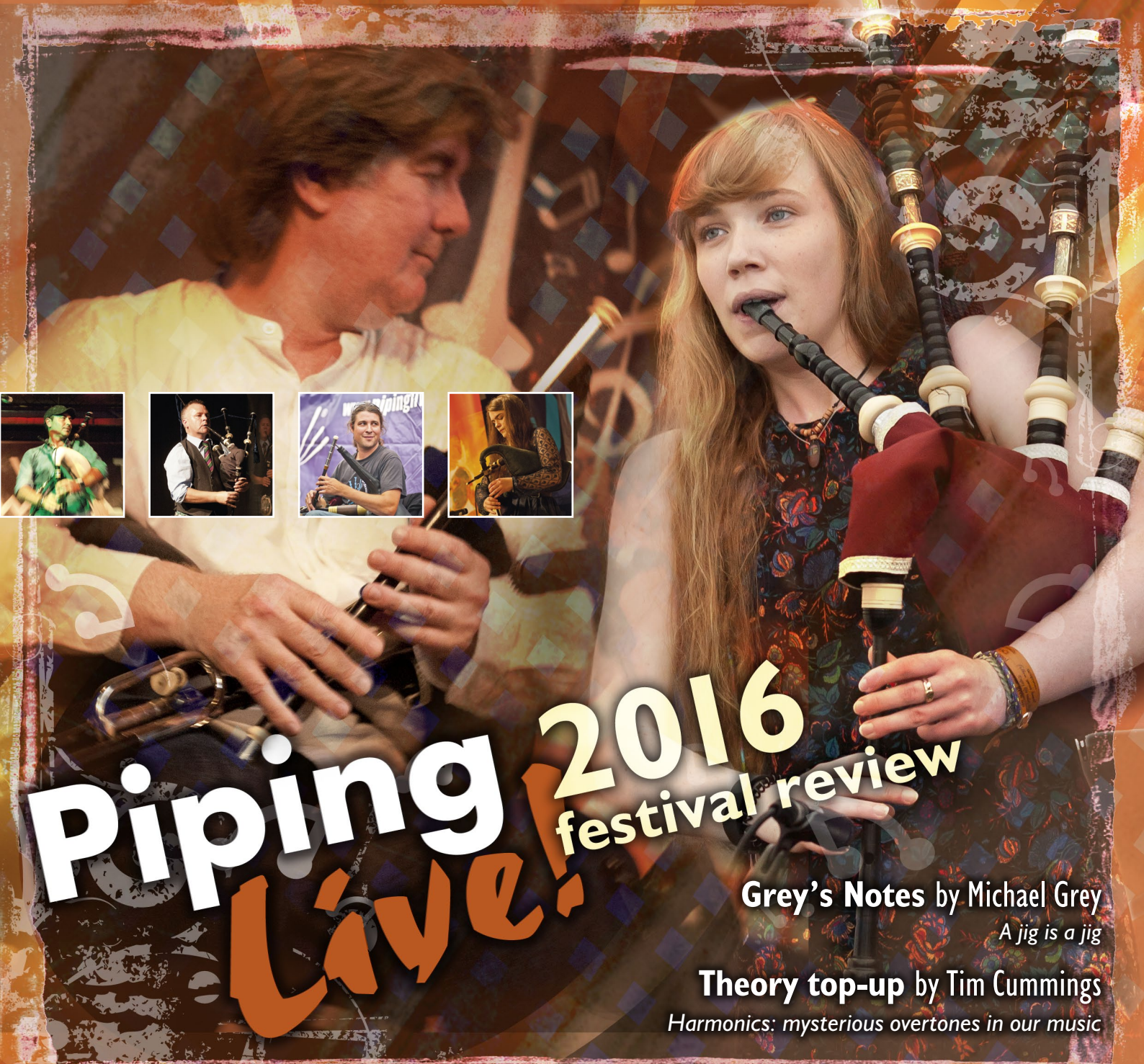


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PIPING TODAY



Piping 2016 Live! festival review

Grey's Notes by Michael Grey
A jig is a jig

Theory top-up by Tim Cummings
Harmonics: mysterious overtones in our music

Pipe Major Iain McLeod and the Edinburgh City Police Pipe Band

Thomas Zoeller and Allan MacDonald

The World Pipe Band Championships 2016

Field Marshal Montgomery Pre-Worlds Concert Review

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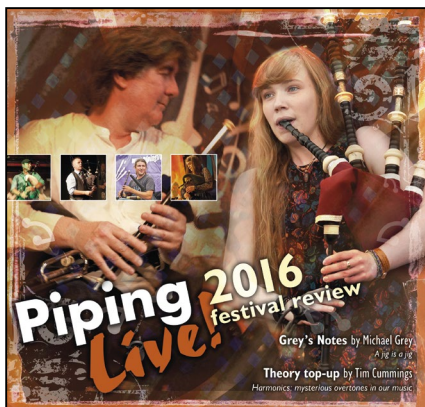
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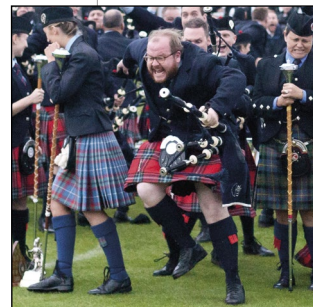
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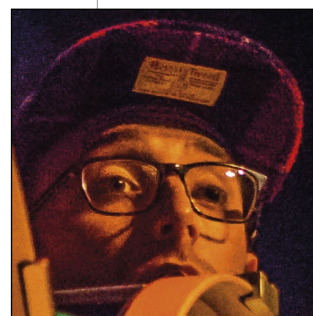
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PIPING TODAY

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An exciting time ahead

I think this could very well have been my busiest few months in piping so knowing where to start with this editorial is a bit of a quandary.

Let me begin by congratulating the big winners this summer and in particular, Ian K. MacDonald for winning the double of Gold Medals at Oban and Inverness, a rare feat in the long history of these two events — I believe Ian is the 12th piper to manage this great achievement. Also, looking in-house to our own staff I have to say how proud we are of Finlay Johnston winning the Clasp at Inverness with *Lament for Hugh*, following on from his march win at Oban. It has been a very good year for Finlay. I am sure many more will follow.



The qualifiers for the Glenfiddich Championships to be held in Blair Castle in October will now have been selected and it is reassuring to know that the recently formed Scottish Culture and Heritage Group of the William Grant Foundation have confirmed support for the Championships for the next three years. More news on that to follow.

Back to big winners. You run out of superlatives describing the quality of performance given by the Field Marshal Montgomery Pipe Band. Hard pressed this year, with fierce competition particularly from Inveraray & District and St Laurence O'Toole, Pipe Major Richard Parkes MBE and his band, rather like Mo Farah in the Olympics, managed to dig deep and find that little bit extra on the home stretch to secure another World Championships. I believe the 11th under Richard.

My own foray into the pipe band world this year with the Spirit of Scotland Pipe Band was a truly memorable experience and also partly explains my opening sentence of this editorial. Having been out of the pipe band world for several years, it was with a degree of uncertainty and hesitance that I re-entered. The availability of Jim Kilpatrick MBE as leading drummer, along with a wonderful corps of drummers, made the task of assembling an equally impressive pipe corps so much easier. The preparations for the season were hard work but we had lots of fun as there was so many stories and memories to share.

Any prizes we would get would be a bonus and I know it could sound disingenuous to say they ultimately were not the most important thing. What truly was the most important part was the bonding experience of being part of a team on a combined endeavour which, of course, all pipe bands are. I guess this was the biggest thing I personally have missed in my time out from the bands. It was an emotional experience which I will treasure.

More on big winners. *Piping Live!* this year was probably the best one we have had. This year's festival went very well, with a total audience of 37,641 at around 150 programmed performances. One of the highlights was *The Piping Live! Big Band* which brought together 100 pipers and drummers aged eight to 86 from across the world to parade to George Square to officially open the festival. The big band raised money for Asthma UK.

Throughout the week we had 834 performers from 16 countries including Slovakia, Switzerland, Mallorca, Italy, France, Australia, New Zealand and many more.

Ticket sales were very strong and of our 22 main ticketed events, eight were complete sellout shows.

Finally, news on our staffing. Following the departure of David Wilton and Clare Lynas who have taken up new teaching and lecturing posts in the City of Dundee High School and North East Scotland College respectively, we are pleased to announce that Wilson Brown and Dan Nevans have been employed as their successors. Wilson Brown is a Gold Medallist and also played for many years in the Strathclyde Police Pipe Band. After taking a 20-year break from solo piping, during which time Wilson developed his career in the police service, he has made a return to the solo platform most recently competing in the Senior Piobaireachd and Clasp events at Oban and Inverness. Dan Nevans is a music graduate and a member of the Shotts and Dykehead Pipe Band, having won the Worlds with them in 2015. Dan is also developing his career in solo piping and gaining prizes on the circuit.

Stuart Samson has indicated his desire to retire as lead tutor of the BMus Traditional Music – Piping course which the Centre delivers in collaboration with the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Stuart is a highly respected figure and has been responsible for guiding many of our graduates to reach their potential in piping.

We have appointed Willie McCallum as the successor to Stuart in this role and he starts with us at the end of September. We needed to find someone with a tremendous profile in piping to take on where Stuart left off and Willie brings exactly that to the table. Willie is without doubt one of the most successful and highly respected figures in piping today and so we are sure that his input will be a positive force for the future success of the degree programme.

In addition to Willie McCallum, we are further strengthening the team by employing Ross Ainslie on a part-time basis as a tutor for the degree and HNC programmes. Ross is one of Scotland's most accomplished and successful performing musicians with a flair for composition. Prestigious industry recognition has come in the form of a multitude of award nominations.

We look forward to an exciting new era.

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

CLASP secures sponsorship deal with Wallace Bagpipes



THE National Piping Centre has announced that Wallace Bagpipes will be the main sponsor for the Competition League for Amateur Solo Pipers (CLASP) for the 2016-17 season of events.

The support will enable CLASP to continue to develop and offer top-quality prizes to performers.

Craig Munro of Wallace Bagpipes said: "We are extremely honored to support and work with the CLASP.

"It's a fantastic organisation which helps raise the standard and profile of adult amateurs worldwide.

"We feel this will not only help strengthen our position in the market place but also see it as an opportunity to give something back to a section of the worldwide piping community often overlooked in our industry, with the majority of the current focus being on juveniles or professional events."

CLASP organiser Margaret Dunn said: "We're delighted with the sponsorship.

"It will allow the CLASP to grow and also gives competitors the opportunity to win some high quality products from Wallace Bagpipes."

● Following the success of the CLASP workshop weekend in April, another event will be held October 14 and 15 at The National Piping Centre.

The weekend is open to any enthusiastic amateur bagpipers and is designed to give players the chance to work more on tunes they have chosen to play for competition.

Guest instructors will include Willie McCallum and Dr Jack Taylor, with more to be announced.

Piobaireachd set tunes and light music will be worked on in small groups.

The weekend programme will also feature a talk from performance psychologist Fiona McConnachie.

For more information or to register, visit www.theclasp.co.uk/workshop/workshop-registration/

More CLASP news on pages 22&23

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Captain John MacLellan Memorial

The Captain John MacLellan Memorial competition took place in front of a capacity audience at the Waldorf Astoria Caledonian Hotel in Edinburgh on August 27. The pipers were Iain Speirs, Roddy MacLeod, Greg Wilson, Innes Smith and Callum Beaumont, with Iain Speirs winning with *The Salute to Sir John A Macdonald, Canada's First Prime Minister*. The event was judged by Bill Livingstone, Fear an Tigh was Euan Anderson and it was sponsored by Glenfiddich Piping and Fiddle.



Photos: Derek Maxwell

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News in brief

● **The College of Piping in Glasgow has appointed Colin MacLellan as its new Director of Piping.**

A Gold Medal winner at the Argyllshire Gathering and Northern Meeting, Colin has enjoyed a highly successful solo piping career and has played with top-flight pipe bands including this year with Spirit of Scotland. He also is a senior adjudicator in both piobaireachd and light music.

His appointment at the College marks a return as he taught there at the age of 18. His remit in his new post is to lead the development of the College's teaching programme.

Colin MacNeill, chairman of the College of Piping, said: "Colin's experience and achieve-

ments in piping and in the teaching of piping will help the College to achieve its mission to provide excellent and structured teaching of the bagpipes to all levels."

Colin MacLellan added: "I am very pleased to have been appointed and I look forward to working with the Board and the current staff."

● **The last of this year's seasonal schools at The National Piping Centre take place in October.**

The Young Stars school for pipers aged 16 and under runs from October 17 to 20 at The NPC in Glasgow. The National Piping Centre Seasonal Gatherings, for learners aged 17-plus, runs at the same venue from October 14 to 16.

For details or to register, visit www.thepiping-centre.co.uk/bagpipe-drumming-schools/

EMI

WAVERLEY

CAPITAL PARADE EDINBURGH CITY POLICE PIPE BAND



by Andrew Bova

Iain McLeod

Stories from the legend

ABOUT a year ago, *Piping Today* ran a story entitled *Piping's Most Exclusive Club: Pipe Majors Who Have Won the Worlds*. On that list of greats sits Iain McLeod. A legend in his own right, he's a man who's seen it all and done it all, a walking encyclopedia of piping and drumming history who breathes life into the knowledge and stories he shares.

Fortune smiled on me when I was asked to interview Iain, a man still sharp and brimming with humour. What was planned as a 45-minute interview turned into a nearly two and a half hour conversation about everything from the history of our craft to the present state of competitive piping, all interspersed with unabashedly selfish questions posed from a current competitor to one of the greatest competitors ever to cross the line.

Above his many achievements and accolades, Iain's name is synonymous with the Edinburgh Police Pipe Band, latterly renamed Lothian and Borders Police Pipe Band, of which he was the pipe major from 1959-1976, winning five World Championship titles. With such incredible competitive success, I asked Iain what his method was for running the band.

He said: "Once the competition season was finished, we put the pipes away for at least a month, then started again from square one, started selecting what music we were going to change, what we were going to do and got to it on the practice chanter.

"I was a great believer in having a group of four practising together, before we came together as a unit."

"We had a lot of engagements as a police pipe band, so everyone had to keep their pipes in a first-class condition, which was more difficult in these days. You had to do that in the whole of the winter months. Then, when the competition season arose, you doubled down. Everyone had to be on top of their form."

Curious about the music selection process,



I asked Iain how he went about picking repertoire for the band.

Iain said: "We were very open to suggestions. I would decide at the end of the day what we were going to play but everybody had their say. And some of the lads came up with some good suggestions, some had some good music."

The pipe band medley was introduced in 1970, and under his leadership they won the Worlds in 1971, 1972 and 1975, so they were obviously quick to grasp and succeed in this new genre.

Iain said: "People were getting fed up of going to competitions and championships and hearing *Donald Cameron*, *Cameronian Rant*, and *Pretty Marion*. This was brought in mainly from the public's point of view, to get a variety of music and decide who was presenting it best and who had the most musical sound.

"There were bands who competed at that time and could only play about three march strathspeys and reels, half a dozen 6/8s — end of repertoire. But we always had a big repertoire in the police pipe band so we had a lot of tunes to choose from to make up the medley. And from there on, it was a case of everybody trying to beat everybody else — it was to attract good music to competitive piping.

"I thought it was a better result to give the best bands coming out on top, who could produce the best music with the best sound rather

DE
CE





Embarking on Russian engagement in 1966

than the same old stuff churned out month after month, year after year. And to use a bit of variety in the time signatures you were going to be playing. I think, from the public's point of view, it was much, much better."

I asked if he had a favorite time signature, curious about his own musical tastes. With a mischievous smile and a suppressed chuckle he replied, "Aye. All of them."

Satisfied with his tongue-in-cheek answer — I did eventually get him to admit that he's a fan of the heavy 2/4 marches — I pushed the question how the band had their early success. His response was simple: "Hard work. A lot of practice. And dedication."

"Practice, practice, practice until you can do it backwards kind of thing. And keeping the interest alive in competing and playing.

"I also had the hardcore — I used to call them the Dirty Dozen. Twelve pipers who were all of a high standard, who were all keen as mustard and were very good players.

"You can't do it without the players. You've got to have the top-notch players in my opinion, or have them all thinking along the same lines and working towards the same goal. There were some people who wanted to play differently but when they came to the band they had to knuckle down and play the way I wanted them to play. There was only one man, who shall remain nameless, who had a problem adjusting. He didn't play with us very long."

Iain reduced the mix of talent, dedication, and hard work to two simple words which elegantly reflect the way he ran his pipe

Parading on Red Square, Moscow, 1966





Parade along Princes Street, Edinburgh, featured in the film *Let's Be Happy* with Vera Ellen, 1956

corps: "No passengers."

Curious about his "Dirty Dozen", I asked his thoughts on band size, starting with his ideal number.

He said: "Twelve. That was my ideal, but now it could be 24 or 26."

"When I hear some of the results Field Marshal get or St Laurence O'Toole, it takes a lot of doing, to get them to be so perfect in every respect — blowing particularly.

"And the unification, there's a lot of work by the pipe major. There must be a whole lot of time with individual players. Everybody has their own idea of the best way to do it.

"I think they have to draw a line. Or we could go, 'Right, we'll have 16 pipers this year, we'll have 26 next year and so on. It has to stop somewhere. And it's all the more work for the pipe majors or they must have some good pipe sergeants working with them."

In addition to an excellent pipe major, pipe sergeant and pipe corps, every great band needs a solid drum corps, and Iain had the talent behind his "Dirty Dozen" to ensure sustained success.

He said: "The band are judged on the pipe major's performance. Despite the great drum corps that you have, it's a pipe band competition. So piping should be the principal thing, in my opinion.

"But when you come up against people like Alex Duthart, who we had for a wee while, or Jim Kilpatrick, it's a great boost to the pipe section, provided that the PM and the leading drummer are thinking along the same lines.

"Provided the PM is able to say, 'Well that's very good from a drumming point of view but from an ensemble point of view, I'm not so sure, would you be able to alter that bit?'"

Iain had the good fortune to work with Alex, who is arguably the greatest drummer of all time. He said: "Alex Duthart once said to me, 'My ambition is to get the Shotts Drum Corps, and your (pipe) section.' And we did get Alex but only for about six months and then he had to move back into the west of Scotland again.

"He played with us at Perth in 1968 and he played with us in 1969, then he went back to Shotts. His wife's father wasn't keeping very well so she wanted to be near him and they moved

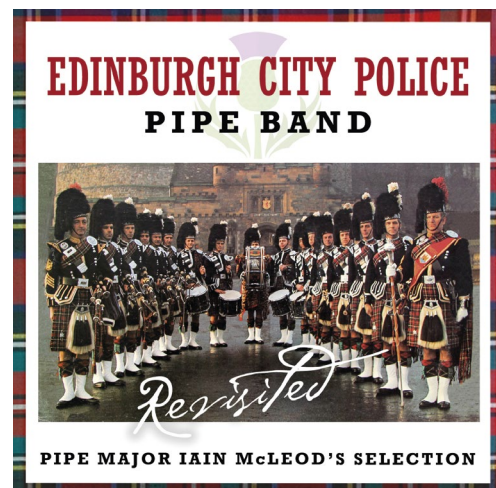
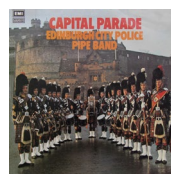
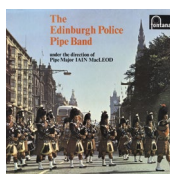
from Edinburgh. That was the reason they left us, unfortunately."

Iain also spoke highly of another of his leading drummers, Bob Montgomery, with whom he won four of his five Worlds titles.

He added: "A lot of credit should be given to Bob because he had a good drum corps. But it was difficult getting drummers into the police service, whereas in other bands it didn't matter what the drummers did for a living."

There have been massive changes in the pipe band scene over the years and Iain says there have been great strides forward in sound quality. He added: "The overall standard, particularly the quality of sound, of tone, of bands has improved, in my opinion. And it says a lot for the pipe majors to maintain such a high standard of sound.

"You hear some of the things that the likes of Field Marshal do that I think are absolutely brilliant and other bands like Inveraray are coming along the same. St Laurence O'Toole have improved beyond all recognition in the last 10 years. Top notch."



Such improvements have a lot to do with the availability and quality of equipment around today. Iain retired in 1976, just at the beginning of introduction of synthetic materials to piping.

But no matter how good the equipment, Iain still believes that it's the pipe major that really makes the difference. He said: "Everyone is making chanterers these days and bands like to follow trends. What they don't tell you is that you don't get the pipe major along with them!"

Iain compared piping to football, saying that the two fields are similar nowadays with transfers, money, and sponsorship.

But he doesn't think bands are focusing more on the sport — the competition — rather than the music. He said: "The pipe band scene will never change dramatically, you'll still have a top dozen bands above the rest."

"But nowadays, if you're on the periphery of the prize list and getting fourth and fifth, it's not seen as good enough to be contented with that."

I was able to reassure him that the camaraderie around the bands is still strong. But there are many ways things have moved on.

Bridging a generational gap he said: "I've got something in common with you, too. I played with Shotts, when I was about 15 or 16."

"Here's what I had to do for a practice. Go by train from Edinburgh to Shotts on a Friday, go to a competition or a practice on a Saturday and back to stay in Shotts overnight afterwards. There were no trains on a Sunday, so I had to

come back to Edinburgh by bus. So to go to a practice took me three days.

"Those were the days of the McAllister family, with old Tom McAllister. I played behind him at Cowal one year when I was a wee boy. He was a hard man. A very fair man, but a hard man. Very dedicated. Old Tom, he was the one who perfected the introductory E."

It's funny that Iain, whose band had such a rivalry with Shotts, spent time there as a boy. He always had a winning mentality as a piper and pipe major. He said: "It was a football manager who said, 'Show me a good loser and I'll show you a loser.' Great statement. I've always liked that."

But not every band shared the philosophy, although he felt Muirheads and Shotts did.

He added: "But the rest were quite happy to get a prize."

"I was never jealous of other bands. We had a great rivalry with Shotts. A big rivalry. But a fair bunch of boys, they were good lads. There was a statement in a press clipping Mary came across the other night. We won a quartets competition many years ago in Motherwell, we played really well you know, we got first. Shotts were second."

"Willie McAllister went up for his prize and he said, 'Well, all I want to say is, I'm proud to have been second to that performance.' So that was quite a compliment."

While everyone associates Iain McLeod with Edinburgh City Police, few remember that he

was an incredibly successful solo piper, winning three Silver Stars at the Northern Meeting, the Gold Banner at the Mod, and the Gold Pennant for former winners.

He chuckled: "Only two of us won the Gold Pennant, John Burgess and myself. So, no bad."

Iain had firm views on choosing solo repertoire. He said: "You have to select tunes that you can perfect, for a start, not that you want to play so that you're giving the adjudicators a more difficult time to knock you back."

"For instance, you don't hear an awful lot of people playing *The Little Cascade* in solo stuff, tunes such as that."

"They can master it but they come to the fourth part and maybe there's something they're not going to like, so they'll drop it and bring in another tune, rather than persevere and get it wrong."

"There's a lot of them that try to play the stuff but they haven't mastered it at all. You better be 100% sure of what you're doing."

And he has some controversial views on the solo competitive scene.

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He said: "I honestly think — and I'll get slated for this — there's too much emphasis placed on piobaireachd.

"I could mention half a dozen guys who are Gold Medal holders that I wouldn't classify as top pipers. I think the emphasis that's put on it is all wrong.

"You can encourage study and learning piobaireachd as I did with Donald MacLeod and Willie Ross but winning the Gold Medal does not 'automatically' make you a top player. I think that I'm not too popular with this opinion, but who cares?"

You can't help but admire his confidence in an opinion which has been formed through years of experience, observation and thought.

For the interview, and admittedly my own personal gain, I asked what advice he has for aspiring young soloists.

He said: "It's the same old story — practice. But not too much. If you peak before the competition, then you've hit it too early.

"You'd see me picking up the pipes before the Northern Meeting at the most, three or four days before the competition. But never for a month or so beforehand.

"There's a lot of natural ability that comes into it. If you've got it, nurture it, but don't go over the top on the practice side in the run-up to competitions."

And what does he suggest for young players who want to get into Grade 1?

Iain said: "Don't jump into the deep end. Take it easy. It's a good idea if you can get into a top band, even though you're not playing in competitions, then graduate through the ranks and into the competitive side of the band."

This interview comes off the back of an album soon to be released, highlighting the history of Edinburgh City Police Pipe Band, going right back to the 1960s.

It showcases more than just competition music. Iain said: "It's a big variety. It's Gaelic airs, strathspeys and reels, hornpipes, jigs —

you name it. A good variety of stuff. And for that time, the quality of sound is pretty good."

Naturally, I wondered if he has a favourite track on the album. He didn't need to think for a second before responding: "Yeah, I did a solo spot on it. *Leaving Glenurquhart*, *Inveraray Castle*, and *The Smith of Chilliechassie*."

And of the other highlights, he said: "The sound of the opening 6/8 marches is, I think, near perfection. It starts off with *Old Adam*. I thought that was really good."

Reflecting on all the stories — not all of which are reproduced here, sadly — and the knowledge and advice that Iain had shared, I thought it only fitting to give him an open forum to speak to you and I, those still in the game, and provide a parting thought for our community.

He became introspective, clearly considering his options and sifting through his years of experience. He smiled, chuckled, and encouraged: "Keep up the good work." ●

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on the
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of CEOL MOR

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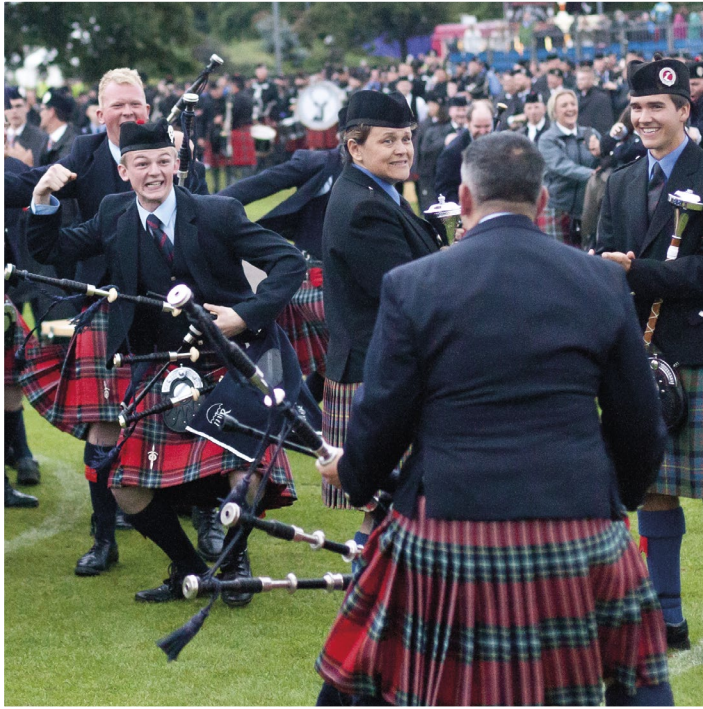
A Piobaireachd Society publication

by Stuart Milne

Field Marshal Montgomery do it again

World Pipe Band Championships 2016





BY the time the Grade 1 winners were announced at the World Pipe Band Championships on Saturday, August 13, the tension in the air was palpable.

Even the sky had turned dark and menacing with anticipation — partly because of the cloud cover, but mostly because at that point it was virtually night time. After two hard-fought days of competition at the climax to one of the most open Grade 1 seasons in recent memory, the jubilation in the ranks of Field Marshal Montgomery when they were proclaimed World Champions for the 11th time even prompted a momentary loss of footing and dignity from pipe major Richard Parkes MBE, now one win away from tying the all-time record of his idol, pipe major Ian McLellan BEM.

There was to be no storybook end to the season for British and Scottish Champions Inveraray & District, who won the MSR event on ensemble preference but lost out by a single point in the Medley and overall standings, although the runners-up spot was enough to secure the Champion of Champions band and drumming titles for the first time in their Grade 1 history.

Nor was there a fairy-tale finale for leading drummer Jim Kilpatrick MBE, with Spirit of Scotland qualifying for the Grade 1 final but failing to make the prize list. Nonetheless, it was heartening to see his unparalleled career honoured by leading his band on to the marchpast in his final major after 50 years of pipe band drumming, a retirement gesture his mentor and fellow titan of the pipe band world Alex Duthart did not live to enjoy. The Saturday round of competition also marked the swansong of piper Allan Hamilton, himself a 50-year servant to the band known variously as the City of Glasgow Police, Strathclyde Police and now Greater Glasgow Police Scotland.



Jim Kilpatrick MBE leads Spirit of Scotland Pipe Band during the marchpast

The gruelling Grade 1 championship, which requires finalists to play their entire competitive repertoire over two days, began on Friday, August 12 — a sparsely attended event held in two of the Glasgow Green arenas in appalling cold, wet and sometimes windy conditions. This year the two-day qualification format claimed its first major casualty,



'A third place for piping instead of fourth in the Medley or fourth instead of fifth for drumming in the MSR would have seen the RSPBA Jubilee Trophy and Banner taken back to Argyll instead of Northern Ireland'



Inveraray & District Pipe Band play in the rain during Friday's qualifier

with New Zealand Police edging out perennial prize-winners Peoples Ford – Boghall & Bathgate Caledonia to the sixth and final qualifying slot in Heat 1. It was touching to see how much achieving their best Worlds result since 1999 meant to New Zealand Police after their 12,000 mile journey, with pipe major Emmett Conway struggling to hold back tears in his interview for the BBC's highlights programme after leading his band into the final for the first time.

Along with Ryan Canning of last year's winners Shotts & Dykehead Caledonia, Emmett learned his craft at Field Marshal Montgomery, and their former band put on a masterclass

in technique, expression and pipe tone, taking all four firsts in piping over the final two rounds. Richard Parkes opted to bring back the *Sandpiper* medley that won this competition in 2002, widely considered one of the classic medleys of the last 20-odd years. About two parts into the first jig, *Archie Beag*, it was evident the band were playing with an extra level of flair above and beyond even their usual high standard. It was a medley run worthy of winning a World Championship in any era, and will be fondly remembered by those who witnessed it as one of the greatest performances ever heard in this hallowed arena.

It is a mark of just how far Stuart Liddell and Steven McWhirter have taken Inveraray & District since the magical journey began in 2004 that their best-ever result at a World Championship represents disappointment. A third place for piping instead of fourth in the Medley or fourth instead of fifth for drumming

in the MSR would have seen the RSPBA Jubilee Trophy and Banner taken back to Argyll instead of Northern Ireland once the tie-breakers had been worked out, but this year it was not to be. 2016 has been the best season to date for Inveraray, and their current form suggests it may soon be bettered.

There was a happier end to season for Alen Tully and St Laurence O'Toole, with Steven Creighton's corps sweeping the drumming titles in both events to secure the Samuel J. Hodgson Cup and Andante Sash, while the band came third overall. An otherwise fabulous run in the Medley was marred by an unfortunate missed attack, although finishing six points behind Field Marshal and Inveraray in the MSR meant it would have been very difficult for SLOT to secure the band championship regardless.

Defending champions Shotts & Dykehead Caledonia finished fourth, taking away the positives of two third-places for Andrew Lawson's

The Spirit of Scotland pipe corps tune up before the Friday morning qualifier



WORLDS 2016



Jim Kilpatrick's Spirit of Scotland Pipe Band drum corps

new-look drum corps. When the season began, few expected Shotts to have a reasonable chance of retaining their title but over the course of the campaign, the band pulled themselves back up the prize list to leave them with the opportunity to do exactly that.

Playing first in the MSR they had the misfortune to endure the worst of the day's weather, but then again Shotts are no strangers to rain having been virtually washed off the park in a notoriously torrential downpour on this ground in 2013, and the band set an excellent standard for the rest of the day's competition to follow. It would appear the band is still as healthy as ever, and pipe major Ryan Canning will have every chance to add to his championship tally in the seasons to come.

As the last band in the draw, ScottishPower

had the unenviable task of following Field Marshal Montgomery's epic medley performance to close out the Grade 1 competition but put in one of their finest runs in a long time to earn a second for piping behind the World Champions, helping them to fourth place in the event and fifth overall.

Rounding off the Grade 1 prize list was Police Scotland Fife, who made history by securing their first top-six finish at the Worlds, hot on the heels of their sixth place at Dumbarnton two weeks earlier. Since their inaugural season in 2008, this band have always had a quality pipe corps but the story of their season has been Mick O'Neill's drummers, who matched their runners-up spot at the Scottish Championships with a second in the MSR. The band's result may have come as a surprise to some observers but

their consistent finish to the 2016 season means Police Scotland Fife must now be taken seriously as top-six contenders at every major to come.

Just as no Olympic athlete wants to finish fourth, seventh place at a major can often be the hardest result for a band to take, particularly when the band in question is a six-time World Champion in the form of Simon Fraser University. Two solid runs, including perhaps the most entertaining medley of the afternoon, hinted at a return to the SFU of old but there was no room at the inn for Alan Bevan to build on his first top-six finish as pipe major in 2015.

Continuing the afternoon's pattern of re-arranging classic medleys, the second round of the Grade 1 contest provided another opportunity for fans to hear Spirit of Scotland's much-discussed selection from their first appearance



at this competition in 2008. Back then, the band were formed of an extended group of friends who just so happened to be some of the world's top unattached pipers and drummers, who only had a week of practising together before hitting the grass as a Grade 1 band on Glasgow Green.

This time round the band's membership comprised an even more dazzling array of prize-winners, particularly the revamped drum corps under Jim Kilpatrick, all committed this time to a full season of five majors plus most of a winter's preparation. While initial results were promising, with the band placing in the first three championships and winning the drumming in Belfast, Spirit's eighth place at this year's Worlds was only a marginal improvement on 2008, when they came 11th in a final of 14. Although the band's music was memorable and entertaining, the performances and

results from the tail end of the season indicate that bringing a band of elite players together for a comparatively short time is not a model for sustained competitive success. However, the emotional scenes as the band marched off after Jim Kilpatrick's final competition as a pipe band drummer suggest the band's priorities were elsewhere, and the legacy of the Spirit of Scotland project should perhaps be measured in terms other than silverware.

The crowded field in today's Grade 1 meant Iain MacPherson did not enjoy the best first season as pipe major of Greater Glasgow Police Scotland but nevertheless, the band were able to achieve the important task of qualifying for the final, with perhaps their two best performances of the year securing a respectable ninth place.

The 78th Fraser Highlanders rounded off their undefeated season in Ontario by return-

ing to the final and the top 10 in the world, although their two Saturday performances suggest there is much work still to be done if this historic band are once again to win major silverware in Scotland.

Manawatu Scottish Society recovered from a sobering set of results at North Berwick the week before to reclaim their usual spot in the final, with their fifth and sixth places for piping in the MSR equalling the best results for a New Zealand band at the World Championships for many years. Unfortunately for them, last placings for drumming and ensemble coupled with a missed attack in the Medley meant the band were unable to build on this potential, finishing 11th above their compatriots New Zealand Police to round off the Grade 1 table. As one online commenter observed afterwards, it is surely a mark of the strength of the New Zealand pipe band scene



‘The result leaves the RSPBA music board with a very interesting decision to make, and both PSNI and Johnstone face a tense wait to find out which grade they will play in next season’

that neither band representing the Land of the Long White Cloud in the final were the domestic champions.

Despite all the drama of the Grade 1 Championship, the ecstasy and heartbreak were, if anything, more keenly felt in Grade 2. The Pipes & Drums of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the first Grade 2 band since Inveraray & District in 2009 to come into the Worlds sitting on a grand slam, suffered the

agonising fate of losing on ensemble preference to Johnstone, who secured their senior band’s third straight World title and second in as many seasons in the grade, arguably winning the bonus prize for wildest celebration in the process. PSNI did manage to play off the field as Champion of Champions and World Drum Corps Champions, although just how the pipers were feeling as they did so is open to speculation. The result leaves the RSPBA

music board with a very interesting decision to make, and both PSNI and Johnstone face a tense wait to find out in which grade they will play next season. The Glasgow Skye Association’s second place in drumming secured the Champion of Champions title for Arthur Cook’s drum corps, and given his success helping turn around the fortunes of Denny & Dunipace a few seasons ago, this band might not be too far away from a return to the premier grade themselves.

In Grade 3A, Worcester Kiltie from Massachusetts, USA, pulled off their best impression of St Laurence O’Toole by winning the band and drumming double in their centenary year. Aughtinobher’s second place was enough to crown them Champion of Champions, three points ahead of fellow promotion contenders Portlethen & District, also securing the drumming title in the process.

The Grade 3B World title went to Australia's Perth Metro, led by former Western Australia Police pipe major James Cowie, with 2622 Highland Squadron RAF taking the drumming prize. Fourth place was enough for Prestonpans Royal British Legion to win the Champion of Champions title, with Bothwell Castle finishing second in the drumming on the day having already wrapped up the Champions of Champions award by winning the Scottish Championships two weeks earlier.

In the closely-fought Juvenile grade, George Watson's College pulled off the double in their first major win of the season as a band, which in light of Dollar Academy's absence from Dumbarton due to a school rugby tour of Argentina, was enough to secure both Champion of Champions titles.

In Grade 4A, a mere two points separated the top four bands, with Ullapool & District edging out Cleland Memorial, Portavogie and Burntisland & District. Ullapool's consistency at all five majors gave them double-digit leads in both Champion of Champions tables, while the Portavogie drum corps were crowned World Champions a year after the band won Grade 4B in only their second competitive season.

Johnstone's development band capped off an excellent campaign by winning Grade 4B, the first time since 2009 that two bands from the same organisation have won World titles on the same day. They also secured the Champion of Champions prize for bands and drumming, with Kilmarnock taking Best Drum Corps on the day. In *Piping Today* issue 77 pipe major Keith Bowes snr spoke of Johnstone's plans to ultimately have three competing bands across the grading system, and on current form, they are well on track to achieve this in short order.

Glasgow Green erupted with the cheers of parents and supporters when North Lanarkshire Schools were announced as World Champions and Best Drum Corps in Novice Juvenile A. Dollar Academy, the only other band with a chance of winning a grand slam, had to settle for second place, but it was still enough to secure both Champion of Champions titles.

North Lanarkshire Schools made it three World titles out of a possible four in their organisation as their development band also won the drumming in Novice Juvenile B, with 1st Troon Boys' Brigade winning the band prize. A fourth place for drumming gave Preston Lodge High School's development band an eventual

13-point lead in the Champion of Champions table over Lochgelly High School, who in turn wrapped up the Champion of Champions band title by finishing fourth overall.

In the drum majors events, a tearful Paula Braiden of Cullybackey picked up the Adult title, with the Juvenile grade going to Gibb Fraser of Coalburn IOR and Jamie Cupples of Killeen taking the Junior section. The Champions of Champions were Lauren Hanna of Drumlough in the Adult grade, Emma Barr of Field Marshal Montgomery in Juvenile and Jamie Cupples in Junior.

With the weather thankfully much kinder on the Saturday than it had been for the Grade 1 qualifiers the previous day, the only thing that could have spoiled the moment for those bands delighted with their results was the infuriatingly late hour at which the final prizes were announced. After a full day's competition starting at 9am victorious bands were still playing their way back to their buses 12 hours later, having waited their turn for pictures to be taken at the Champions board. The sorry sight of the tiny handful of bands remaining in position after the Grade 1 announcement being asked to play *Scotland the Brave* was a limp anti-climax to what should be one of the most memorable days of a World Champion's life.

In all fairness to the RSPBA, this situation has resulted from the association acting in total compliance with the wishes of their members. The gist of the feedback provided by bands after the trial of the two-day format in 2013 was: the format of the competition works well, but a one-day contest is preferable, and if two days are necessary it should be Friday-Saturday. By keeping the structure the same but shifting the Grade 1 qualifiers to Friday with everything else on Saturday, this is precisely what the RSPBA have done. However, following this recommendation has in fact exacerbated the very problem that trialling a two-day Worlds was supposed to fix: the competition has grown too big for a single day.

Thankfully, there is a relatively simple solution. It is surely time to act on the concerns raised by other commentators in recent weeks and find an alternative to the unsustainably bloated marchpast. One way of reducing the time to get bands on the field and simultaneously provide more of a spectacle for the paying public would be to have massed bands playing on to the field in waves, as is common at contests in North America and some smaller games



Perth Metro Pipe Band, Grade 3B World Pipe Band Champions

'A two-hour marchpast and prize-giving ceremony starting at 6:30pm is simply too much to ask of even the most patient of bandsmen, particularly those with long bus rides home'



Ullapool & District Pipe Band, Grade 4A World Pipe Band Champions

in Scotland. The RSPBA have clearly shown willingness to embrace change by shifting the Worlds to two days, now some similar thinking is needed to keep the current format a success all the way through the day. As it stands, a two-hour marchpast and prize-giving ceremony starting at 6.30pm is simply too much to ask of even the most patient of bandsmen, particularly those with long bus rides home.

It is a shame such a change is necessary, because the 2016 edition proved once again that the World Pipe Band Championships is a truly momentous and memorable occasion. History is made, dreams are realised and hopes are dashed in equal measure — some by the most excruciating of margins. This year giants of our community bade farewell after close to a lifetime of continuous service. It is entirely possible that

somewhere in the ranks of Novice Juvenile and Grade 4, youngsters who will grow up to be the Richard Parkes and Jim Kilpatrick of their generation competed at their first Worlds. While it will be many years before we find out who they are, we can only hope that when the time comes for them to hoist their trophies and be interviewed by the 2066 version of Jackie Bird, they won't have to do it in the dark. ●

COMPETITION LEAGUE FOR

10 questions with Gordon Hislop



Gordon receives his medal as the CLASP Overall Winner of Grade 1 for season 2015/16. The medal is presented by Craig Munro of Wallace Bagpipes who are now the sponsors of the CLASP competitions for 2016/17.

Q. Where do you come from and how did you get into playing the bagpipes?

I'm from Edinburgh and learnt to play at school. When it came to joining the OTC, the pipe band seemed a better option than square bashing. We were taught by Jimmy Pryde, of *Amazing Grace* fame, and I can still hear him now: "What's all this hilarity? You'se are no' here tae enjoy yersels."

Q. What is your current bagpipe set up?

I have a set of Sinclairs, which belonged to my father's cousin, Iain K Murray, a plastic McCallum chanter and a Gannaway bag. I use a MacLellan chanter reed, with a Henderson bass and EzeeDrone tenors. I won my bag cover a few years ago — can I admit that, or does it preclude me from amateur competition?

Q. Do you have a regular tutor and practice routine?

Tom Speirs has been teaching me piobaireachd for the last couple of years. His eyes begin to glaze over when I ask for light music tuition, though.

Q. What is your day job and does it allow you enough time to keep the pipes going?

I'm a Clinical Geneticist at Ninewells Hospital in Dundee. Some days, finding time to play the pipes piping in the evening isn't a luxury, it's an absolute necessity to retain even a nodding acquaintance with sanity.

Q. You have been a member of CLASP for quite a number of years now, have you noticed improvements in your playing with the regular competition league?

Undoubtedly. Playing in front of a judge, who you may have heard playing at a Gold Medal, and even (occasionally) playing for a small audience, allows you to find out how well you really know a tune. The crit sheets often have a useful nugget of detail; the ones you disagree with the most are the ones to pay most attention to.

Q. If someone was thinking of joining CLASP, what would your advice to them be?

Look after your birl finger.

Q. Do you have a favourite CLASP competition and, if so, why?

The Army School of Piping in Edinburgh, maybe. It usually has a good field, and the panelled room with vaulted ceiling is a great venue.

Q. Have you ever played in a pipe band or fancied the idea?

I played in a band at school but haven't considered it since, largely due to the commitment and the responsibility. For solo piping I can choose the tunes I want to play, practice when it suits, and if I screw up a performance, I haven't let anyone else down.

Q. What are your piping ambitions?

If I can beat Gill Cairns in a piobaireachd competition just once this year, I'll be happy

Q. Is there anything your fellow CLASP members do not know about you?

Well, they still talk to me, so there must be. ●

Gill wins New York prize at the Worlds CLASP



Eric and Maureen Stein presenting Gill Cairns with the all expenses paid trip to compete at the amateur section of the Metro Cup in New York, 2017. Gill was the Overall Winner in the Grade 1 World Solo Amateur Piping Championships

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

WORLD SOLO AMATEUR PIPING COMPETITION August 9-11, 2016

OVERALL WINNERS: Grade 1 Gill Cairns;
Grade 2 Colin Brown; Grade 3 Ian Kirkwood

GRADE 1

Piobaireachd: 1. Gill Cairns; 2. Gordon Hislop;
3. Andrea Zingg

2/4 March, Strathspey and Reel:

1. Stuart Peters; 2. Karen McLean; 3. Gill Cairns

Hornpipe & Jig: 1. Stewart Gaudin; 2. Gill Cairns;
3. Karen McLean

GRADE 2

Piobaireachd: 1. Con Houlihan;
2. James Carnegie; 3. Colin Taylor

2/4 March:

1. Andrea Zingg;
2. Con Houlihan; 3. Colin Brown

Strathspey and Reel:

1. John Campbell;
2. Con Houlihan; 3. Stephen Ross

Jig:

1. Stephen Ross; 2. Colin Brown;
3. James Carnegie



Photo: Alister Sinclair

The CLASP competitors at the Inveraray Highland Games. From left: George Gordon, Gill Cairns, Con Houlihan, Stewart Gaudin, Ian Graham, Gordon Hislop.



Grade 2 overall winner Colin Brown with sponsor, Craig Munro of Wallace Bagpipes

GRADE 3

Piobaireachd: 1. William Copland; 2. Ian Kirkwood
3. Stewart Allan

Piobaireachd ground: 1. Stewart Allan;
2. Andrew Richardson; 3. Ian Kirkwood

2/4 March: 1. Aaron Yeung; 2. Colin Campbell;
3. Ian Kirkwood

Strathspey and Reel: 1. Aaron Yeung;
2. Andrew Richardson; 3. William Copland

Jig: 1. Ian Kirkwood; 2. Aaron Yeung;
3. Andrew Richardson

CLASP results from around the Highland Games

LUSS HIGHLAND GAMES July 2, 2016

GRADE 1

Piobaireachd: 1. Robert Low; 2. Robert Frater;
3. John Frater

2/4 March: 1. Robert Frater; 2. Robert Low;
3. John Frater

Stathspey and Reel: 1. Robert Frater;
2. Gregor McCulloch; 3. John Frater

GRADE 2

Piobaireachd: 1. Gregor McCulloch; 2. Gill Cairns;
3. George Gordon

2/4 March: 1. George Gordon; 2. Helen Thomson

Stathspey and Reel: 1. Gill Cairns;
2. George Gordon; 3. Helen Thomson

GRADE 3

Piobaireachd: 1. Colin Campbell

ROSNEATH HIGHLAND GAMES July 17, 2016

GRADE 1

Piobaireachd: 1. Robert Low; 2. Stewart Gaudin;
3. Gordon Hislop

2/4 March: 1. Robert Low; 2. Stewart Gaudin;
3. Gordon Hislop

GRADE 2

Piobaireachd: 1. Gill Cairns; 2. Con Houlihan;
3. Janette Greenwood

2/4 March: 1. Gill Cairns; 2. Stewart Allan;
3. George Gordon

GRADE 3

Piobaireachd: 1. Stewart Allan; 2. William Copland

2/4 March: 1. William Copland

INVERARAY HIGHLAND GAMES July 19, 2016

GRADE 1

Piobaireachd: 1. Ian Graham; 2. Stewart Gaudin;
3. Gordon Hislop

2/4 March: 1. Stewart Gaudin; 2. Gordon Hislop;
3. Ian Graham

Stathspey and Reel: 1. Stewart Gaudin;
2. Gordon Hislop; 3. Ian Graham

GRADE 2

Piobaireachd: 1. Andrea Zingg; 2. Gill Cairns;
3. George Gordon

2/4 March: 1. Con Houlihan; 2. Gill Cairns;
3. Stewart Allan

Stathspey and Reel: 1. Stewart Allan;
2. Con Houlihan; 3. George Gordon

GRADE 3

Piobaireachd: 1. Stewart Allan; 2. William Copland

2/4 March: 1. William Copland

Stathspey and Reel: 1. William Copland

by Stuart Milne

Piping Live! 2016

THE GLASGOW INTERNATIONAL PIPING FESTIVAL 2016

WHILE *Moments that Matter* may have been the official slogan of *Piping Live!* 2016, it would also be fair to dub this year's festival "the year of the singing pipers". The line-up was as varied as you could ask for – there were Highland pipers, folk pipers, uilleann pipers, Cape Breton pipers, Asturian pipers, Slovak pipers, and even the occasional drummer (apparently there was a pipe band competition at the end of the week). One striking similarity between performers was just how many put down their pipes and whistles to break into song – proof if ever it was needed that there is much more to us than the shortbread tin/tourist calendar cliché.

The festival started in thoroughly traditional manner, however, with the Masters' Solo Piping Competition taking place all day in The National Piping Centre auditorium on Monday, August 8. Finlay Johnston won the Piobaireachd event with Gordon Walker taking the MSR, leaving Angus MacColl's second placings in both events enough to secure the overall title and the invitation to the Glenfiddich championship at Blair Castle in October.

National Piping Centre Principal Roddy MacLeod MBE was perhaps the busiest man in Glasgow for the entire week, competing himself in the Masters' while having the small matters of the festival to run and a Grade 1 band to prepare for the World Championships. Nonetheless he took time out of his schedule to lead a massed band of volunteer pipers and drummers (and even a few learners on practice chanters) marching in a short parade to formally kick off the week's music programme in George Square, in the company of his Spirit of Scotland colleagues Finlay Johnston, Jim Kilpatrick MBE and Tyler Fry.

Glasgow's city centre hub was treated to an international line-up of pipe band performances throughout the week, including Greater Midwest from the USA, Edmonton Youth from Canada, Manawatu Scottish Society from New Zealand, Balagan from Denmark and some with less distance to travel. Unfortunately the fickle Glaswegian weather drove more than a few bands playing later in the week into the adjoining music tent, which at least gave bandsmen the chance to keep the moisture in their instruments to a minimum ahead of the Worlds.

Over its 13-year history *Piping Live!* has been a launch pad for bands that have become firm fixtures in the Scottish folk scene, and the 2016 festival's *Emerging Talent* series showcased a number of rising stars who we can expect to hear more from in the future.

A substantial crowd gathered at the Street Café on the NPC steps to enjoy the first-ever gig from Robyn McKay and Friends. Given her extensive musical experience,





including several years with the St Laurence O'Toole organisation, a spell at the National Centre of Excellence in Traditional Music in Plockton and current studies at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, it is hardly surprising that she has found a group of five equally talented companions to make music with. The group have a rich, vibrant sound and it was refreshing to hear virtually all their material is composed by Robyn herself. The standout item on their setlist is her song written to the haunting melody of Gordon Duncan's *The Sleeping Tune*, about a woman seeking passage on a ship to escape a lifetime of misery with an abusive husband. Her singing voice combines the gentleness of Kate Rusby with the Scots lilt of Fiona Hunter,

and she can also turn on a bit of forceful projection when she wants to.

In contrast to the fresh-off-the-laptop material of Robyn's band, Italian duo Franco Calanca and Mario Lipparini then proceeded to take the Street Café back many centuries in time with music from their native Bologna region, heavily influenced by other Celtic traditions such as Ireland and Galicia, and played exquisitely on the Italian piva emiliana bagpipe, guitar and Celtic harp.

Smallpipe and recorder player Callum Armstrong was a sensation at last year's festival, and made a welcome return to *Piping Live! 2016* with his unique brand of double-chantered pipes, unorthodox finger technique and lively original compositions. He also

happens to have a hand in recreating Ancient Greek music, and is set to enthrall and inform a wide variety of audiences for years to come.

Entertainment is certainly something associated with Ross Ainslie and Ali Hutton in bucketloads, and the Treacherous Orchestra pipers closed out day one of the Street Café with a selection of tunes from their eagerly awaited new album *Symbiosis*. Thankfully it would not be the last time these two were heard at the festival, with Monday's show whetting the appetite for their closing concert six days later.

Another singing piper from a very different tradition got Tuesday's music underway in the form of Lubomir Tatarka and the United Drones of Slovakia. The group

rotated between various Slovak bagpipes and the giant fujara flute — imagine a didgeridoo held in caber-tossing position, with the blow-hole in the middle and the finger holes at the bottom. No microphones were necessary when Lubomir burst into song, his booming voice projecting across half of Glasgow. It was also welcome to hear the group explain the background to their repertoire, much of which comes from the Slovak pastoral tradition — the music tends to be slow and simple for the basic reason that the shepherds had plenty of time to kill out in the hills all day with their sheep.



Sales for ticketed events at this year's festival were among the strongest ever, and the 2016 line-up of lunchtime recitalists was always going to draw a big crowd. Stuart Liddell took the Tuesday afternoon slot with a typically dazzling performance, effortlessly fielding audience requests without seeming to have a care in the world.

Those still craving more solo piping were able to simply step outside for the ever-popular pipe major and leading drummer recital sponsored by *pipes|drums*. This year the participants were Andrew Hayes and Brendan Kelly of Ottawa Police Service, Calum Watson (standing in for Ross Harvey) and Gordon Brown of Peoples Ford – Boghall & Bathgate Caledonia and Roddy MacLeod and Jim Kilpatrick of Spirit of Scotland. Many in the Street Café crowd, which very nearly spilled over into the traffic on Cowcaddens Road, took the opportunity to enjoy one of Jim's final appearances as a leading drummer before his retirement at the end of the week, with the showman duly treating them to an enthralling mashup of some of the most famous fanfares from his 50 years in pipe band drumming.

Down at George Square a trio of musicians at the other end of the career spectrum were making the audience tap their toes in the music tent. Ross Miller combines his emerging track record on the solo piping circuit with a wealth of Grade 1 band experience despite his age, latterly with Boghall & Bathgate and now at Inveraray & District. His studies at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and joint leadership of The National Youth Pipe Band have also seen him step boldly into the more folky side of piping, on this occasion in the company of fiddler Charlie Stewart and guitarist Luc McNally. Their arrangement of Bill Livingstone's retreat march *Leaving Arisaig* and the reel *Aye, Right* is a particular



treat, and it was refreshing to see from Ross's Fred Morrison-like 'gig face' the sadly rare spectacle of a piper clearly enjoying his music – perhaps those smiley, oft-ridiculed tenor drummers are onto something after all?

The International Quartet Competition, supported by RT Shepherd & Son, has become the must-have ticket for the Tuesday evening of *Piping Live!*, particularly when Inveraray & District are in the line-up. The Argyllshire outfit continued their remarkable run of form in this contest to once again lift the title and all-important bottles of Glenfiddich awarded to each piper, seeing off competition from Dowco Triumph Street, New Zealand Police, Bagad Cap Caval, Spirit of Scotland, Police Scotland Fife, the 78th Highlanders (Halifax Citadel) and Johnstone, the first Grade 2 band to take part in the event.

Anyone in need of a calm and collected morning after a late night at the Festival Club, which throughout the week provided an excellent opportunity for fans to track down artists they missed during the day, was able to find solace in the tranquil Renaissance/Baroque repertoire of the Bourdon Collecteif from Belgium. The six players, all Flemish speakers but mostly playing music that would have been heard at the French court centuries ago, created a gentle sound with a combination of two musettes, cello, violin, and what may have been a *Piping Live!* début for the harpsichord. Later on the pipers switched to larger instruments with double chanters, giving rise to the possibility that Callum Armstrong's experiments with such pipes in the UK are somehow connected to a wider European tradition — is there a PhD thesis in there somewhere?

Following Willie McCallum's lunchtime recital spot on Wednesday, ceol mor enthusiasts suddenly found themselves spoilt for choice. While the Piobaireachd Society put on an informal taster session of big music with help from renowned soloists Bruce Gandy and Murray Henderson in the Street Café, upstairs in the NPC auditorium Colin MacLellan put on a fascinating presentation of a new book of the complete ceol mor compositions of his late father, Captain John A. MacLellan MBE, which includes *The Edinburgh Piobaireachd*, *The Phantom Piper of Corrieyairack*, and *For My Lass – Fair, Pretty and Highland*. In addition to performances from Colin himself and his wife Jenny Hazzard, who now plays Captain MacLellan's pipes, Colin talked the audience through the stories behind the tunes and some of the important personalities in his father's life. Hopefully the days are long behind us when it was acceptable for a profoundly deaf piping judge to exclaim very loudly to his colleague as a competitor entered the venue: "I don't like this man's playing!" The presentation also made excellent use of the projector screen, which amongst other things showed archive images of the Forth Road Bridge being built as the audience listened raptly to *Farewell to the Queen's Ferry*, which went out of service following the bridge's completion in 1964.



It was a highly engaging and informative hour and a quarter that imparted a great deal of insight into the compositions and character of one of the leading post-war pipers.

There was just about time afterwards to nip back down to George Square to catch the David Shedden Trio, featuring David himself on pipes and whistles alongside Innes White on guitar and Graham MacKenzie on fiddle, creating a delightful blend of instruments evoking the sound of early Breabach.

Nova Scotian duo Matt MacIsaac and Mac Morin were busy creating their own brand of head-bopping music back at the Street Café. Matt's story of how he ended up joining the Canadian military after losing his passport in what Glaswegians would call a "belter" of a week in Barcelo-

lona is alone worth the admission price to any of his future gigs.

After finishing his set Matt then had to fight his way past the out-the-door queue of punters waiting desperately to catch one of his band's final practices before the Grade 1 qualifiers —



understandable given the band in question was the star-studded Spirit of Scotland, forced indoors by the misbehaving weather that would continue to frustrate bandsmen and festival-goers alike for the next couple of days.

Those without a ticket to Field Marshal Montgomery's sold-out *IMPACT* concert at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall or simply not into the pipe band scene were able to enjoy an evening of music from the quieter varieties of Scottish bagpipes, courtesy of the Lowland and Borders Pipers Society in The National Piping Centre auditorium.

The same venue was packed to the rafters again on Thursday morning as Fred Morrison launched his new line of uilleann pipes, made with his long-time collaborators McCallum Bagpipes. In between sets Fred gamely deconstructed the mysterious workings of the Irish bagpipe

in his inimitably entertaining way, happily taking audience questions in the process.



Just as The National Piping Centre played host to its lunchtime recital series throughout the week, including Angus MacColl on Thursday, across the River Kelvin the College of Piping catered for ceol mor and pipe band enthusiasts alike with afternoon performances. Youngest-ever Clasp winner Callum Beaumont played *Lament for the Earl of Antrim* as Thursday's *Piobaireachd of the Day*, alongside a selection of light music, with Lomond & Clyde of Grade 2 filling in admirably as *Pipe Band of the Day* on very short notice. With new pipe major David Wilton understandably focusing on competition material instead of concert repertoire in his first season in charge, the expanded mini-band of 10 pipers, four snares, bass and three tenors simply treated the audience to virtually their entire repertoire, in addition to a Gordon Duncan-inspired solo from young piper Calum Kaye. Their consistency in the Grade 2 prize list this season and finely crafted medley, centred on the chilling Runrig song *Chi M'in Geamhradh*, mean there is no doubting Lomond & Clyde remain a band to watch under their dynamic new leadership.



was rewarded with the winner's set of Fred Morrison Reelpipes and an interview with Jackie Bird on the BBC's Worlds highlights programme.

After a brief interlude, the oldest event in the pre-World's calendar made a welcome return under a new name. For many years the Lord Todd Recital Challenge saw four of the world's

top pipers entertain the crowd at Strathclyde University's Todd Bar on the Thursday night before the Worlds. The Pipe Major Alasdair Gillies Memorial Recital Challenge now honours the memory of one of its most beloved participants, whom the piping world sadly lost on the day of the Cowal Championships in 2011. Despite the unfamiliar setting the 30-minute recital format remains the same, and this year it was Angus



Given the thoroughly international mixture of musicians that characterises the *Piping Live!* festival, there could have been no more fitting occasion for respected Canadian piper, adjudicator and BBC commentator Bob Worrall to launch Book Three of his *International Collection*. Performing tunes from the book were Bob himself, Michael Grey, Chris Armstrong, Roddy MacLeod and Willie McCallum, who performed the fabulous 2/4 march he composed for his father in public for the first time since Willie snr's passing in April. The event was also a chance for the audience to hear a rare performance from John Wilson, latterly famous as a judge but also a double Gold Medallist and winner of other major solo prizes even as a teenager, in addition to his illustrious career with Strathclyde Police on and off the competition park.



In the evening the only place to be for those not busy practising for the Worlds was the Strathclyde Suite of the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall for a mouth-watering double-header of solo piping. First up were the teenagers Callum Craib, Robbie MacIsaac, John Campbell and Harry McLachlan in the final of the ever-popular Pipe Idol competition. Given the criticism often levelled at younger pipers for playing technically demanding but unappealing material at excessively high tempos on occasions like these, it was delightful to hear performances that were at once enrapturing, controlled and thoroughly musical. After a very closely-fought contest Callum Craib

MacColl versus Inveraray & District in the form of pipe major Stuart Liddell, pipe sergeant Alasdair Henderson and corner piper Callum Beaumont. While Angus may have received the loudest cheer of the evening for his downright outrageous rendition of Fred Morrison's hornpipe *The Hard Drive*, the scintillating Stuart Liddell was declared the winner.

Alongside the World Championship Grade 1 qualifiers, there was still a full festival programme on the Friday. Those in need of some cheering up after a miserable day on Glasgow Green due to their results and/or the weather could find solace in the frenetic energy of Lorne MacDougall closing out the week's music in George Square with Ross Kennedy on bouzouki. An unusual element of audience participation elevated proceedings still further — this *Piping Live!* crowd can sing a mean B♭. Later in the evening an altogether different audience packed into The National

Piping Centre's auditorium for the Glasgow Uist & Barra Association's 80th birthday party for Rona Lightfoot, the renowned singer and piper who acted as a trailblazer for female competitors in an age when Scotland's traditional music establishment was firmly and fiercely dominated by men. Performers included pipers Margaret Dunn and Dr Angus MacDonald alongside Gaelic singers Sineag MacIntyre and Julie Fowles, with Rona making a welcome musical contribution to conclude the evening. Meanwhile, across town the Anxo Lorenzo trio from Galicia teamed up with Scotland's RURA and the David-Shedden Trio for the first *Piping Live!* event at the Drygate Brewery.



The Red Hot Chilli Pipers have such a large and devoted following of their own that they had no bother filling Sauchiehall Street's famous 02 ABC on Saturday night for the After-Worlds Shindig — just as well considering anyone braving proceedings on Glasgow Green to the bitter end before heading for the venue via a much-needed fish supper only had time for the last two sets of their encore, so late were the final prizes announced. No wonder St Laurence O'Toole members Craig Munro and World Drum Corps Champion Grant Cassidy had to leave the field and change into their Chillis uniforms long before their band's results were announced.

At a forgiving hour on Sunday afternoon the penultimate event of the festival began in the shape of the Gordon Duncan Memorial Competition. While photographs in the sleeves of his three albums show Gordon was a prolific solo prize-winner in his youth, the one contest that seems to have captured his heart as an adult is the Macallan Trophy at the Lorient festival in Brittany, and it is fitting that the event held in his honour follows the Scottish, Irish and Breton mixture of music, competitors and judges that meant so much to him. This year the pipers were David Shedden, Robert Watt and Hervé Le Floc'h, with the latter two

taking their respective national sections and the Bagad Cap Caval pipe major also winning the Scottish element to secure the overall title. In contrast to the early years of this competition when the Scottish section solely comprised an MSR, it was thrilling to hear so many of Gordon's best-loved tunes being played in the presence of his family.

As if that wasn't enough, it was left to two of Gordon's most famous pupils, Ross Ainslie and Ali Hutton, to close out *Piping Live! 2016* in grand style. Mostly playing material from their new album in the company of Duncan Lyall on

bass and Moog synth, Steve Byrnes on guitar and Martin O'Neill on bodhran, plus special guests including Gordon's son Gordy jnr, the dynamic duo did what they do best — let the crowd have a party with as few inhibitions as they wished. While a few tunes were of course from the pen of their mentor, there is no hiding the fact that Ross and Ali can write themselves. The retreat march written by Ali for his grandmother and performed first on guitar and then pipes was the musical highlight of the evening, if not the entire week, and is crying out to be used as a pipe band medley opener.

Reflecting on the diversity of the festival as its final evening died away, one obvious common thread was the versatility of so many performers. There was a time not so long ago when pipers straddling the worlds of solo, pipe band and folk playing was not only unusual, it was actively frowned upon. But for the current crop of young pipers, such barriers simply don't exist anymore. They are equally comfortable on the solo boards as they are under the watchful eyes of the BBC cameras in the Worlds Grade 1 Arena and on stage in front of a crowd of revellers looking for a good time. They can write their own music and, on the evidence of this year's festival, plenty of them even sing.

This generation can do it all. ●

A conversation with

THE Highland bagpipe is well represented throughout Europe. The pomp and regalia of regimental piping, the Tattoo, the street march — all these aspects have been adopted throughout virtually every country that has embraced the Highland piping idiom, regardless of their own piping heritage. Pipe bands are becoming more or less commonplace from Kelvingrove to the Kremlin. Piobaireachd is as well known in Brittany as it is in Ballachulish.

It is no coincidence that during this time The National Piping Centre has been holding many summer schools, recitals and competitions in Europe. It is, however, the almost underground development of piping that is making inroads into how Europeans will be experiencing pipe music in the 21st century; and the proponents of this change are no strangers to pushing the envelope, especially when it comes to experimentation and development of music.

Allan MacDonald is renowned for his deep philosophical approach to pibroch and his encyclopaedic catalogue of music both old and new. Both volumes of his *Moidart Collection* are without a doubt two of the most influential collections of music in the modern idiom of pipe music. Thomas Zoeller — one of the pioneers of junior practice chanters, designed for the smaller hands of young players desperate to start early — also has the *Dudelsak-Akademie*, a leader in teaching and development of piping in Germany.

Individually, Thomas Zoeller and Allan MacDonald are no strangers to change. Together, however, they have achieved some incredible things. They have co-developed several apps for iPhone and Android platforms to assist youthful pipers with a more organic style of learning. Approaching both the basics of the chanter and the mixolydian scale, they extended this app based learning to include a scholarly, yet accessible introduction to the mysteries of canntaireachd. Since 2005, they have been extending the boundaries of piping with the folk enclave Homebound.

I spoke to Thomas and Allan about their shared vision and love of pibroch, their music and the freedom they find in taking a pan-global idiom of music to the people. Like many of these piping stories, theirs began at The National Piping Centre.

Thomas started: “My first encounter with



Allan was in 2001 when I was at the NPC for an intensive course of study. I was passing the practice rooms when I became entranced with a pibroch I heard through a closed door.” It was like nothing Thomas had heard before, yet it was familiar nonetheless.

On the other side of that door Allan MacDonald was playing the ground to a lament in his own inimitable. In 2002 Thomas auditioned for and was accepted into the Bachelor of Scottish Music (Piping) from the RSAMD and he introduced himself. To cut a long story short, Allan and Thomas found in each other a kindred spirit, and what started as a chance encounter would lead to over a decade of musical and teaching collaboration, culminating in a series of interactive learning tools for smart phone and computer tablets.

Their continuing teaching, the joining of scholarly endeavour, both within the Scottish standard and the incredibly diverse European piping realm, led to further investigation of drone based music, but also differing principles

of teaching that could be applied across all ages and levels of musical education.

Thomas continued: “The bagpiping app was more than just an educational tool. We looked deeply at the basics of education, not just for developing the lingua franca of the music for pipers and students of the music, but for anyone; musicians who may have had an interest in the genre, but needed a reference point to start.”

Helping to understand the challenges of the mixolydian scale and the history of the music also tied into the second app Allan and Thomas produced, that of a basic learning tool for young players. By assisting them to learn aurally as well as traditionally, they utilised the 21st century obsession with smartphones.

Thomas added: “Offering game based learning is fine, there are no problems for me to change the way of learning. It captures the visuals and moving graphics that kids these days are so used to. In looking and listening, it can be used anywhere — on the train or a bus.”

Despite the success of the app, and the ca-

Thomas and Allan

by Stuart Curnow

HOMEBOUND AND BEYOND



‘In competition, I felt I was just going through the motions — doing what was expected’

capacity of it to bring understanding to a broad range of musicians, Allan takes a different tack when talking about teaching and the use of canntaireachd.

He said: “I don’t believe canntaireachd is as important in this modern age with technological and recording possibilities. It is an important original source, as it gives us the melody clearly with minimal decoration and is a reference point for those who teach — but the Campbell Canntaireachd tends towards a literate production rather than an aural one.”

Allan has often been vocal in his criticism of standardisation and historical control of the music: “Pibroch, especially in competition, for me never had any cultural validity. In competition, I felt I was just going through the motions — doing what was expected. People debate as to how it should be performed to a set of rules.

The tutor, by providing aural sounds, would place his own emphasis on a certain phrasing, again, reinforcing rules. All the performer would be doing is parroting the tutor.”

Allan has approached the big music from a historical linguistic context with great academic success; and while he is on the record as stating that control of music threatens to stymie its growth, you cannot deny the musical beauty of the Gaelic vocables in canntaireachd and their use to inflect emotion, tempo and timbre. Allan voice alone has been one of the most iconic attachments to the piobaireachd canon in the last 30 years. It has brought more to the appreciation and understanding of pipe music for students of Celtic culture, than can be discussed here. His voice is ubiquitous, and has become evocative of Highland musical culture whether he likes it or not.

His collaboration with Margaret Stewart on their two significant and culturally important albums, *Colla mo Run* and *Fhuair Mi Pog*, helped define the renaissance of piobaireachd in the late 20th century. However, it was his emotive command of canntaireachd, used to brilliant effect on John Mulhearn’s cutting edge musical project *The Extraordinary Little Cough* and his sonorous and evocative Gaelic on Ian Morrison’s *Eas*, that provides the most effective counterpoint to his own argument.

Working with Thomas on Homebound presented Allan with another opportunity to shake off the chains of musical conformity.

As vigorous as Allan can get about historical, cultural and musical rigidity, he is also lacking in pretension when it comes to actually describing music. He said: “It was great when the CD was released, I could find out what the band I was playing in actually was. *Jazz-folk-fusion?* You only ever need to define music for marketing purposes, when you play from the heart, it doesn’t matter what it is called.”

Thomas describes Homebound differently. He is almost philosophical when he talks about music, but it’s philosophy with passion. Thomas said: “The idea was to define a concert full of the music that I had experienced in Scotland, but also to allow the collected musicians to present what they believed. Homebound was a journey that would bring musicians together to make audible what they have in common, their essence as musicians. In most of our cases, it was the drone. Drone based music has always fascinated me, regardless of the culture or the technical differences. Whether it is a single drone, or a mixture of drones and chanters, the aim was to combine the musical ethos of all these instruments and the musicians and see what became of it.

The eclectic mix of Homebound’s music springs from many sources. The influence of India sits easily with the both Gaelic and the bagpipe, especially the tanpura, the classical Indian string instrument that plays only as a single drone note.

Thomas explained: “There are so many traditional uses of a drone, and the musical glue for Homebound is the drone. It represents the foundation of so many musical traditions around the globe, providing a tonic as well as important harmonics. You can find it in the Great Highland Bagpipe, but also in Indian music. The difference is that Indian music

'One of the only pipers able to make a living through competitions was John MacColl. You can't do that these days. There has to be more to what we do with the music'

dedicates a whole instrument to the drone and Indian musicians have described it as the soul of Indian classical music. Then you have vocal traditions such as Mongolian deep throat chant that uses harmonics, or the Australian didgeridoo and Yidaki, that, also through the intense physical connection (circular breathing), has been used as a ritual instrument. So we took the essence, the spirit and inspiration that musicians draw from this monotonous sound as the link for our music – and our latest album *Adroneline*.”

Thomas continued: “Homebound started off as a one-off performance, like a closure to a period, but it became more successful than we expected, so we looked to expand it to a series of performances and a CD. Keeping the experiment going will be a challenge, even though as a group, we are enjoying the playing more and more with each gathering.”

The strength of this experiment is evident both from the longevity of its performers and the audience it attracted. What started as a single concert to mark the end of a point in Thomas's life grew into something else, and almost a decade later, is still providing a beautiful outlet for strong cross cultural expression.

Allan agreed: “In this world of instant availability of music, it can be hard to find an individual audience and to keep it going. When we took *The Bruce 700* to Germany, and played it with *Homebound*, the two collections of music together sold very well post performance. While the music worked very well on the day, and people bought all the CDs we had, all the work to put it together, the numbers of people involved, the geographic location of the musicians... to keep that momentum going is very difficult.”

Such is the strength of both the availability of traditional and trad-fusion music in Scotland and the wider world, coupled with the advances in recording and the availability of fresh music on the internet, developing a long term following can be very elusive. This is good for the listener but can increase the struggle for the musician to find a constant following and as a result, most professional musicians in piping today have had to significantly expand their playing repertoire to survive.

I asked both Allan and Thomas if they felt making music a profession was becoming easier, or more difficult?

Allan said: “We have a great course in the RSAMD, and when I was teaching, I didn't really encourage, or discourage for that matter, anyone to pursue any specific musical style over another. If they wanted to play folk, that was fine. If they wanted to compete on the boards, I'd ask what tunes they wanted to play and show them how I would play it. That was a bit of a problem for me, musically and intellectually because this place I was teaching at was a music college. It was an educational institution and I felt we should be equipping the students to make a living as a musician, not just making them a great performer.”

I asked if this came down to the student piper's predisposition towards competition?

Allan said: “For me, teaching is difficult in that circumstance. My ideas, my beliefs in music have nothing to do with the reality that was going on in the way of competitions. In the early years, one of the only pipers able to make a living through competitions was John MacColl. You can't do that these days. There has to be more to what we do with the music. Shouldn't we be helping people to turn this around and find a career in the music?”

“There are implications of all these graduates coming out with competition as the mainstay of their repertoire. There are many more opportunities to explore folk or traditional music with the bagpipe, and it is through these folk and trad crossover bands that they find their voice and a career. As little as five years ago I felt we were stuck in 'competition conservatism', but that seems finally to be changing.”

A national tradition of piping is not restricted to Scotland, although much of what keeps the Great Highland Bagpipe strong throughout Europe is that sense of tradition.

The mystery and the history, whether romantic or real, it all adds to the attraction. That is not to say that the myriad forms of bagpiping don't have their own folklore and their own attraction.

Thomas continued: “I think people from outwith the culture tend to imitate what they see, and if they imitate well, that becomes the norm. This applies to competition as well as amateur performance.”

It may be that there is a growing *pan global* piping tradition, one that defies the single nationalism of an individual instrument, and

this idea could be best described by *Piping Live*. In his studies Thomas has embraced this idea of a pan-cultural instrument with relevance greater than just the Scottish historical idiom, the competition realm or any local musical dialect. The idea of a pan-cultural musical idiom, whether it is a cross pollination of Tunisian, German and Armenian, or a mix of Breton, Bulgarian and English. The bagpipe in all its marvellous forms has a narrative that is worthy of study and a place alongside the Highland pipe.

Allan essentially turned the piping world on its head with his scholarly work on Gaelic language and its effect on piping, and his deep understanding of cultural influence on musical construction. His body of work, whether with Margaret Stewart, *The Highland Sessions* with Mary Anne Kennedy and now with Thomas Zoeller and Homebound, continues to tease the listener, to challenge to their ideas and change their preconceptions.

The opening track of *Homebound Concerts: Live in Germany* gives the best introduction as to what can be achieved by musicians when they set their minds free. *Sunset on Rishikesh* is glorious. Evocative and sublime, it draws the listener in embraces them with the promise of scent and mystery. What follows is an auditory rollercoaster. From *Latha Bha Ridire Ag Ol* to *Fairy Road* to *Fhir A Chinn Duibh*, the music refuses to stand still, it rises and falls — a musical dervish one moment, a mournful lament the next, and their latest offering *Adroneline*, continues from where the original concert left off. These minstrels provides an international musical ride of sheer exuberance.

We will always try to intellectualise emotional constructs around music. Whether it is the controlled environment of piobaireachd versus cultural interpretation of canntaireachd, electric versus acoustic or rock versus pop, the appeal of music goes deeper than just listening to one type of music or playing an instrument 'traditionally'. Maybe that need for understanding goes to the heart of why we are so passionate about music.

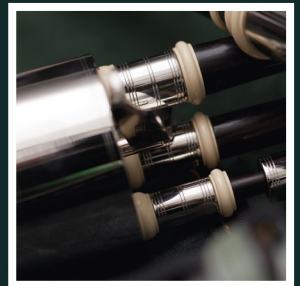
Thomas and Allan show that people from different countries, from diverse cultural backgrounds and languages can achieve commonality simply through music; whether it is through an educational app on a mobile device or a concert comprising a multitude of cultures. The beauty of music shows more of what joins us, than what sets us apart. ●

Fred Morrison

UILLEANN PIPES

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

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by Stuart Milne

Field Marshal Montgomery Pipe Band in concert

GLASGOW SKYE ASSOCIATION PRE-WORLDS CONCERT 2016

NINE years, eight Champion of Champions titles, five World Championships and two grand slams had passed since Field Marshal Montgomery Pipe Band last took to the stage of the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall on the Wednesday before the Worlds. There wasn't a spare seat in the house on August 10, 2016 as the pipe band community flocked to hear the most dominant competition band of our time perform *IMPACT* – with a good few punters no doubt keenly assessing their chances of winning back the World title in one of the most open seasons in recent memory.

In a shrewd marketing move, Field Marshal had announced in January that the band would be taking a retrospective look at their classic competition and concert repertoire from down the years, with the public invited to nominate their favourite sets for the band to play.

As the lights dimmed, the retro theme for the evening was laid down in superbly atmospheric fashion, with a haunting backing track preceding Mary Anne MacKinnon's suite *The Mists of Time* from the band's aptly titled *Début* CD, featuring 21-year FM stalwart Jonathan Greenlees



performing the opening piobaireachd movement from the heights of the auditorium's upper circle. The band then joined in for the chorus part of the piece featured in past medleys before seguing into the jigs *The Piper's Bonnet* and *Donald Cameron's Powder Horn*. In tribute to long-time band president and founding member Billy Maxwell, who passed away in 2013, the first set rounded off with *Maxwell's Bonnet*, the closing tune from the medley that helped FM win their first Grade 1 World title in 1992. It was one of the most original and memorable openings to this concert in recent years, and could scarcely have been more effective in setting the tone for the evening to come.

The choice of compere also plays a major part in creating the atmosphere for a concert, and retired geography teacher and respected RSPBA judge Bob Worrall is very much of the "keep calm and carry on" variety. As is to be expected from his decade as commentator for the BBC's Worlds coverage, he invariably strikes the perfect balance between informing and entertaining the audience, whatever the occasion. Highlights from his job at *IMPACT* included the revelation that Billy Maxwell re-mortgaged his own home to pay for Field Marshal's first set of uniforms, and the

story behind Ryan Canning's two-parted jig *Sparky Cherry*, involving pipe major Richard Parkes MBE and a popular parlour game best played after a certain hour of the evening has been reached.

The following set of hornpipes really showed off the terrific sound from the entire band, helped by the vastly superior venue acoustics compared to the last time this reviewer heard Field Marshal in concert at the Aberdeen Music Hall in 2014. Chris Pollock's bass drum in particular rang loud and true right to the very back of the hall. The band played for most of the evening with a mighty 26 pipers, seven snares and seven tenors. Those listening with a particularly critical ear for the weekend would have noticed that at a few points in the evening, the pipe corps struggled to maintain the stability of their famous drone sound that makes them such feared opponents on the competition park, although Field Marshal's four imperious performances over the course of the Grade 1 contest rendered any such concerns irrelevant in the end.

While there was no return of the video screen used so effectively at *Re:Charged* back in 2007, the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall lighting team did a marvellous job creating ambience to help the audience forget they were mostly staring at a pipe band standing still on a stage for three hours.

Bob Worrall next revealed the 14/8 *Random Star 10* by former Monkstown Mossley leading drummer Gavin Bailie to be the first public-vote choice of the evening – perhaps a surprising inclusion from Field Marshal's first album, but fitting that the innovative Ulsterman's music also be featured following his passing two years ago. The unusual tune was followed by the reels *Jim Blakeley*, *Pipe Major Graeme Hood* and *Smelling Fresh*, and the rounded arrangement of *Pipe Major George Allan* that closed the medley from FM's third grand slam season in 2013.

Field Marshal's pipe corps have been regarded as one of if not the best in the world for many seasons, in no small part due to the





All photos: Alister Sinclair

formidable array of solo players pipe major Parkes has recruited over the years. Four of the band's younger pipers took to the stage to show off their talents, with Kris Koyle, Ross Hume and Connor Sinclair forming a tag team, followed by a stand-alone spot from Bradley Parker. The finger dexterity of all four players was astonishing, although many opted to wow the sell-out crowd by playing at frenetic tempos that, while undoubtedly impressive, may not have

gone down well with everyone in the audience. Moreover, the decision to place Bradley Parker's solo immediately after a tag team rather than break up more of the band, sets later on came over as rather odd.

Next up was the band's No.1 medley, beginning with the hornpipe *A Wee Bit Out of the Ordinary* by Don Bradford, who has penned much of Field Marshal's repertoire over the past 20-odd years. In contrast, the next set of reels bore the hallmarks of the talented young piper and whistle player Scott Wood, who

alongside Alistair Patterson on keyboards, Ron Jappy on guitar, Chris McNicholl on percussion and Jack Smedley on fiddle, comprised one of the most prestigious backing bands to perform at these concerts in a long time.

Following another band set of *Cabar Feidh* in hornpipe form, *The Mason's Apron* in jig time and the FM classic *The Fiddler's Rally*, the stellar line-up was completed by Gaelic singer Catriona Watt to perform *MacLeod's Oran Mor* and *The Shepherd's Crook* alongside the band, before the first half rounded off with the reels from Field Marshal's 2009 Worlds medley, beginning and ending with *The Ness Pipers*.

So far much of the material had been familiar, particularly from recent FM medleys. While some audience members may have been yearning for more new content at the halfway stage, given the stated aim of the concert as being retrospective and a celebration of the band's history, this was perfectly acceptable, especially since much of the repertoire was being interpreted in new ways.

There was indeed some fresh material straight after the break in the form of the march, strathspey and reel that the band had





yet to perform in competition this season: *The Braes of Badenoch*, *Blair Drummond* and *Pretty Marion*. Any concerns about potential cobwebs were blown away by the results of the Friday qualifiers, when this set earned the band straight firsts to breeze to the top of their heat.

Following another beautiful Gaelic air, *Sine Bhan*, and the hornpipes *Tam Bain's Lum* and *John MacKenzie's Fancy*, it was the turn of Andrew Carlisle to reprise his solo spot from 2007's *Re:Charged* concert. Andrew is Professor of Music and Director of Piping at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and has a formidable track record in formal solo competitions, but regular piping audiences will know he likes to really let rip on these occasions. As with the previous solos, the ability to pull off these difficult tunes at such mind-boggling speed is a talent to be saluted, but may have turned off more traditionally-minded listeners.

The music of the late, great Gordon Duncan also displeased the more conservative elements

of the piping establishment, particularly his ground-breaking use of piobaireachd in ways often considered sacrilegious back in the 90s. A quartet led by Graham Drummond paid tribute to Gordon's genius with a jig-time arrangement of one of his most radical compositions, *Pressed for Time*, with the piobaireachd *The Earl of Seaforth's Salute* played as counterpoint on fiddle. This is arguably the most innovative material Field Marshal have played in a long time, and the tension built by the juxtaposition of the two melodies was released in glorious fashion with another reworked version of perhaps Gordon's most beloved tune, *The High Drive*.

Next, it was the turn of Keith Orr's drummers to honour Bobby Rae, another giant of the Northern Ireland pipe band scene, under whom Keith played in the renowned Royal Ulster Constabulary drum corps. The audience's interest was piqued by the sight of the tenor drummers carrying and initially playing their drums vertically at chest height à la Switzerland's Top Secret Drum Corps. Perhaps the most novel section of the entertaining salute came when four of the side drummers about-faced to play the once-again vertical tenors drums in a style reminiscent of Japanese drumming.



All photos: Alister Sinclair



There could be no better choice for calming the mood after the exuberance of the drum salute than the music of Aly Bain and Phil Cunningham, and the pipe corps' rendition of *The Ruby* marked the best integration thus

far with the backing band in possibly the most musically sophisticated part of the entire show.

A set comprising the 2/4 march *Donald MacLellan of Rothesay* and seven jigs, many familiar from recent medleys, followed, before the audience were treated to one of Field Marshal's all-time greatest hits – the *Sandpiper* medley that ended the band's nine-year winless streak on Glasgow Green to deliver the World title in 2002, and remains one of the most popular tracks from their *Unplugged* album recorded on the same stage. The trademark Field Marshal harmonies lifted the beautifully simple Breton air *La Baum* to new heights before building into *Francis Morton's*, a hornpipe with all the characteristic exuberance of its composer, Fred Morrison. The resurrection of this medley proved a winning strategy once again a few days later as Field Marshal claimed their 65th Grade 1 championship and 11th World title.

The formal part of the evening finished with a final set ending with yet another World Championship-winning medley closer, *The Train Journey North*. After the customary amount of applause, when Bob Worrall returned to the stage he announced the band would perform for an encore the most-requested set in the online polling, which inevitably turned out to be the *Trevor Buckley* medley that won the band back-to-back World titles in 2006/07. The backing musicians came out for one final set of jigs — *The Boys of Ballymote* and *John Patterson's Mare*.

While the show had been very well crafted, with good balance between pipe band-only sets for the purists and more ambitious selections with backing musicians, what happened next

was telling — the sell-out crowd did not, as has become tradition at these concerts, rise to their feet. While last year's headliners Simon Fraser University had marched triumphantly out of the hall to a standing ovation, this time the audience applauded enthusiastically but remained squarely in their seats.

It is doubtless that the band and their backing musicians put a tremendous amount of time, care, work and sweat into the concert, but to be truly special these events require a certain "X" factor, which often no amount of preparation can generate on its own. The reaction of the majority of the audience suggests *IMPACT* just did not have the emotional resonance the band were perhaps hoping for — a concert to be admired but not, on this occasion, to be loved.

It is difficult to gauge the extent to which the band's decision to have a public vote on the repertoire was behind this — while it generated a great deal of online buzz and social media interaction in the build-up to the concert, perhaps there were more than a few disgruntled punters in the crowd unhappy that their favourite did not make the cut? Either way, while the resultant album will doubtless sell well, Field Marshal's stellar medley performance in the Grade 1 Final will likely live longer in the memory of the pipe band fraternity than the concert that preceded it.

Thankfully, however, Richard Parkes' involvement with January's *Live in Ireland 87* project provides hope for the future. Anyone desperate to hear *The Calm Before the Storm* live on stage can always hold out for the *Unplugged* tribute concert at Celtic Connections in 2031. ●

by Timothy Cummings



Theory Top-Up Harmonics:

An introduction to the mysterious overtones in our music

WHEN you come across the word “harmonics”, do mysteriously inconspicuous high notes come to mind, the ones that some people claim they can hear embedded in the sound of drones, and that are apparently used to more finely tune their instrument? If so, you’re not too far off. They are strange things, these harmonics, and you may doubt their existence. But I’m here to tell you they do exist, and not only that, but they are a beautiful and essential natural phenomenon in music and beyond.

Harmonics are ubiquitous: every one of us hears, creates and responds to them many times every single day. They are embedded in every voice, every musical instrument, the ring of a church bell, the ringtones of your phone, the song of a sparrow, the ‘moo’ of a cow, the hum of your refrigerator, the honk of a car horn and even the buzz of a Cessna flying overhead. If you enjoy music and want to get better at listening to it and creating it, harmonics are worth getting to know.

Those of you following the *Theory Top-Up* series and any of the preceding articles I’ve written on musical keys will have encountered a number of analogies relating music to food: comparing musical keys to a bowl of flavoured ice cream, B-minor tunes to salted dark chocolate, and so forth. The worlds of culinary taste and musical sound have a surprising amount in common, particularly in the way that we discern particular flavours and timbres. Sometimes these worlds overlap, such as when someone describes a pipe chanter as sounding “sweet”. For this article, I’m hoping you’ll tolerate an imperfect analogy and a simplified physics lesson in order to help you better understand the world of harmonics.

The harmonics of beer

WHEN young people sip their very first ‘adult’ beverage, such as coffee or beer, their initial reaction is rarely one of immense pleasure. But

over varying amounts of time, palates mature, and the same individuals may find themselves not only enjoying these beverages, but craving them and developing strong preferences for specific types and brands. Sure, part of that craving has to do with the physiological effects of caffeine and alcohol, but people also begin to distinguish why they like one variety over another, singling out subtle differences in aroma, taste, aftertaste, the feel of the drink in the mouth and even appearance.

With this in mind, read the following blurb, plucked from the website of the Stone Corral Brewery, owned by Bret Hamilton, a piper who also hosts the annual Càirdeas gathering (a.k.a. The Vermont Bellowspipe & Fiddle School). This is a description of his *Stampede* double-IPA:

“Meridian, Sterling and Nugget hops showcased against a robust blend of 6 malts. Notes of stone fruit, citrus, honey and resin with a big malt background and assertive hop bitterness.”

Bret, a talented and experienced brewer, has the ability to distinguish a remarkable range of specific flavours effervescing in his frequently blissed-out mouth. Nobody who describes or reviews a beverage such as this ever seems to say that it just tastes like beer. Of course it does taste like beer but that is to speak very broadly. Obviously there’s much more happening in addition to that fundamental beer taste.

The same is true for many other beverages and foods such as coffee, tea, whisky, cheese and so on. We all recognise that on a generic, fundamental level, each of these types of drinks or foods tastes like coffee, tea, whisky, cheese, etc., and that variations in their native soils, climates, source ingredients, production, ageing and packaging all contribute various flavour ‘overtones’, some of which are so slight that only the most gifted sommeliers can detect them by

engaging in peculiar tasting rituals.

You may know that flavours are essentially combinations of chemicals which create a variety of sensory impressions via the taste buds on our tongues. We can distinguish between any number of foods and beverages simply because our taste buds are sensitive to a seemingly infinite combination of these chemicals. If someone were to blindfold you and give you a glass of apple juice and a glass of pear juice, you could immediately distinguish between the two, thanks to your ability to perceive differences in the chemical make-up of each of those juices.

Likewise, if someone were to blindfold you and play a low-A on a Highland pipe chanter and then the same exact note on a clarinet, you could immediately distinguish between the two. But how can your ears ‘taste’ the difference? After all, the chanter and clarinet are both wind instruments made of similar wood, and which produce sound from a cane reed vibrating at the same exact number of beats per second. And they both have vertically arranged sound-holes and a relatively similar shape. So how is it that we hear them as being so different? And how is it that some pipers can hear the difference between a set of Lawrie drones and a set of Henderson drones, even if the pipes had happened to have been made from the same tree, in the same year, reeded with the same reeds, tied into the same type of bag and played by the same player?

The answers to those questions have a lot to do with the harmonics that are naturally embedded within most of the sounds we hear. The way we distinguish harmonics with our ears is a lot like how we distinguish flavours with our tongues. The way we hear harmonics helps us hear the difference between the words “peer” and “poor”. It is the variations in ever-present harmonics that help us distinguish the voices of different people, or different instruments, or the difference between good chanter tone and bad. We pipers, whether consciously or not, also tune our pipes by the way we hear

particular harmonics. And just like with food and drink, we each have different harmonic ‘tastes’, whether or not we’re even aware that those harmonics exist. It could easily be argued that understanding harmonics, and being able to hear and distinguish them, is paramount to becoming a successful piper.

The physics of a vibrating string

Disclaimer: The following is a greatly-simplified physics discussion. If you wish to understand this phenomenon at a more deeply scientific level, I encourage you to talk with an actual physicist and/or study the wealth of material available online.

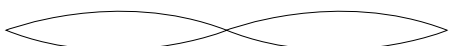
THE simplest and most accessible way to introduce harmonics to you may involve a string. The image below represents a string with nodes at either end. Let’s pretend it’s the A string on a fiddle, with a bridge at one end, and the nut at the other. If you were to bow or pluck the string, it will vibrate, oscillating back and forth along the whole of its length.



Diagram of string vibrating as a whole

THIS vibration produces sound waves, and the most prominent wave produced by the A string on a fiddle produces, unsurprisingly, an A. If it is a standard, well-tuned fiddle, that string will vibrate at a frequency 440 times per second, or 440 hertz (Hz). Any note that is produced from the vibration of the full length of the string, a “standing wave”, is called the *fundamental frequency* (or *fundamental* for short). The fundamental of your Highland pipes’ bass drone is most likely a B \flat in the 120Hz ballpark. The fundamental of your tenor drones would also be a B \flat , but an octave higher, near 240Hz.¹

It’s nothing too complex; but look beyond that fundamental vibration and things start to get a little more interesting. That string can’t leave well enough alone and it’s going to do this crazy thing where it also decides to vibrate in whole-number ratios of its fundamental frequency. At the very same time that string is vibrating along the whole of its length, it is also vibrating at twice the frequency of the fundamental:



A string vibrating at twice the fundamental frequency

1. These are the sounding pitches, based on the assumption you are playing a standard Highland pipe that tunes at competitive pitches.

Being twice the frequency of 440Hz, we therefore have a simultaneous vibration of 880 times per second. As it turns out, 880Hz is also an A, precisely one octave higher than the fundamental. And what that means for you, the listener, is that you’re actually hearing two notes at once, from the very same string: the fundamental A (440Hz) and the A an octave above that (880Hz). The fundamental A, however, is so much stronger that it mostly eclipses the other, which you really have to concentrate to hear. In fact you may not hear it at all at first, or you might think you’re imagining it. But it’s really there, I promise. That secondary A, the much quieter one, is generally called a *harmonic* (or *partial*, or *overtone*).

I can tell this is starting to make you thirsty, so let’s look back to our beer analogy, and imagine that the fundamental 440Hz A (or the string vibrating along its whole length) is the basic, fundamental beer flavour. The 880Hz A, on the other hand, could be analogous to the more specific “stone fruit” presence in the Stampede double-IPA. It’s not the main flavour, but it is palpable and definitely contributes to the overall impression of that particular beer.

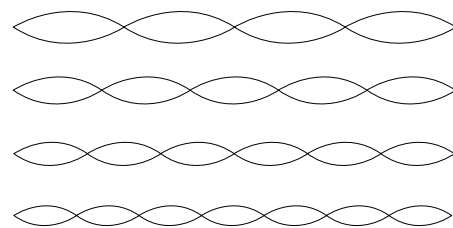
Put down your pint glass for another moment and let me introduce to you the next harmonic that would naturally occur with the aforementioned vibrating string. Not only will this string, when bowed or plucked, vibrate at 440Hz and 880Hz, but it will also be vibrating at three times the fundamental frequency. The harmonic produced from the corresponding 1320Hz is the E above the A at 880Hz (an important interval in music theory called a “perfect fifth”):



A string vibrating at three times the fundamental frequency

Let’s arbitrarily assign this third partial the “citrus notes” of the delectable India Pale Ale. So now we have the fundamental beer taste, and within that we can just barely pick out stone fruit and citrusy flavours (overtones). Make sense?

But wait, there’s more! Our humble fiddle string is busier than you might think. It is also vibrating at four times the fundamental frequency (1760Hz, an A two octaves above), and five times (2200Hz, a C \sharp), and six times (2640Hz, another E), and seven times (3080Hz, a G)... and this pattern goes on, in theory, infinitum:

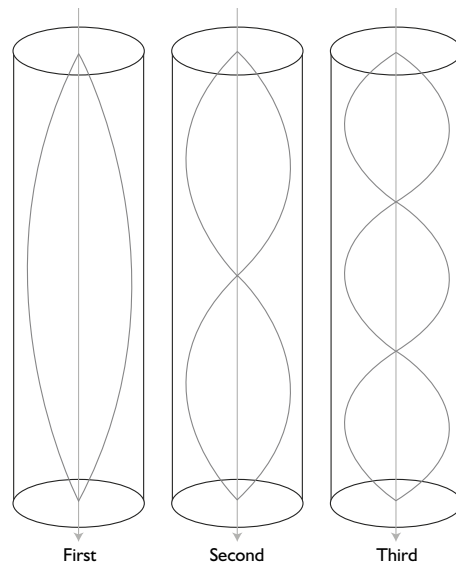


Strings vibrating at four, five, six, and seven times the fundamental frequency

With all those new overtones embedded in our ‘beer’, we’re now getting the whiffs of honey, resin and the various malts and hops. These flavours are super faint — most people can’t detect them without having practised the art of tasting — but they are there. And some people can sense more of the embedded flavours than others. The same is true for just about any musical note you’ve ever heard.

Bagpipes, of course, are not stringed instruments. But the same idea of fundamentals and vibrating multiples applies to wind instruments. Take the above explanation, replace the vibrating string with a column of air — like those found inside our chanters and drones — and voilà, you’re on your way to understanding how all this works on your bagpipe.²

Sound waves in a column of air



The intervallic pattern

AS an aside, you may also be interested in thinking about the “harmonic series” in terms of intervals, that is, the way we measure the

2. That’s once again a great oversimplification (like much of this article), as things get much more complicated in regards to open-ended columns of air, or conically-shaped columns of air, and so forth.

distance between any two notes. As briefly mentioned over the page, for example, the distance between A=440 and A=880 is an “octave”

(technically a “perfect octave”), and the distance between A=880 and E=1320 is a “perfect fifth”. Understanding this natural pattern in terms of

intervals may help some of you transfer this knowledge to other keys, such as when playing a pipe chanter in a non-standard key:

The fundamental and harmonics of a bass drone tuned to A (as for Border pipes, smallpipes in A, Highland pipes in A, etc.)

'partials':	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	etc...
Hertz:	110 (approx.)	220	330	440	550	660	770	880	990	

Fundamental | harmonics (overtones)

* slightly flatter than an equal-tempered C# (e.g. on a piano)
 ** considerably flatter than an equal-tempered G

Intervallic pattern of the harmonic series

Fundamental | harmonics

* slightly smaller than a standard minor-third
 ** slightly greater than a standard Major-second

It's important to remember that pretty much any musical note or spoken vowel you are subject to is full of these harmonics, and that the pattern of intervals is essentially the same in every case, regardless of instrument or key. Hearing these harmonics takes practice but if you can detect the difference between the sound of a clarinet and a pipe chanter, then you can hear plenty well enough to distinguish some of the more prominent individual harmonics.

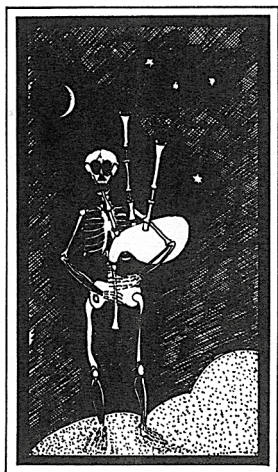
Stay tuned...

BUT now you may be wondering about a question posed earlier in this article: how is it that we can distinguish between the sound of the clarinet and pipe chanter, even when they're playing the same note; or

distinguish between someone saying the words “peer” and “poor”? The answer largely involves harmonics, of course. Unfortunately the answer also involves another fairly in-depth explanation, and seeing that my pint glass is now in need of a refill, I will have to leave the second part of this story for the next issue of *Piping Today*. In the meantime, I urge you to ask a guitarist, fiddler, or other string player to demonstrate harmonics to you on their instrument, especially in regards to the various fractions of a vibrating string. You may also enjoy searching online for recordings of “throat-singers” and Jew's harp players who are masters of manipulating harmonics with their mouths — sometimes to such a degree that you can hear the harmonics at least as prominently as the fundamental pitches themselves. ●

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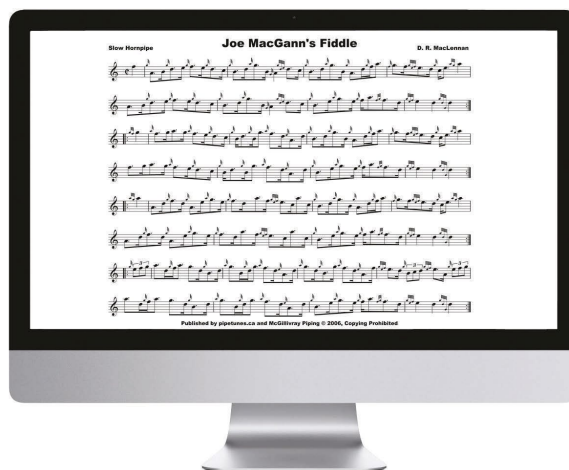
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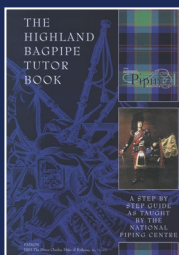


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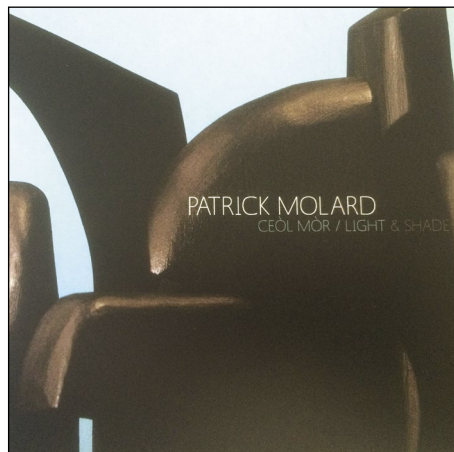
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CD REVIEWS

PATRICK MOLARD

Light & Shade

INNACOR RECORDS



IT'S been a long time since a piping album genuinely excited me. By genuinely excited me I mean got me up out of my chair, walking around a room, talking out loud about what I was hearing because I couldn't internalize the thoughts. *Ceòl Mòr/Light & Shade* by Patrick Molard did that for me. If you consider yourself a musician, get yourself a copy of this album tout suite. Notice I say a musician and not a piobaireachd enthusiast, because even though this is a piobaireachd album, it has so much more to offer.

The album takes and plays with piobaireachd in a jazzy context while retaining the musical essence of the original tune. At times, Molard masterfully overlays an expertly played tune on a seemingly independent musical idea carried out by his colleagues, creating musical layers that entice the ear and invite thoughtful consideration of rhythm and technique, all while simultaneously providing an easy listening experience. His mixed choice of competitive favorites and relatively unknown tunes means there are familiar melodies on which the ear can hang, as well as unknown tunes which allow for greater experimentation as they avoid preconceived notions and musical expectations. Ultimately that's what this album is, something for everyone.

That said, for me, it's the incredible musicianship of Molard's colleagues sets this album apart. Jacky Molard (violin and arrangements), Eric Daniel (guitar), Yannick Jory (saxophone), Hélène Labarrière (Double Bass), and Simon Goubert (drums) deserve praise equal to Molard for the musical talent and understanding they brought to the project. They've clearly spent the time to gain an understanding of piobaireachd and then brought their musical training to the party in order to create a unique musical product. A highlight for me is Yannick Jory's interpretation of *The Little Supper*, wherein he takes the motifs of the tune and explores them on the saxophone over an intriguing, jazzy ostinato, sans bagpipe and sans Molard. What really drew me into the album was the incredible use of rhythm, including entire variations played as hemi-

olas which flow seamlessly into unison 6/8 time. If you're a fan of somewhat complex rhythm then this album will have intense re-listen value. Also worthy of a mention is the excellent recording quality by Marc Gironce and mixing by Jacky Molard.

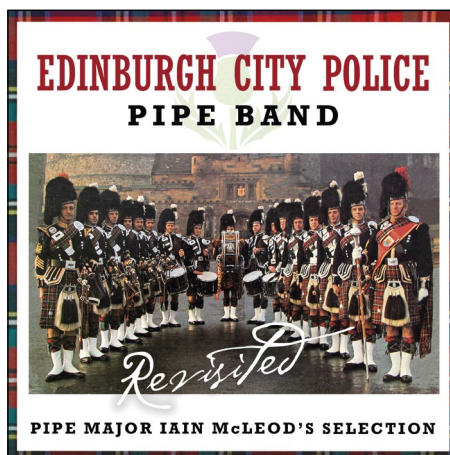
Right, so it's not your grandpa's piobaireachd album (unless your grandpa is seriously into jazz, in which case he'll dig it), but that doesn't mean it's not excellent and it doesn't have a place amongst your Donald MacLeod and *Masters of Piobaireachd* recordings. It's good music, and there should always be room on your album rack for that. ● BY ANDREW BOVA

Edinburgh City Police Pipe band

Pipe Major Iain McLeod's Selection

GREENTRAX CDTRAX389

THERE is a group of piping enthusiasts for whom the words 'police pipe band' doesn't immediately bring images of PM Ian MacLellan's Glasgow Police pipe band to mind, but instead, memories of a band from the other coast of Scotland spring forward. They recall the great Edinburgh City Police Pipe Band under PM Iain McLeod, and its five World championship victories in 1963, 64, 71, 72 and 75. Rheumy eyes go misty at the thought of the band, its music and its impact on the pipe band world.



That PM Iain McLeod achieved five Worlds wins while competing against the equally revered Muirhead and Sons under PM Bob Hardie sets the bar and indeed the platform from where pipe band music was to spring through the next fifty years.

This selection of PM Iain McLeod's favourite sets from the band's five recordings has a delightful variety and showcases just what an outstanding band the east coast police were. There are beautifully paced 4/4s, 9/8s and 6/8s, the recording starts with the familiar strains of *Old Adam*, all of which are hard to find on a modern day pipe band recording, and all are played with a panache and swing that emphasizes the musicality of the tune not the dexterity of the player. That panache is also evident on the MSR sets, of which there are five on the recording, as PM McLeod leads from the front and has the band take the big tunes on in magnificent style. This is glorious MSR playing

with the PM John Stewart, *Inveraray Castle*, John Morrison of *Assynt House* set alone worth the price of the CD. Marches are played with spirit, strathspeys with sparkle and reels with drive — you know where each starts and stops. It's hard not to think this is something that has got lost with today's emphasis on the showpiece medley. The 'medley' is one thing this CD does not have, with airs followed by hornpipes or jigs being the closest it gets, and it doesn't sound any the worse for that.

Those hornpipes and jigs also demonstrate the band's skill as they fly through the tunes in tight unison and with that trademark panache. Tunes such as *The Banjo Breakdown*, *Butter Fingers*, *Alan McPherson of Mosspark*, *John McKenzie's Fancy* all get the Edinburgh City Police treatment, all are a delight to listen to and a testament to the impressive playing behind them.

It would be remiss not to mention that even the latest of these recordings is over fifty years old with the earliest nearly sixty years in the past. Given the rate of innovation in the piping and drumming world over those intervening years, it is inevitable that these recordings do not sound like those made recently by our top pipe bands. Perhaps the biggest innovations in the pipe band world have been in the tone of drums, and the drum tone across these recordings is very different to that those listening to pipe bands today are used to. That doesn't detract from the quality of the drumming but merely reflects the technology available at the time.

PM Iain McLeod's hand picked selection is a fitting tribute to a band that not only reached the top, and stayed there, but helped carve out the future direction for bands in the decades to come. If you are one of those lucky enough to remember the band at their peak then this will jog a whole host of memories, if you aren't then this serves as a very musical reminder that they could play, 'back in the day'. ● BY CHRIS MACKENZIE

RED HOT CHILLI PIPERS

Octane

CPP02CD

IN the 11 years since the five original members recorded the *Red Hot Chilli Pipers'* eponymous debut CD, the band has expanded enormously in terms of its line-up, fan base and status as one of Scotland's leading musical idiosyncrasies. It's therefore a pity their latest offering, *Octane*, doesn't live up to the potential of the 22 total musicians on the roster.

While including more original compositions from band members in the track list than on previous albums is a welcome development, a few simply don't have a compelling enough melodic hook to linger long in the listener's memory. This is particularly true of the opening track comprising ZZ Top's *La Grange* and the jig *The Green Room* by one of the pipers, and the full-throttle treatment blasted out by the band can seem like over-compensation at times.

There are unquestionably a number of musical highlights, but they tend to be fleeting moments rather than entire standout tracks. The set of three



jigs includes a particularly nifty piece of bass guitar work by Ross Saunders as he echoes the first part of *The Kesh Jig* in the reprise. Adding in a banjo part gives a delightfully charming and entirely logical twist to Gordon Duncan's famously off-the-wall reel *Pressed for Time* — an idea which, according to the sleeve notes, originated in a collaboration with Irish trio We Banjo Three at the Pittsburgh Irish Festival.

The album's most musically sophisticated section was also born in the USA, in the form of a beautiful whistle tune called *Chasing Love* written by Jeanette Willis of Nashville's The Willis Clan. It's delicately arranged with sumptuous pipe harmonies by Cameron Barnes and gentle piano backing from Marco Cafolla, before being paired with *The Way It Is* by Bruce Hornsby & The Range. However, the decision to cut the arrangement over two tracks deprives the album of a single hit comparable to the brilliant perfection of *Fix You* from 2013's *Breathe* album.

Moreover, there is at least one genuine misfire. Surely the Red Hot Chili Pipers of all people would be able to craft the eternally popular Scottish folk song *Wild Mountain Thyme* into a sure-fire festival crowd-pleaser, but the male vocal feels a tad OTT and instead of closing out in life-affirming, arm-swaying fashion the track ends on an awkward minor key note.

Coming in the wake of a mainstream breakthrough on Radio One three years ago and the Chillis' finest album to date in *Breathe*, the biggest disappointment with *Octane* is that it simply doesn't catch fire.

● BY STUART MILNE

TRAIL WEST

Rescattermastered

TYREE08CD

N years to come theses will be written about the impact of the island of Tiree on Scottish music in the early years of the twenty first century (and take a bow Gordon Connell) as Skipinnish, Skerryvore and more recently Trail West have stamped their footprint right across the traditional music scene in Scotland and further afield.

With an accordion and pipe base all three have, in their own way, looked to redefine what the west coast sound is. In Trail West's case it is a joyous mix

of Ian Smith's beautifully melodic accordion playing, Seonaidh MacIntyre's driving piping with Andrew Findlater and Alain Campbell's drums and guitars beefing the sound up. Beefy the sound maybe, but Trail West have a much more intimate sound than their rockier cousins Skerryvore (although a number of them appear on the album) more big ceilidh than big stadium sound.

This album follows on from the well-received debut, *One that got away*, and sees the band continue with their ceilidh music for the new millennium approach. Strong melodic tunes are played straight, there is no wondering where the tune has gone with this crew, but generally with enough pace to take gold at the hundred meters ahead of Mr Bolt and with a verve and confidence that invites you to get on your feet and do whatever you do that resembles dancing. As anyone who has seen them live will know this is a band that enjoys what it does and that is evident from note one of this album as the band launch into big jig set starting with *Jim MacAlister's*. In full blown action the band are energetic as a force nine in the Minch and create waves that are just as big.



There is one noticeable change from the earlier album as this recording has seven songs compared to the two on the first. At first sight the songs seem a strange mixture with the Gaelic *Eilean Uibhist Mo Rúin*, *Maraiche Nan Cuantan* (beautifully sung by Kathleen McInnes) alongside *MacPherson's Rant*, *John Henry* (yes he of the hammer) and the well-travelled Sea Shanty, *South Australia* (not a regular song at west coast ceilidhs). Throw in a set of sing-a-long Gaelic waltzes and the delightful *Homes of Donegal* and the selection could easily be described as eclectic. Yet it is testament to the ability of this band that they take this ragbag of material and blend it into one extended sing-a-long in true ceilidh style. If you aren't belting out "haul away or hear me sing" at full volume by the end of the track you are probably missing the happiness gene and a visit to the doctor is in order.

This is a raucous, boisterous, turn it up loud, and invite the neighbours to come on over to dance and sing-a-long, big ceilidh of an album. If you haven't yet — then do yourself a favour and go and see the boys the next time they are in town, or the next town, or the town several hundred miles down the road — you won't be disappointed.

● BY CHRIS MACKENZIE

ROSS AINSLIE & ALI HUTTON

Symbiosis

GWR004CD

Ross Ainslie and Ali Hutton must be the two busiest pipers in the Scottish folk scene. Since they always seem to be running around performing with Treacherous Orchestra, Old Blind Dogs, Dougie MacLean or whoever else in the traditional music world has requested their top-quality services, it's a great pleasure to finally have a CD from the dynamic duo performing simply as Ross & Ali.

The main men combine their mastery of pipes, whistles, guitar, cittern and harmonium with their Treacherous Orchestra colleagues Duncan Lyall on bass and Moog and Martin O'Neill on bodhran. Any listeners wary of their band's wardrobe choice and often head-banging repertoire can rest assured that *Symbiosis* has a delicate touch and level of musical sophistication that is impossible not to like. Ross and Ali mostly stick to their whistles and strings, with Highland and Border pipes only featuring on three of the album's nine tracks, but all through the recording the skilful playing and tasteful blend of instruments is quite simply beautiful.

The vast majority of the material is penned by Ross and Ali themselves, and although the music is invariably pleasant there isn't always a particularly memorable melodic line, with some tracks carried by the overall effect of the instruments rather than the tune being played. While Ross is particularly good at crafting romantic numbers like *Love at the Loch* for the whistle, by far and away the standout piece on the album is the 3/4 march Ali has written in honour of his grandmother — *Mrs Jane Kennedy of St. Anne's, Methven*. Ali introduces the melody on guitar, before a sumptuous bridge gives way to a reprise with Ali on Highland pipes and Inveraray & District's Gus Sicard on pipe band snare drum. Hearing this for the first time at the *Piping Live!* closing concert this year was a magical experience, and thankfully the album version is an equally enrapturing six minutes of musical bliss.

Ross and Ali remarked at that gig that it had taken the pair 20 years to finally make this album together. The only complaint about *Symbiosis* is that it has taken them so long to bring it to us.

● BY STUART MILNE



Grey's Notes

by Michael Grey

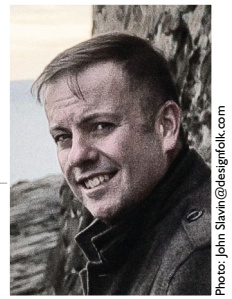


Photo: John Savin@designfolk.com

A jig is a jig

THERE was a time when I thought that one of the hardest things I'd ever done in my life was to play Peter MacLeod's tune *Donald MacLean*, twice through in the jig final at the Northern Meeting.

John Burgess, ever the man, in the middle of the bench at the Eden Court theatre (rightly so) and managing his cigarette like a fine theatrical prop: smoke rising, languid swirls clouding the bench in the coolest way; Burgess, wrist at just the right cant and fag angled in just the right way, well, JDB effectively imbued that bench of three with the gravitas I'd imagine was in line with any — Pearly Gates included. And me, sweating and E-striking away.

Thinking back now, I have to laugh. At the very least, smile. The piping world misses JDB and the coterie of many characters of his generation. And by the way, on this particular late Thursday afternoon in early September, I was to play, on the repeat, the third part of the tune, three times. I glanced to the bench, knowing I'd blown it — an amateur thing to do, to give yourself away in a glance — and there was JDB, smiling and shaking his head. I finished my nine unplanned parts — and exited stage right.

Of course, a jig is a jig. A dance tune passed our way courtesy of that seriously musical and enigmatic emerald green place southwest of the Hebrides. Four parts will give you 60 seconds of rhythmic and technical intensity. Highland pipers, by hook or by crook, have managed to squeeze out the fun factor by usually adding a “twice through” in its performance. And Highland dancers shake their fists.

Anyway, my Eden Court thwacking is, of course, far and away not the “hardest thing” I've ever done. I'm happy to say that there is nothing in piping that comes close.

I've lived long enough to have attended more funerals than I'd like (and undertakers aside, who likes funerals?) support acquaintances, friends and family move through tricky health or life challenges — pardon the, admittedly, politically correct vernacular — and, well, just

lived a life, one where bagpipe stuff is never the “most challenging”.

My God, it surely can feel like that, challenging, from time to time — let's keep it real — but, no, a life lived usually tempers all that. Bagpipe stuff, as I'll call it, is just that: stuff — things that happen related to the instrument you happen to play and, sometimes, the band where you choose to make the whole thing happen. All this, I know, is no different from you. We're all the same.

But. But, that often-used word of qualification, one that most always comes before bulls**t — as in, say, “I really enjoy her strathspey playing but only if she'd play in time”. The pipes are taken very seriously and pipers have been known to guide their lives based on the call of the pipes. They have been known to choose careers (teaching is good, summers off and all that) and partners (people who love, or, at least, tolerate the pipes and the hours of never-ending close quarter practice sessions that goes with them) — all to ensure a “full life” featuring a soundtrack cranked up to 110 decibels.

In my mid-30s, there was a time I thought my life as I knew it was over. My body started behaving in a weird way when I played the pipes. I developed a physical issue that had nothing to do with my hands — my finger technique — and everything to do with the bagpipe itself. When I played the pipes my left arm would tremor, it would involuntarily shake. And the outcome of this? My pipe emitted a strange tremolo sound. Some actually thought it was attractive. “That vibrato thing is really cool, how'd you do that?” Most, like me, thought it not.

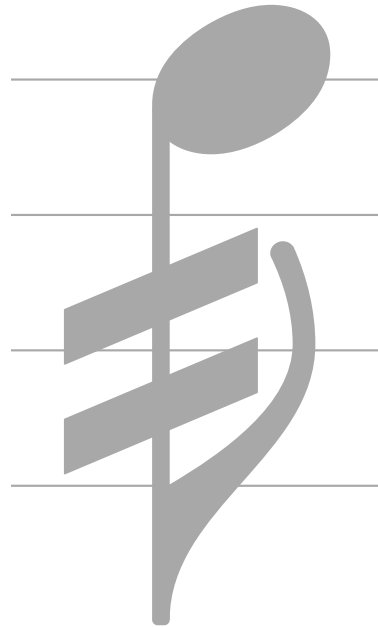
So in the middle of my prime medal-chasing years I did every freaking thing I could to fix the problem. Maybe composer Bela Bartok was right when he said, competitions are for horses, not artists.

But I can tell you, I did everything I could to stay in the saddle. I visited doctors, specialists, research clinicians along with attention to diet and exercise — yes, crazy stuff like that: diet and exercise. The problem was a strange one — no one had seen anything quite like it and all, by and large, were stumped.

Almost every piper I know has managed, or manages, personal challenges creating the best music they're able. Issues generally range from the physiological to the psychological. And it seems a truism that if you play the pipes long enough, an unwanted music-making challenge will land in your sporran.

So I fought my shaky arm and my vibra-pipes. The problem didn't manifest itself every single time I played and I managed to get through some performances unscathed. And after about five years it stopped. The arm shook no more. I have my doubts that the problem disappeared as a result of any remedy I attempted.

I do know I came out of my tribulation a changed piper, and I suppose, in turn, a changed person. In trying to overcome “the problem” I found my way to better understand that pipes are pipes. And to be your best is what really matters. To be your best is relative to you. Your best is your best. You'll be happiest when you measure your best on your own terms. A jig is a jig — no matter how many parts you play. ●



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