters get in Rocky's face to ask him about the fight, all Rocky wants to do is call on Adrienne. In the end, Rocky scores a win for the little guy and finds himself returning home to a hero's welcome.

Across history, tales with the same root concepts have livened up the days and inspired people to do their best. Humanity uses these stories as a moral guide, motivation and as a representation of success.

And here is the problem. All these stories are lies and you are lying to yourself. People don't magically change overnight from paupers to princes. Fairy godmothers don't bestow prince-attracting dresses and pumpkin carriages and above all, strange women lying in ponds distributing swords is not and has never been a basis for a stable system of government.

What Campbell recognises is that it is part of the human condition to look up to the sky and feel incredibly small. To feel insignificant and desperately, foolishly, ignorantly mortal. So we tell each other stories to make the night seem less dark, the days feel more hopeful. Some of these stories are designed as moral lessons, or warnings about the realities of whatever landscape the storytellers come from and some of them are made just to inspire the damn dirty ape that we are to stand up out of the mud and achieve something.

The experience we all share as musicians, as artists, is that we all step out into the unknown and follow our own hero's journey. From the first day you are handed a practice chanter your adventure begins and depending on which choices you make, your journey will unfold, positively or negatively.

In the book *The Barcelona Way* by Damien Hughes, the author presents a detailed account of Pep Guardiola's time managing FC Barcelona from 2008-2012. Did you read that? "A detailed account of Pep Guardiola's time managing FC Barcelona." A real person – Pep Guardiola. "Detailed account" – facts, information that is provable and quantifiable. No fantasy or fiction, no additional twists of poetic nuance. In the book, Hughes explores Guardiola's attachment to the team and the journey by which he took an already existing system, highlighted the strengths and removed the negatives until the newly refined process created one of the greatest teams in football history.



It's not as if Guardiola had appeared magically from the mists. He had captained Barcelona under some great managers in Johan Cruyff and Bobby Robson. This is a person who had already completed several areas of exploration and experimentation in the journey to become a professional footballer, win titles and then to become a great team leader.

In Guardiola's life we see a profound example of Campbell's monomyth displayed in real life.

Perhaps it's a safe assumption to say that the myths of old are based on the natural progression of life. We all begin in a status quo and face multiple "calls to adventure" on the road of life. We have several helpers and mentors along the way, face abysses and transform anew into the next stage, the new status quo.

What then, is the key to unlocking your ability and furthering your path? The answer has been inside you all along…

Take control of your brain.

Neuroplasticity is the process by which the brain develops new neural pathways. As you learn and repeat a task you form neural connections that send the information from your brain, down your nervous system and into whatever body part is occupied with the procedure you are attempting.

The journalist Malcolm Gladwell is often quoted from his book *Outliers* that it takes 10,000 hours to master any skill. What Gladwell could be interpreted in saying is that it takes 10,000 hours of dedicated practice to become masterful at any skill. That dedicated practice has been described to you in previous articles.

If you repeat a process, your brain will become so acquainted with sending those signals that you do not need to think about how to manufacture the process. The process will activate in an almost supernatural manner. The only way to appropriate this skill is with the dedicated practice mentioned before.

To develop a new neural connection and strengthen it into a highway of information takes roughly two weeks. Therefore to begin the first steps of developing a new technique or process, one must then make dedicated practice time, be organised and thoughtful to achieve even the first step on the path to improvement.

The greatest myth you were ever told is that of motivation.

You either want to do the work or you do not. "Feeling motivated" is a short-term boost. It's sprinting the first 10 yards of a marathon. It's days one and two of a diet. Motivation is painting over a crack in the wall.

The only way you are ever going to get better at anything is with discipline, patience and forgiveness.

Look again at the diagram of Campbell's "Hero's Journey". Once the hero passes the threshold into adventure, we see the tale broken into the sections "challenges and temptations, death and rebirth, transformation and atonement" before the return to the status quo.

Think now about your piping. Are you not in an endless cycle of challenges and temptations, death and rebirth, transformation and atonement? When you learn and perfect new pieces are these not challenging? Are you not tempted to under-prepare your performance or instrument by outside factors? Do you not feel upset by poor performances? Does a great performance not give your enthusiasm for the art new life? When you develop to a higher level and proceed to perform there, is this not a transformation and a cycle of atonement? Of course, the answer to all these is yes.

A wise man once said: "The only way you are ever going to get better at anything is with discipline, patience and forgiveness." I should know – it was me, earlier in this article. This is the true path: "*Per Viam Veritatis*".

By the way of truth, to take control of your neuroplasticity and create chemical reactions leading to profound changes in the process by which you operate and perform upon the Great Highland Bagpipe, you must discipline yourself into a well-organised practice routine.

This routine must be flexible enough to allow for you to have a life outside it but strict enough to enact these positive changes in the shape of your brain. If you miss a practice session or fail to be consistent in the positive changes you are attempting to make, then you will not settle the neural pathway in the brain and the process with remain inexact. By "discipline", I am referring to consistency, as well as routine.

To achieve this, the *You* part of your brain must direct the machine part of your brain to operate. Therefore the *You* part of your brain must be patient. If *You* push yourself too fast, too soon, problems will develop and you will have to alter your routine to fix these issues leading to confusion, obfustication, stress and a loss of enthusiasm. (Which is different from motivation). You must allow yourself to be human.

The journey is long and the path fraught with danger. The nights are long and cold. The days packed with adventure. Some days you will raise your arms in the air as the champion you know you are but most times, most times you'll stare into the grass and feel like a loser. No one will remember the contests you don't win. The performances that were not great will slip into distant memory ne'er to be retold. You need not be afraid of the past, only hopeful of the future. Forgive yourself for past folly and prepare for the next performance.

And remember, it's not over till the coffin lid is nailed down. Even then, the tunes still play on. Your journey is part of our Zeitgeist's long and winding road. You walk it shoulder to shoulder with brothers and sisters moving along it at their own pace. Whatever this year in piping holds for you, I wish you a truthful and earnest crack at becoming the player you dream about being. ●

'This routine must be flexible enough to allow for you to have a life outside it but strict enough to enact these positive changes in the shape of your brain.



by Timothy Cummings

THEORETICALLY SPEAKING:

The Signature of Time

I HAVE been teaching private lessons on the pipes and other instruments for close to 30 years now. Those of you who have done any teaching for a decade or more can understand my experience that every student is unique, and brings a new combination of strengths and weaknesses. It's to be expected. It's a good thing.

But there has been one 'weakness' that the vast majority of students of mine have consistently needed help with: decoding time signatures (or metre signatures), both the top and bottom numbers, but especially the bottom. Pretty much the only exceptions to this rule have been those who previously studied music theory and are advanced players of other instruments. I have even seen this chink in the armour of those playing in Grade 1 pipe bands.

Even after having studied the piano for 10 years, and the pipes for eight – all the while using written music for both – I myself never fully understood time signatures and rhythm until I got roped into playing handbells at my father's church – a gig that required very focused counting. Taking a music theory class and joining a wind ensemble soon thereafter sealed the deal.

To be sure, it is not essential to have a full and perfect understanding of time signatures in order to produce great music. Elvis Presley, Paul McCartney, Jimi Hendrix and Eric Clapton have all confessed to being unable to read music. But having this understanding can surely help, particularly if you weren't already showing undeniable signs of musical genius from a very young and tender age. (And I'm willing to bet the aforementioned geniuses might have benefited at least a little bit from this knowledge from time to time.)

Time signatures are not ever going to generate eye-popping headlines in the paper, nor tens of millions of 'likes' on our little glowing screens, but the good news is that they are genuinely useful and uncomplicated. Familiarising yourself with them will deepen your musicality.

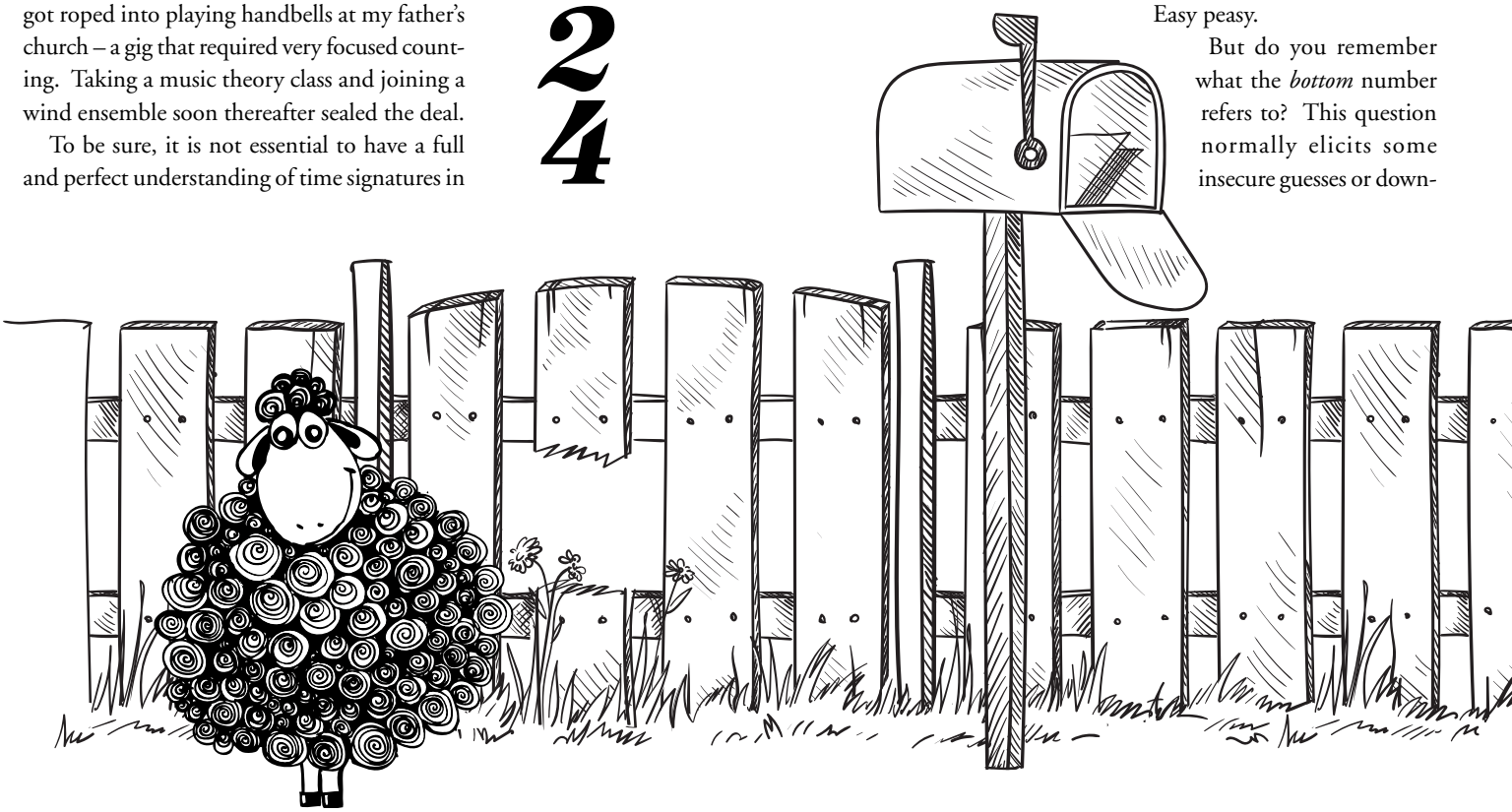
Have I convinced you to take a closer look then? Of course I have, so now consider the fancy-fonted numbers below. Can you describe, precisely, what each of those numbers is signifying when it comes to written music?

$$\frac{2}{4}$$

If you're like most of my students, you might offer that the top number has to do with how many beats are in a bar. And you'd be correct. But before I ask you about the bottom number, do you know what 'beats in a bar' refers to? Probably, but let me help flesh it out just in case. When music theorists refer to the 'beat', we are referring to stronger rhythmic pulses in the music that we are experiencing. For our purposes, this generally translates to a basic foot tap, or a footstep if you are marching. A bar (or measure, in American-speak), refers to a consistent section of music. If you'll allow me to compare a bar of music to a picket fence, the bar is all of the fencing in between the support posts, and the bar lines are the posts themselves. In this analogy, each picket, or vertical board, represents a beat.

A time signature with a top number of ***2*** therefore means that there will be two evenly-spaced pickets between each post, two evenly-spaced foot taps within each bar. Easy peasy.
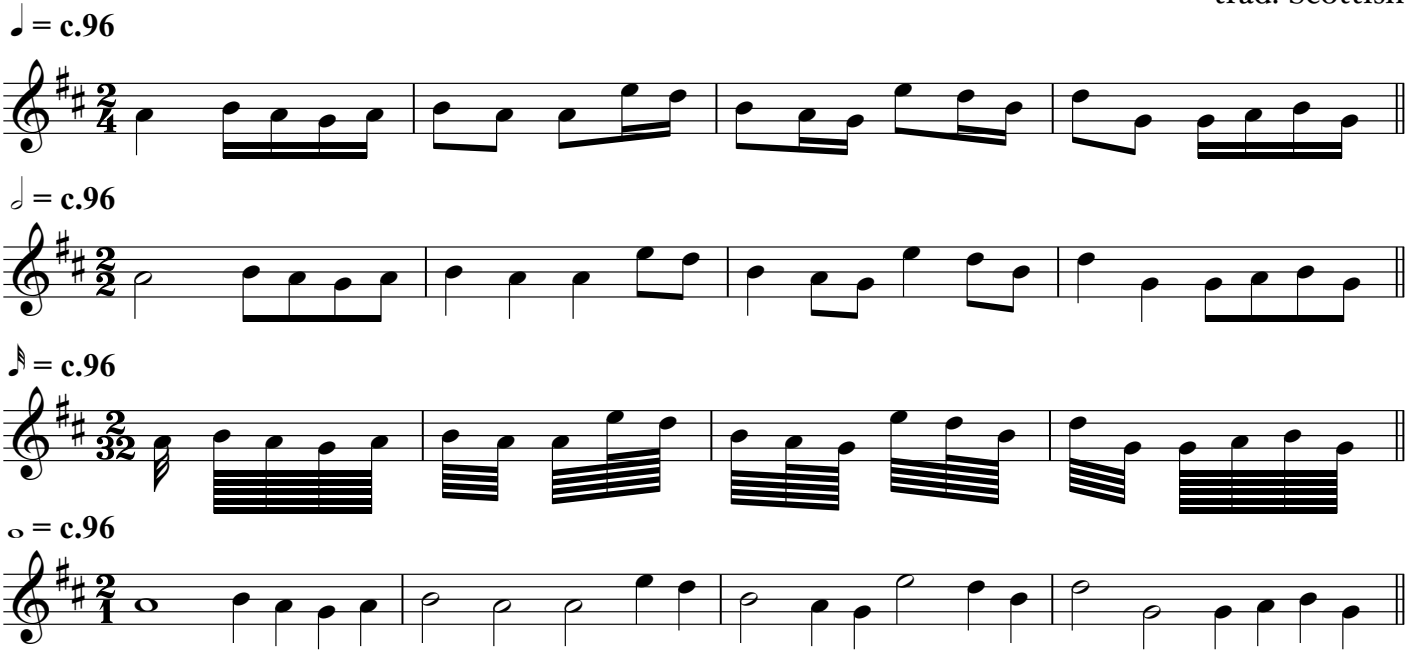
But do you remember what the *bottom* number refers to? This question normally elicits some insecure guesses or down-



Fingal's [quickstep]

A - modal

trad. Scottish



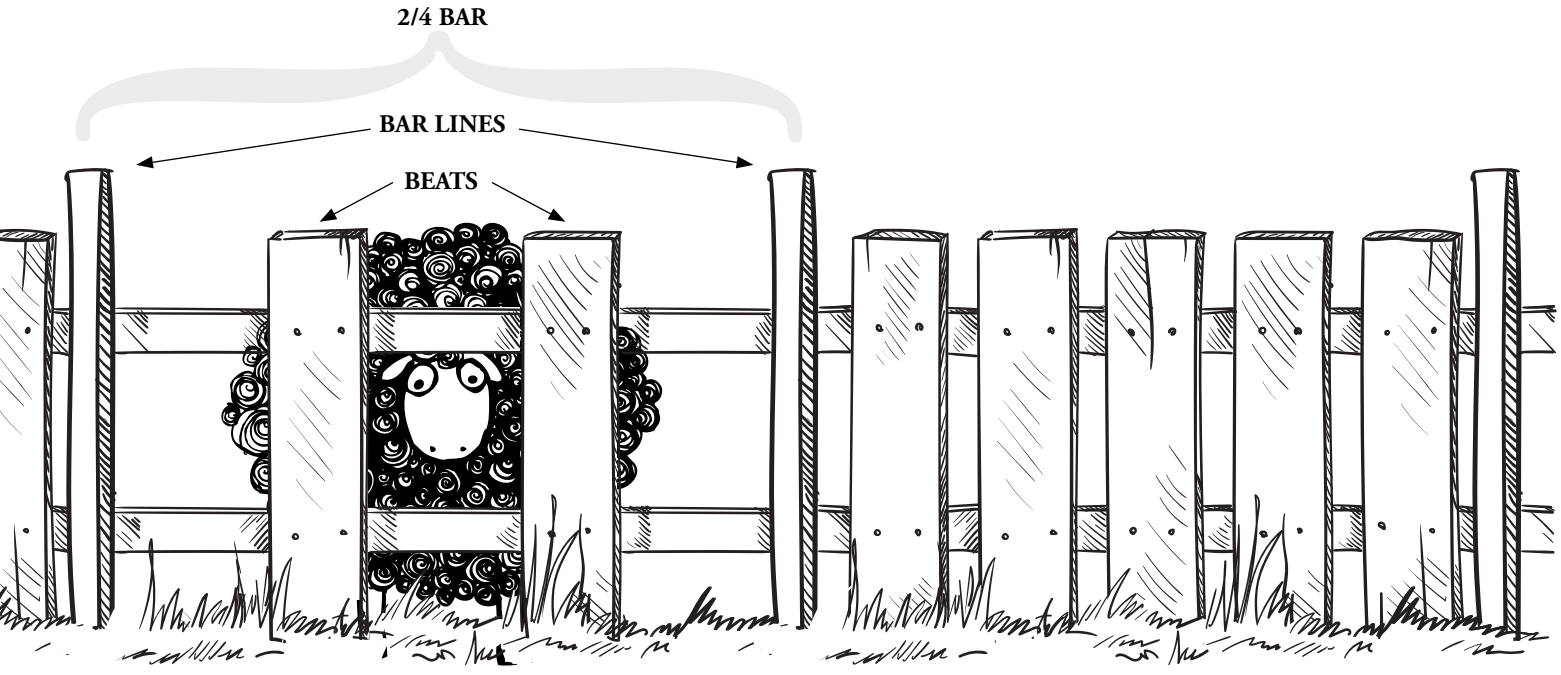
right silence from most of my new students. The answer is less obvious, as in a way, it has more to do with the *width* of the individual pickets that make up the fence.

The bottom number, a ***4*** in this case, tells us what type of note – what rhythmic value – is being assigned to the beat. From the top number of the time signature, we know how frequently we're tapping the beat; but what, exactly, are we tapping our foot to? Each quaver, or each crotchet, or each minim, or something else?

And this is where my bias against British nomenclature will be revealed, eliciting sudden gasps of horror from my legions of loyal readers. The ***4*** in our above example refers to the crotchet, but that fact is not at all obvious to your average student of music. At first glance, the number ***4*** and the word 'crotchet' have absolutely nothing common. What is slightly more obvious is that, in the US, that bottom ***4*** corresponds to a *quarter* note, a note that makes up 1/4 of a whole note (or semibreve, in British parlance). If the bottom number were a ***2*** or an ***8***, it would be referring to a 1/2 note (minim) or 1/8 note (semiquaver), respectively.

Now we are merely inches away from cracking the code of a ***2/4*** time signature: there are two beats in each segment of music, two pulses in each bar; two pickets between each fence post. And it's the crotchet, or quarter note, that's getting the beat. If we continue the imperfect fence analogy, the ***4*** might be comparable to a picket that's 1/4 of the width of one of the widest picket sizes available.

It's important to note that this 'time signa-



ture' (often called 'metre') is also a rule. You cannot, by decree, fit *three* ordinary crotchets or quarter notes into a bar if the time signature calls for two. For this fence design, there isn't room for three pickets between the fence posts. If you put only one crotchet in that space, then there will be a gap in the fence and all of your sheep will escape, to the ruin of you and your family. If your fence design simply must have three pickets between the posts, if your tune undeniably has three strong pulses per musical segment, then you'd better change the rule so that the top number is a ***3***. If your fence design calls for wider or narrower pickets, then we'll need to change bottom number – normally to a power of two: ***2***, ***8*** or ***16***, for example. Remember that we're dealing with fractions in a way, and that the bigger the bottom number, the shorter the note duration.

Here's another very important note: time signatures don't really have anything to do with *tempo*, though they sometimes can give an initial impression of speed. Technically speaking, time signatures are all about the organisation of beats and beat groupings. In its most basic musical sense, the word tempo – Italian for *time* – has to do with how fast you're moving alongside the fence and its pickets. Are you crawling on your knees, walking moderately fast, jogging, or riding atop a galloping sheep? That's what tempo is generally about, not the time signature. ***2/4*** can be achingly slow, moderately paced, Mach 2, or anything in between.

To further clarify, if you have the same exact melody written out in three different metres – one in ***2/4***, another in ***2/2***, and another in ***2/32*** – they will all look different on the page, but they will all *sound* and *feel* the same if the indicated tempo is the same (e.g. *96* beats per minute). Whether the beat-note is a crotchet, minim, or demi-semi-quaver depends more on convention, which may ultimately be based on how clear and easy it is to read on the page. We pipers are far more used to reading quicksteps in ***2/4***. And quicksteps may be notated that way because, for example, writing it in ***2/32*** would be cumbersome to read: the pulse notes would be demi-semi-quavers, or 32nd-notes, each having a trio of flags or beams. The faster runs within the tune would then require hemi-demi-semi-quavers and semi-hemi-demi-semi-quavers (64th and 128th notes) requiring four and five flags or beams per note. Ultimately that would result in at least four times as much ink as the ***2/4*** version, making a page of music much more visually cluttered. Sure, you could also write the same tune out in a ***2/1*** metre, in which the semibreve (whole note) gets the beat, but that might give the initial impression, visually, that this is a much slower tune. The beat groupings would then be less visually apparent, too.

One final note: if you thought the mentions of sheep in this article were inane and unnecessary ewe-phemisms, you'd be right. But you may nonetheless appreciate the following: according to Google's dictionary, the origins of the word 'signature' (as in *time signature*), include *signatura*, a late-Latin term once used to refer to the markings on sheep. ●

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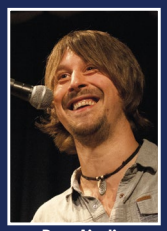

Alisdair McLaren
Director of The National Youth Pipe Band


Finlay Johnston
Glenfiddich Winner


Wilson Brown
Gold Medallist


Margaret Dunn
Silver Medallist

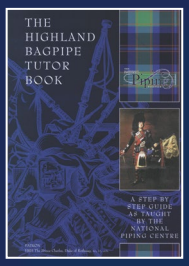

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COMPETITION LEAGUE FOR AMATEUR SOLO PIPERS

11 questions with Stewart Allan

Stewart is a long-standing CLASP member and started competing in Grade 3. He is now a steady prize winner and is currently competing in Grade 2.

Q. Where are you from and how long have you played the bagpipes for?

I am from Mauchline in Ayrshire and I started playing from primary seven – 16 years ago now.

Q. What was your inspiration to learn the bag pipes?

At the age of five, my parents took me to a joint Armed Forces Day in Kelso. There I saw the Royal Scots Guards Pipe Band playing and that was the start of it. My parents thought it was just a young boy's dream but five years later I got my first lesson.

Q. Who has taught you over the years and do you play with a pipe band?

From primary seven, I received private lessons from William Gilmour, or "W" to those who know him. Willie then taught me at the academy until sixth year. After school I was self-taught until three years ago when I started getting lessons from Chris Armstrong of ScottishPower Pipe Band who I currently still get lessons from. I have played in a few local bands over the years but currently play in Kilmarnock Pipe Band who have recently been upgraded to3B

Q. How much time do you dedicate to your piping and what is your main profession?

I see piping as a part of my lifestyle and would normally practice for a minimum of one hour every day. I compete in the CLASP because piping isn't a full-time activity for me, I am a full-time quantity surveyor in the construction industry.

Q. Have you ever had to overcome any hurdles in your piping career and what are your piping goals?

My biggest hurdle that I have had to overcome in piping was during my time at university. Piping worked great until my last year for my honours degree when basically piping was put on hold. I wasn't happy at this as I missed my piping but the biggest hurdle was getting back in to it – basically it felt like starting again. My piping goals are to get to the top of Grade 1 in pipe bands and to get as close to the top as possible in a competitive and professional level in solo piping.

Q. What is your favourite type of bagpipe music to listen to?

I enjoy listening to CDs of professional soloists competing as it allows me to enjoy the music and I can learn for my own competitions. I also like the Red Hot Chilli Pipers but for different reasons to traditional piping.





Q. How did you get into competing at CLASP and have you seen the benefit in your playing?

I enjoyed competing solo but struggled after I turned 18 as all competitions were under-18s. Janette Greenwood got me in to the CLASP after about five years of not competing solo. It has certainly improved my playing over the years as I have something to work for and lots to learn to be competitive.

Q. What was your best piping experience?

My best experience in piping would have to be a tie between being accepted for lessons with Chris Armstrong and getting my first overall prize in the CLASP. Winning a prize in the World Championships in the CLASP was a good experience. In 2006, I was also asked to play for the officers' parade on a cruise ship by the Captain.

Q. What is your favourite competition to attend and why?

The World Championships, both band and solo, is the best competition by far because of the atmosphere and volume of turnouts.

Q. Who are your piping idols and why?

I would need to say Chris Armstrong as he is my tutor and may read this (ha ha). Seriously, Chris is a great player and has had a vast wealth of knowledge from a very young age. To even be half the piper he is would be amazing.

Q. Is there anything of interest that your fellow CLASP competitors do not know about you?

Most if not all the CLASP members think piping is my main and only hobby. Yes, it's my main hobby but I also get flying lessons training for my private pilot's licence at Prestwick Airport – in between piping of course. ●

2019 COMPETITIONS & EVENTS

The National Piping Centre – March 30
Army School of Piping – June 8
Luss Highland Games – July 6
Balloch (Loch Lomond) Highland Games – July 13
Rosneath Highland Games – July 14, TBC
Inveraray Games – July 16
Worlds Piping Live Grade 3 – August 12
Worlds Piping Live Grade 2 – August 13
Worlds Piping Live Grade 1 – August 14
Northern Meeting – August 30
Chatsworth Country Fair – August 31 (TBC)
CLASP Workshop – October 4 and 5



Nine Notes

HAMISH Hepburn is a young piper playing with Eabhal who were the 2018 winners of Battle of the Folk Bands at Edinburgh Tradfest. The band offer a blend of Gaelic song and Scottish traditional music on Highland pipes, fiddle, accordion, flute, whistle and guitar.

Fresh from a gig at Celtic Connections 2019 where Eabhal released their first CD, *This Is How The Ladies Dance*, we and fired our questions at Hamish and he blasted back with his Nine Notes.

Q. Tell us briefly about your piping history. Who were your tutors, did you compete in the solos, have you played in pipe bands or have you always been on the path of a traditional musician, rather than a competing piper?

I learnt to play the pipes while at school, and throughout my school years my tutor was Lewis Barclay. During this time competition wasn't high on my piping agenda. I did play in The City of Inverness Pipe Band and the Highland Schools Youth Pipe Band which was a great experience. Piping was always a hobby and very casual for me and I had no intention of pursuing it as a career. However, after school, I took a year out and moved to South Uist to study traditional music at the University of the Highlands and Islands, Benbecula College. There I was taught by Iain MacDonald for two years and it was under him that I started to compete, first in the Flora MacDonald competition on Uist and then the Highland Games circuit the following summer. I was also introduced to the more folky piping while on Uist and began playing for dances and at sessions throughout the island. I suppose from then my main focus has been on folk music. As for playing in pipe bands, it is something I've taken more seriously since coming to Glasgow a couple of years ago. Last year, I played with Johnstone Pipe Band, which was brilliant craic, and this year I've joined The Glasgow Skye Association Pipe Band and will be competing with them for 2019. I also intend to do more solo competitions this year once I've finished my studies.

Q. How did your band, Eabhal, first meet?

The band came together while on Uist and it happened very naturally. We all enjoyed playing tunes and creating music together and it all stemmed from there. We started playing at the local arts centre, Taigh Chearsabhagh in North Uist, and then a few other bits on the side. After a year or two, we all ended up in Glasgow and we've pushed ourselves to gig more, play at festivals and progress as a band as much as possible.

Q. What is the most prestigious gig you/the band have ever played, and which has been the most memorable, and why?

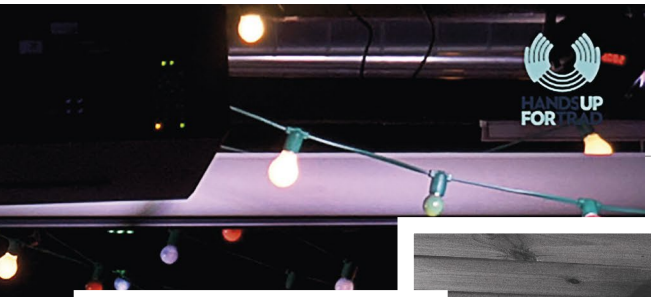
For the band, I would say our most prestigious gig to date was performing at the 2018 MG Scots Trad Music Awards in Perth. It was a cracking experience, and to play on the same stage as so many class musicians was brilliant. Another highlight for the band was Interceltique Festival in Lorient, France, last summer. We were over playing as part of the Scottish delegates, along with several other bands. The whole week was absolutely brilliant.

Q. What is your contribution to the tunes and songs the band choose to play? Do you try to get piping tunes included where you can? Do you compose tunes?

There is definitely an equal amount of input from each member, and everybody has something different to offer. I like to look for older tunes in collections that are lesser known and the majority of tunes I play come from the Gaelic or west coast repertoire. I have also been doing a project about music from my local area, Badenoch and Strathspey, so more recently I have been finding and playing tunes from that area. I do compose tunes, however I rarely sit down and deliberately write one. Most of the time an idea will come to me and from there I write it down or record it and come back to it.

Q. What's your all-time favourite pipe tune, or set of tunes. Do have a favourite tune or set that you enjoy playing at the moment?

Oh, that's a difficult one. It's hard to pick just









from Hamish Hepburn

one when there are so many good tunes out there! However, if I had to choose one at the moment, it would be *Tir a' Mhurain*, which is a song from the Isle of Tiree and has a beautiful melody. I'm also really enjoying the GS McLennan tune, *The Braes of Castle Grant,* at the moment.

Q. What make of pipes do you play and how do you have them set up for playing on stage? (Sheepskin/synthetic/cane/plastic/moisture control, chanter type etc.)

I currently play a set of 1930 Sinclair's and I use them for all disciplines. When playing on stage I have them tuned down to concert pitch to fit with the rest of the band. I currently use a Shepherd B-flat chanter and reeds, and a set of B-flat drone reeds by Bruce Hitchings. I have a James Begg sheepskin bag with a simple tube and sponge for the moisture control.

Q. Can you tell us about any important influences on your piping and development as a musician?

I would say that my time on Uist has had the most profound impact on my piping and musical development. There was a brilliant community of people there and everybody was always playing together and encouraging each other to progress and push themselves. It really was a brilliant time. Having lain as a tutor was also a huge inspiration and I learnt so much from him, plus, it was also on Uist that I started to learn the wooden flute, which has a large part to play in my music today. Another huge inspiration of mine is Steven Blake, whom I have been fortunate to have worked with and been taught by over the past few years. I've learnt a lot about the mental aspects of music and performing, which I feel is very important. I've also been working on arranging music, not just within the band, but for my personal projects as well, which has helped to developing my style of playing.

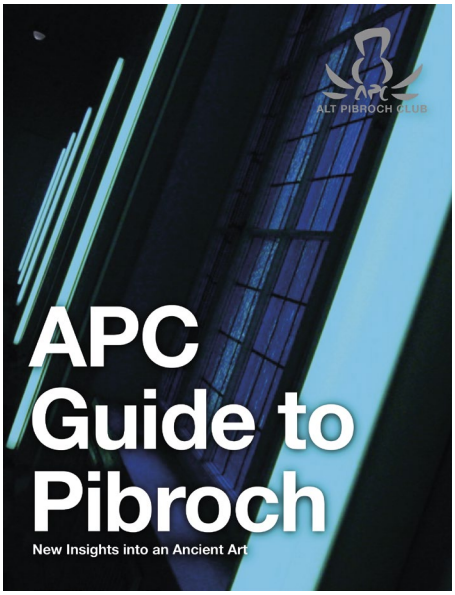
Q. What do you do when you are not playing music?

I'm a big fan of the outdoors and I love getting out and about in the hills and nature. Growing up in the Cairngorms National Park, it was natural to spend a weekend camping or kayaking, or have a day in the mountains. I was very lucky to have all that available to me when growing up. I also do photography part-time and I've recently been getting into concert photography and have taken photos for Celtic Connections and The Wideo Blog in Edinburgh. I find that it's a good release from music and it's also another excuse to get outside. Aside from studying music at the University of the Highlands and Islands, I'm also learning Gaelic and hoping to go on and study it further at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig.

Q. How enjoyable was the recording process for your new CD, and what is the next step for getting it out there?

The recording process was for the most part very enjoyable and we recorded it in different stages so it was strung out over several months. It has been really good to see the album come together and develop over the months of recording and to finally have it in a physical copy. I think for everybody in the band, it's been a big learning curve and we've learnt loads from the process, not just from the recording but all the admin and excess stuff that goes on in the background. We received the physical copies at the end of January, just in time for our Celtic Connections gig on February 1. The album was released in February so we have been posting out all the pre-ordered copies and will be doing a launch tour to promote it. ●

BOOK REVIEW



THIS electronic book demonstrates years of work by David Hester from the Alt Pibroch Club. David is based in the US city of Baltimore, but the book would not have appeared without the input of others including Allan MacDonald, Barnaby Brown and the late Roderick Cannon.

David spoke at the Piobaireachd Society Conference in 2016 and was introduced by Jack Taylor as someone who "looks backwards at old sources, but also looks forward to think what can be done with them". He played at the Archie Kenneth Quaich in 2018, playing a virtually unknown tune from the Campbell Canntaireachd (1797). The style of playing was very different from the other players – unfamiliar to listeners, it was exciting and vibrant.

I have been studying piobaireachd for many years, but David's search for the 'early sources' is very detailed, and includes various books that I had never heard of. He also mentions frequently that the published Piobaireachd Society Collection (and Kilberry book) 'sources' are only one method of looking at the music. Most pipers will take that route, as a) it is simpler – the written music is easily available b) their teachers will teach them to play that way, and c) to win a contest, many players would think one needs to play the music the judges expect.

The above may be true, but one senses that the tide is turning. Players (encouraged by an open-minded Solo Piping Judges Association) are becoming more confident in putting forward different settings to be listened to. The Piobaireachd Society itself is changing, putting forward as Set Tunes more of the modern piobaireachds, and bringing settings such as Gesto's *War or Peace* out of obscurity.

David's book gives you an introduction to these settings, taking advice directly from the 'primary sources'. Details of the fingering are provided, and readers are advised on how to approach them. There are sound files provided (embedded in the Apple book, but for those with a non-Apple device the sounds are in zip folder). Some singing and playing by Allan MacDonald is included.

One of the highlights was the summarising of different versions of simple movements. In the diagram below the throw on D is compared across five different 19th century sources.

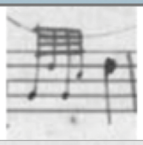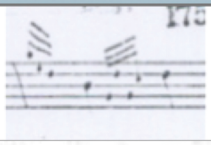
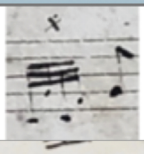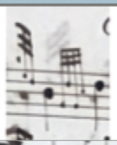
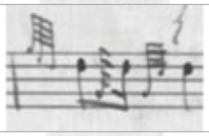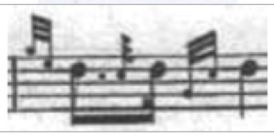
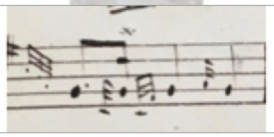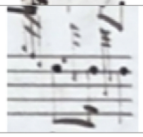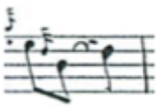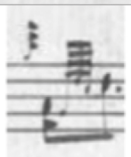
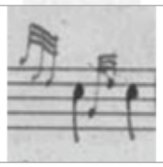
This book continues the debate about the style that is played nowadays by most pipers. Namely: "Is this the way we play correct, as passed down by the oral tradition from people like Calum Piobaire?"

My main criticism of this book is that David has side-stepped this issue. He has his viewpoint – but does not examine the reasons why the Piobaireachd Society made their Collection, using a method that he criticises so strongly. He states that the work of Archibald Campbell of Killberry (and colleagues) in the early 20th century are "the idiosyncratic products of individuals on a personal mission". One could say the same of David.

My own view is that the debate will continue, and maybe this book will help inform that. I recommend that you go and read it: the book is easy to read, and it's free! ● BY PETER MCCALISTER
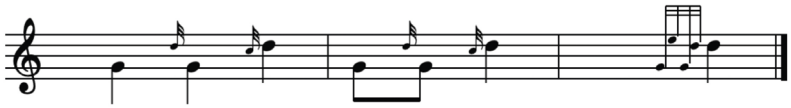
Available free of charge from
www.altpibroch.com

D-throws

Hannay-MacAuslan	MacDonald	MacArthur-MacGregor	Reid	MacKay
				
				
				
				

D-throws are depicted in three ways:

The first (top row) is the "heavy" D-throw. It is, essentially, a grip to C, leading to D.



CD REVIEWS

Niteworks
Air Fàir an Là



NITEWORKS were a fitting choice to open the GRIT Orchestra's performance of *Bothy Culture* at the SSE Hydro at Celtic Connections 2018. Perhaps no other artist is doing more to directly continue the musical legacy of the late Martyn Bennett, who seamlessly matched bagpipes, old Scottish songs and archive recordings of custodians of Scottish folk with modern electronica.

Happily for everyone who attended that concert, much of Niteworks' material from that performance has made it on to their second album, *Air Fàir an Là*. The Skye-based line-up of Ruairidh Graham, Allan MacDonald, Christopher Nicolson and Innes Strachan are joined by a host of guest musicians to add further dimensions to the core sound.

Allan's bagpipes do not appear often on the album, but they get the recording under way with the first tune, the reel *Dookin' for Beetroot* by Mike Katz of Battlefield Band fame. Allan and guest fiddler Fiona MacAskill comprise a duo as traditional as they come in Scottish music, but all this is played out to an eerie electronica backing track, soon joined by head-banging drums. While some attempts to combine bagpipes with modern instruments down the years have simply sounded gimmicky, Niteworks have created a true fusion of cultures that really does work. Fiona's strings are enhanced by two further members of the Kinnaris Quintet (Aileen Gibb and Laura Jane Wilkie), who are responsible for many of the album's most haunting passages.

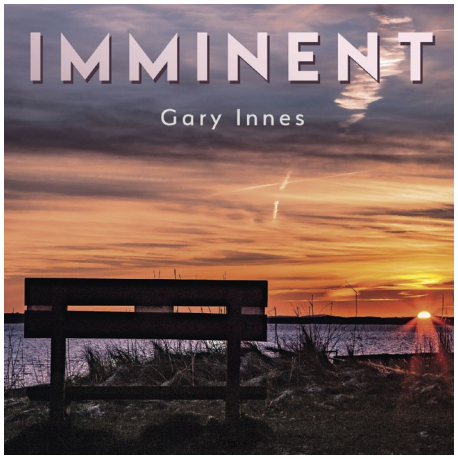
Two of the standout tracks feature the vocals of two guests from the *Bothy Culture* concert – the SIAN trio of Eilidh Cormack, Ellen MacDonald and Ceitlin Smith and the ever-magisterial Julie Fowlis. SIAN perform a Gaelic waulking song that gives the album its name – not a natural choice for a dance backing, but again the two radically different genres work wonderfully together.

The strongest tour de force comes from Julie Fowlis' sumptuous rendition of the haunting Gaelic air *Òran Fir Ghriminis*. Her spine-tingling *Bothy Culture* performance was spoiled for this reviewer by some over-chatty fellow punters on the night, but now at last the song can be enjoyed blissfully free of such distractions.

The pipes come to the fore again for the Hamish Moore jig *Iain McGee's Romanian Boots*. In typical club style, there is a tantalising build-up to the main melody, and when it comes, it makes for the bounciest party track on the album. Allan is on pipe duty once more for *Cumhachd*, featuring the characteristically evocative vocals of his uncle, Allan MacDonald of Glenuig. We are used to Allan senior singing along to piobaireachd passages played on pipes, but not with quite such an epic backing track.

Not every number has the same emotional impact – *Like Wolves in the Night* starts very promisingly, but the six-minute song is ultimately less satisfying than the opening suggests, while *Lùths (Gabh Greim)* is a slow-burner that never really goes anywhere. Still, Niteworks have created a mesmerising blend of old and new that will not please everyone, but is worthy of the hype. As Calum "Ruadh" Nicolson says in an archive recording used in the fifth track: "Today, as we live in a modern society, it's easier to keep those songs alive." How true. ● BY STUART MILNE

Gary Innes
Imminent



MÀNRAN fans will tell you that BBC Radio Scotland's *Take the Floor* presenter Gary Innes is not just a pretty voice – he can play, and he can write. Naturally, the accordion maestro's beloved box is the lead instrument in his third solo album, *Imminent*, but this recording has its fair share of piping influences.

As might be expected from such a well-connected musician, Gary has secured the services of many talented collaborators. Ali Hutton on guitar, Angus Lyon on keys, Steve Byrnes on drums, Conal McDonagh on uilleann pipes, flute and whistle, and James Lindsay on double bass provide the core of backing musicians to create a cosmopolitan feel to the album that goes well beyond the Scottish dance band roots of Gary's early career. Every tune on the album is written by Gary, and we begin with two gentle 2/4 marches, *Dr Brian Tregaskis*, named after a long-serving Fort William physician, and *Glenclova*. The first tune begins in a relaxed jazzy style, before the segue to the second sees Conal bring in his uilleann pipes – a natural fit with the sound of the accordion if ever there was one.

Ali picks up the Scottish pipes in the next track for *Sgoil Lionacleit Pipe Band's Welcome to New York*. It is a lively melodic reel enhanced by the addition of Damien O'Kane's banjo, creating a blend of instruments reminiscent of one of Treacherous Orchestra's gentler numbers.

The Sheerwater, composed for a boat trip to the Isle of Eigg with Gary's father, is another lovely tune that starts off slow before picking up the pace with the arrival of the uilleann pipes, reflecting the voyage of the boat itself as it hits open water.

The fourth track includes a reel tribute to the recently retired Celtic rockers Runrig, and there is a fine electric guitar interlude in the first tune, *Alpha 29*, that vividly recalls the playing of Runrig guitarist Malcolm Jones.

As well as box tunes, Gary has also turned his hand to song writing, and in the case of *Starlight*, he has begun singing himself. The notes tell us that the album title refers to the forthcoming birth of his first child, and *Starlight* is written for a bairn already arrived safely into his family – niece Ellise. Gary has a pleasant singing voice (instantly recognisable if you're a regular *Take the Floor listener*), although crafting lyrics is perhaps not his greatest strength.

Dream Fields is a heartfelt tribute to Gary's former shinty teammates sadly taken before their time, but Blue Rose Code singer Ross Wilson's vocals lack impact. No such complaint could ever be made against the peerless Karen Matheson, and she beautifully carries *Swan Song*, written for more lost friends.

The instrumental tracks are the true highlights of *Imminent* – from the unmistakeable continental style of *Valle d'Aosta* to the energetic reels that close out the album, *Little Vegas* and *John Smeaton*, previously played by Mànran. The pipes may not be the main focus on this album, but there is much for pipers to enjoy, especially those looking for new tunes. ● BY STUART MILNE



Elizabeth Ford has a Ph. D. in music from the University of Glasgow, and is the Daiches-Manning Memorial Fellow in 18th-century Scottish Studies, Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, University of Edinburgh. She collaborates with Donald Lindsay on a number of projects.

New additions to a collection and tradition

by Elizabeth Ford



Donald Lindsey

ON January 10, 2019, the museum of The National Piping Centre acquired three items, all of Donald Lindsay's design. Two of Donald's instruments were added to the collection: his original set of smallpipes in 3-D printed plastic, the Rainbow Set of Pollok, and the set he calls A' phìob grianach, or the Sunny Pipes. This name was inspired by a trip to the Isle of Skye last June to consult with John Purser and Malin Lewis. Malin, a young musician and pipe-maker, contributed to this set by turning boxwood ferrule for the chanter stock. The third item added to the museum's collection was a chanter made according to Donald's design in laburnum by Malin

James Beaton, librarian of The National Piping Centre, said: "We have a case in the museum illustrating bagpipe making. What Donald has done is very new, so we're using these pipes to illustrate new ways of bagpipe making."

Referring to Donald as a "pioneer", Hugh Cheape observes that: "The Lindsay System chanter characterises supremely the bagpipe age in which we live. It is surely a metaphor for progress and Donald has earned our admiration and respect for what he is achieving for piping.

"With the initial prompt to extend the range of the Scottish Smallpipes, the new chanter offers new potential but in a 'collegiate' manner; that is, it follows on in the style of our musical inheritance and it remains loyal to the basic tenets of our 'faith' (to be defined perhaps as our adherence to the highest standards of sound, fingering and grace-noting). Now 3-D printing technology is used to create an instrument that can progressively be worked on and refined, finding historical examples but taking the new product beyond traditional craft techniques and achieving the wider range."

This recognition by the greater piping community is a clear sign that Donald's new and innovative design has caught on in the larger piping world, attracting the attention and praise of players, other makers and composers.

PLAYERS

WHEN Donald designed the chanter, he was only concerned with making the instrument he wanted to play do the things he needed it to do. He had no inkling, until he discovered 3-D printing, that he would be making the instrument for other people, and he is delighted that his design has become so popular. Donald said: "Since 2014, inviting other people to try the design has become an increasingly important part of the appeal that the project has for me personally. It's become a very sociable experience, and the making of chanters and pipes for sale to pipers is only the most visible facet of that."

Several students in Donald's Scottish Smallpipes class at The National Piping Centre have started playing his design. Gordon Ewan started on it in December, and the first thing that caught his attention was the extended range, because it meant he could also play fiddle tunes on

his pipes. The chanter was hand delivered and accompanied by a lesson. Gordon said: "I was surprised by the relative ease of playing and how quickly it became very easy to play. Appearing fairly complicated at first, it quickly becomes apparent that a huge amount of thought has gone into making this instrument, especially the intuitive way that the fingering works and how the fingers sit comfortably." Gordon observed that the chanter reed is more sensitive than his other smallpipe chanter, but it is easy to get accustomed to playing it. He is a very happy customer: "There is a very pleasing tone with the chanter too, right down to that very satisfying velvety low D. Overall, this is a splendid instrument that gives you access to a host of extra notes and accidentals, plus access to a huge amount of new repertoire not previously available to the smallpipes. A huge amount of work has gone into this chanter, every eventuality has been covered and I just cannot fathom how on earth Donald has managed to make a completely keyless smallpipe chanter that plays like a dream and appears to have no compromises whatsoever. It's definitely the thinking man's chanter!"

Fellow student Iain McAskill said: "Being interested in bellows-driven Scottish Smallpipes I noticed the range of notes available in Donald's instrument was greater than in other conventional sets and in addition, they had a lovely mellow and well-balanced tone. When I started shopping for a set for myself I asked Donald if he would consider making a set for me. He agreed and I am now wrestling with them in my own very inexperienced but delighted way. They permit playing in a wider range of keys due to their chromatic scale and are more versatile in playing along with other instruments."

Zexuan Qiao believes the best feature of Donald's chanter is the flea hole, creating a useful semitone, and he is amazed by the many modern improvements the chanter brings overall. He said: "The great thing of playing the pipe is the player can use all the same fingerings, rather than changing the playing. The volume is nice to be heard in a medium-size session."

MAKERS

MALIN felt making a prototype of the Lindsay System chanter in laburnum, one of the earliest woods in pipe making, was a way to get the computer-born design back to its roots. Malin is now pursuing copying it and experimenting with further refinements to the wooden version, which poses new and different challenges. From Malin's prespective as a player, the new design seems to "tell you things about itself and so you end up writing music and tunes in a totally new way".



Malin Lewis performing at the presentation of the intruments to The National Piping Centre Museum



'...the most talked-about aspect is how Donald has managed to fit all these extra notes on to a chanter, the entire set of pipes is every bit as meticulously designed.

Seattle-based instrument maker and musician Cameron Stahl gives a strong and supportive testimonial about the Lindsay System chanter, emphasising the playability of the instrument and Donald's personal attention. He said: "Although the most talked-about aspect is how Donald has managed to fit all these extra notes on to a chanter, the entire set of pipes is every bit as meticulously designed. It's obvious Donald approached the project from a ground-up perspective, and the result is not just a special chanter, but a special set of pipes. The valves seal perfectly. The airflow is streamlined with use of a filter for unparalleled stability, and nothing feels like an afterthought.

"I think there's a tendency among traditional musicians to view modern innovations (i.e. additive manufacturing, o-rings, etc.) with suspicion, but these pipes easily meet or exceed the quality of other leading makers, being very stable and reliable. I'm primarily a wooden flute player and singer, which is not really possible to combine without overdubbing. Using a bellows-blown instrument really amps up what I can bring to the musical table with my bandmates, but the added range of both drones and chanter expands this even further.

"To give an example of the usefulness of these pipes, yesterday I was working on a set including *Ye Banks and Braes*, which among other things, is in D and has a high B, both relatively uncommon to find on a Scottish smallpipe. Not only could I play the instrumental in full over a D drone, I could easily stop the chanter to sing with my bandmates over the drones, resuming the chanter instrumental smoothly thereafter. The adaptability of these pipes make



The Principal of The National Piping Centre, Roddy MacLeod, receives the pipes for the museum from Donald Lindsey and Malin Lewis.

it a great instrument for performers in bands and for solo voice. Also, it's now much easier to connect with other aspects of Scottish music beyond pipe repertoire.

"As for whether they'll change the face of piping as a whole, well, that I don't know. Someone once said to me that 'true creativity comes from limitation' and in the case of the Scottish bagpipes, a rich and deep tradition has emerged from only nine notes. I think many players are content with those nine notes and feel that anything further is a distraction from that tradition. However, players such as myself that enjoy crossover music between many genres, and want to take that great smallpipe tone to new places, will find this instrument to be nothing short of miraculous.

"There are, however, some expected caveats. In particular, I find finger placement must be precise to avoid squeaking, and moving between F# and G can be a challenge as there are limitations in the ligaments those two fingers share. Additionally, accessing the accidentals via the double high G hole will require a lot of practice to do without slurring. So, I'd say it very much is still a 'bagpipe plus' rather than being as nimble as a flute, but then again, the key feature of the design is using the standard Highland fingering, not making a smallpipe sound with flute fingering (although that would be interesting).

"Finally, I'd say that Donald's engagement with both owners of the pipes and interested parties is a real feature of using this chanter. A lot of instrument makers can be difficult to contact, or actively eschew technology, but pretty much any time you have a question or would like to learn something, Donald's there with a helpful comment or video. Frankly, I have to say without this engagement I wouldn't have been confident enough to buy the pipes, but I felt like I got to know the instrument (and the maker) well before it even arrived. Long-winded commentary aside, the real test of an instrument is 'do you like the way it sounds?' and 'does it feel good to play?' I can confidently answer yes and yes."

NEW MUSIC FOR NEW PIPES

DONALD'S original Kickstarter project involved a contest for new compositions for newly redesigned smallpipes. Seventeen works were entered. Donald says that all of the composers clearly took the project seriously, and spent time getting to know the smallpipes, and he has found this process of acquiring new music for a new instrument very rewarding. Judged by David McGuinness, Alasdair Roberts and Lorne MacDougall, the piece *Hieland Clinch* by David Snow won. Of writing for a new instrument, he said: "As a composer, I'm always on the lookout for unusual and challenging projects. I read about the Lindsay System Scottish Smallpipes Chanter Competition on The Composer's Site (www.composerssite.com) in June 2015, and was immediately intrigued, never having written music for pipes before.

"Donald provided detailed technical specifications for the instrument, which were helpful in setting parameters for what I could and could not do musically: rather than inhibiting creativity, I find that such limitations give focus and direction to the compositional process. After some deliberation, I decided that the piece would have a folk music vibe, although I desperately wanted to avoid cliché. With that in mind, I turned to Bulgarian bagpipe music, with its odd meters and unique melodic scales, as a stylistic model. However, for a title I looked back to Scotland, settling on what I hoped was an accurate Scots translation of 'The Highland Limp', a title chosen in recognition of the work's un-danceability, given its changing time signatures."

The second-placed, *Hora of the Hanged Man* by K. L. Fortson, will be released on an album on April 1 with the composer on guitar. This work has many influences, and the composer found writing for the new instrument surprising and interesting because the modification to the chanter makes it extend far beyond the usual confines of Scottish traditional music. He said: "The piece was written largely in double harmonic minor, because growing up I heard many prayers in this mode in synagogue. I just happened to be looking at some Tarot cards for an art project – combined with the folk dance vibe from the rhythmic feel of the pieces due to the notated foot stomps – which inspired the name *Hora of the Hanged Man*.

"I find I often like to rely on myths and legends as inspiration for my piece's titles. My most recent recording is based on an old Suzhou legend, and my previous recording was based on an idea I had when hearing the story of the Navajo Magic Feather dance.

"I enjoy writing for unusual instrumentation (say, string quartet substituting bass for 2nd violin plus a guitar), so I was drawn to Donald's composition contest when he premiered his instrument because it hadn't been composed for before. I found his chanter interesting because, though one would assume it would be primarily for Scottish folk music, his chanter in A's additional semi-tones actually allows for some more modal playing, and is particularly well suited for double harmonic minor songs, my favourite scale to compose in, for the key of D, making it great for a variety of Middle Eastern melodies."

One of Scotland's best-known composers, John Purser, was commissioned to write for the Lindsay System chanter, and the result was premiered at The National Piping Centre event in January. *An Grianan – The Sunny Place,* is an intuitive, cheerful piece, very well-informed by Border repertoire and evoking this old repertoire throughout. When asked about writing for the Lindsay System instrument, he said: "Having been commissioned to compose music for many unlikelier instruments than the Lindsay System chanter, Donald's commission held no fears for me. The carnyx: Maori Taonga Puoro with bassoon: piobaireachd for solo flute: these each had their challenges. The extended range of the Lindsay System has been so well managed by Donald that the tone is good throughout and its variety no more than what you would expect over the extended range of any instrument.

"The smallpipes have always had for me a gentler, but still outdoor sound compared with the Highland pipes, so my piece ambles across a rolling landscape – Borders hills rather than Highland mountains. It is an easy-going piece, but the central section of it, exploiting the higher register, has more disjunct motion. It starts as a kind of variation on the first section but it is a little freer in its organisation – perhaps more organic, before it returns to the first section.

"It is a very happy relaxed piece and Donald and I fixed on *An Grianan – The Sunny Place* as a title, which really is sufficient introduction."

Donald hopes to publish these new compositions in a collection, so other smallpipe players can enjoy this exciting new repertoire.

COLLABORATORS

FIDDLER Neil McDermott, frequently plays with Donald and says the new instrument adds a new dimension. He added: "Since I first played with Donald on his pipes, new reeds and refinements to the Lindsay System Chanter have greatly improved the intonation of the 'new' notes in the extended range of the pipes. The extended range points to an expanded repertoire for the pipes but whether that expanded repertoire is tunes from the wider traditional repertoire, new variations for existing pipe tunes, or a newly-made repertoire, pipey in character but incorporating the additional notes, is a question for the player. As usual, Donald is going in all directions at once!

"When Donald and I sit to play together there is always an element of Donald showcasing the pipes' capabilities. This often takes the form of Donald playing common session tunes that would normally be beyond the range of the Scottish chanter (*Out on the Ocean, Tripping Up the Stairs* etc). The interesting thing is he has tendency to start these common tunes in less common keys or, at least, not in the key one might normally expect to hear them.

"While the Lindsay System Chanter can theoretically play these tunes in the 'normal' key, I'm guessing Donald has found that the tunes fall under the fingers more naturally in other keys. This half-answers a question I heard an uilleann piper ask Donald recently at a session: 'So is it in A or D?' I suspect the answer to that question is no simple binary choice.

"The Lindsay System seems to offer the Scottish piper the opportunity to exploit the uilleann, Northumbrian and Irish flute repertoires and while many players will be enticed by this, I think in the longer term the biggest strength of the extended range will be in a new repertoire, specially made for the Lindsay System that is Scottish in character but incorporating the new notes. Donald is already encouraging this with his tune composing competition."

Richard Youngs, a frequent collaborator with Donald, sums up the experience of working with his instrument: "I am not a piper. I don't understand piping, but I love it. Donald pointed out to me that the pipes have no dynamics. This chimes with my take on them as possessing some kind of austere, minimalist beauty, especially when played slowly.

"Donald and I are collaborators. He plays the smallpipes, the 3-D printed pipes, the full-on pipes while I try to keep up with his invention. It strikes me that he isn't just following tradition, admirable in itself and schooled in it as he is, but reaching out beyond. Most things I have ever valued have been in that beyond, and Donald's mind is open to wherever the pipes can go."

WHAT'S NEXT?

WITH the recognition of the significance of Donald's work from The National Piping Centre, the recognition from his colleagues in the pipe-making field and the increased popularity of the design with players, plans for the next phase of the Lindsay System are underway. As Hugh Cheape said, 'Cum ort, a Dhòmhnaill!'●

For more information, please see
https://lindstruments.com/

http://www.donaldwglindsay.com/

Follow Donald on Twitter at
@donaldwglindsay or @lindstruments

And hear the Hieland Clinch here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X96Abp3UPM8



white people – from outside the piping world. The common first response was a smile (Muhammad Ali in his prime, decked out in tartan). With few exceptions, the follow-up feedback was something like: "Are you $%#@ crazy?" My late sister, Patty, was especially firm: "No good will come from it." Most thought I'd be accused of cultural appropriation.

The online Cambridge Dictionary tells us cultural appropriation is the act of taking or using things from a culture that is not your own, especially without showing that you understand or respect this culture. I thought about this – defensively – and thought: "Well, wait, how does any culture evolve or change if we can't adapt the reflections and highlights of cultures around us? And, anyway, it's Muhammad Ali, an African-American, in the photo donning a Scottish kilt – and hat." Continued research found almost countless interpretations of "cultural appropriation". This truth, alone, sounded blaring alarm bells connected with using the be-kilted Ali image. In a lot of definitions, blogs and essays that I read, one element seemed to always be near the core of the term's meaning: cultural appropriation is the act of adopting elements of an outside, often minority culture. And so, I capitulated. I wasn't ready to fall on the sword of an old photo of a kilt-wearing black American icon.

Still, I come back to a theme I know I frequently talk about: Scots pride. It sits on seriously hard bedrock. So much of the world rolls about in what is imagined Scottishness. Tartan and kilts and sporrans and sheep and whisky and – yes – bagpipes. And, aye [appropriated banter alert], so much more. Scots culture is, dare I say, appropriated at every turn.

And how do Scots respond? With open arms and a "See you, Jimmy" hat – surely a tourist tat example of self-deprecation at its best, a Scottish national trait. In my experience, self-deprecation is common to only the most confident. Jimmy hat aside, there's seldom any real preciousness connected with how Scots see their culture as it's interpreted by outsiders. The many elements of Scots culture, including that of the Gaels, mostly embrace the vitality that is imbued, maybe even fortified, by having those from away embrace what they interpret as the cultural richness of Scotland.

And so what about the draft Muhammad Ali cover replacement? Well, some irony, it dawns on me now: a cartoon version of a piper found its way: Viz Magazine's Simon Thorp's brilliant creation, Finbarr Saunders.

With Finbarr's right foot forward, fingers – and drone tuning – in all the right places; bunnet, too, and kilt all rightly set, cartoon Finbarr might even stand as a beacon to our Coatbridge ladies of 1965: the Great Highland Bagpipe will take you places: Paisley, Renfrew – who knows – maybe even alongside a legend, like Muhammad Ali. ●



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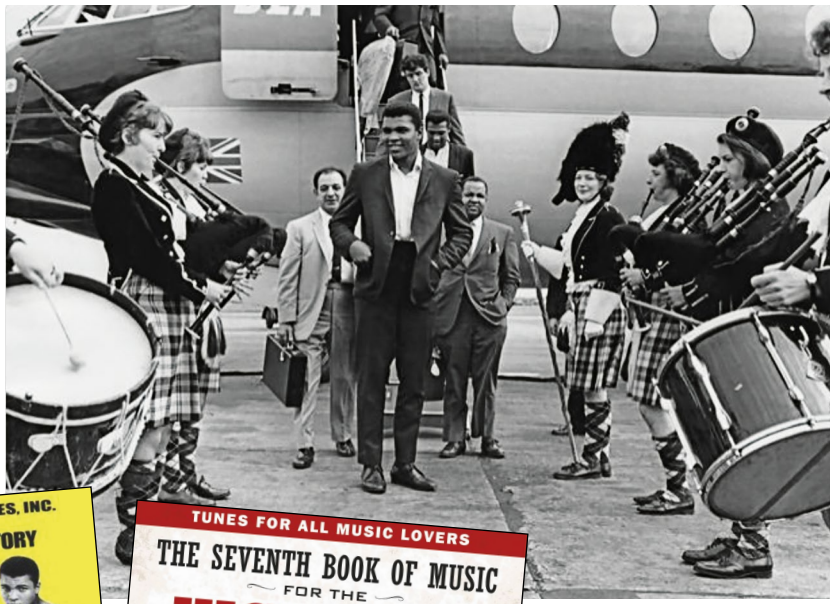
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Grey's Notes
by Michael Grey



The Great Highland Bagpipe will take you places

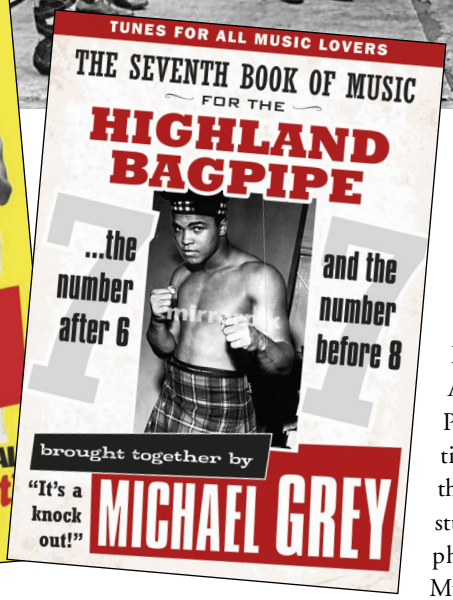
AMIDST the magic found around the instrument we know as the Great Highland Bagpipe is an invisible golden ticket to untold amazing experiences. Learn the fundamental ways of the pipes and the world can be your oyster. The extraordinary travels and remarkable people and events that the pipes can conjure are boundless. There's no prerequisite of grand champion status: pipers and pipe bands of every standard routinely encounter greatness – if not unforgettable bagpipe-made moments. From presidents, prime ministers, the Pope and pop stars, pipers the world over can find themselves in the most unlikely of performance situations.



The Coatbridge Ladies Pipe Band welcome Cassius Clay to Scotland on August 18, 1965

Consider the Coatbridge Ladies Pipe Band. Oh, to be a member in the summer of 1965 (gender and age notwithstanding). On Wednesday, August 18 of that year, Muhammad Ali, the Heavyweight Boxing Champion of the World, touched down at what was then known as Renfrew Airport. And there, waiting on the tarmac for the arrival of one of the most famous and controversial personalities in the world – were members of the Coatbridge Ladies, tuned and ready for a rousing Scots welcome. As part of a world tour, Ali was scheduled for a Friday night four-round exhibition bout at Paisley Ice Rink. Just think: when the New Year landed it's unlikely members of the Coatbridge band had any idea of the historic brush with greatness they would experience before the year was out.





I'm not a student of boxing. Nor do I have any great knowledge of the history of ladies' pipe bands. I do like old stuff. I like the look, the feel, the aesthetic of interesting vintage things. And so to boxing and this Coatbridge Ladies-Muhammad Ali story.

Last summer I was hard at it pulling together a music book project. A part of the process is landing on a decision of what makes the cover. I liked the idea of a letter block poster. I thought, this stark (and cheap) print style, common, especially, to sporting event posters of the 1940s and 1950s was just the thing. So, thanks to a little research and the artistry of graphic designer, John Slavin, we came to a good first draft. The Liston-Clay [Ali] poster would be a central inspiration. In looking at the design we thought: "Wouldn't it be great if we could find an old-time kilted boxer for the cover?"

Well, what are the chances? Enter stage right: Muhammad Ali and the Coatbridge Ladies Pipe Band. In looking for our timeworn kilty, not only was the 1965 story uncovered but we stumbled on a great newspaper photo of the man himself – Muhammad Ali – posing in kilt and Balmoral bonnet. It was just too fantastic. After the appropriate photo licensing enquiries were made, an Ali cover draft was ready (pictured). Now here was a book cover that had real punch (ouch).

But was this just all a bit much, even for me? Even if all legalities were lined up, a non-boxing white guy from Canada might well be looking for trouble using the image of a hallowed Muhammad Ali. I asked around to trusted friends – including people, not just

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