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Letters

From Nigel Bridges  St Boswells

The annual collogue at Roslin was my first, being a relatively new member to LPBS. Could I place on record my immense admiration for the content of the day (I am only sorry that I was unable to stay to hear the concert). The whole day filled me with inspiration and I learnt a lot which will take a while to sink in. In reality every item was a 'highlight' in its own way.

Fascinating to hear the juxtaposition of versions and styles of 'Tulloch Gorm' and 'Reel of Stumpie'. A feast of throw away lines of humour and impromptu step dancing too. It is marvellous to have other instruments present. When I was a boy my pipe teacher told me that I should listen to fiddlers to gain insights into strathspey playing. I think this applies to other categories of tune as well and I loved the way Mairi Campbell played one of the old versions of Stumpie.

Nigel's Richard's knowledge has always impressed me (awed is probably a more appropriate word) but the talk on modes was unique. I am of the musical illiterate as far as theory is concerned and I struggle to try to understand as I know that it can help to make me a better musician. To hear the Raga played by Nigel and Fraser Fifield, well what can one say?, but 'I was there'. I hope the CD is sooner rather than later. It just shows what a versatile and exciting instrument smallpipes are.

The teaching forum was really fascinating and it is so refreshing that there is an absence of prescription. There was consensus that basic techniques of, bellows control, clean fingering and ability to tune individual instruments are the important foundations of smallpipe playing.

Barnaby Brown's thoughts on encouraging composition at an early stage were very interesting. I am not sure that I could compose anything to 'save my life' but it might be an interesting addition to the Melrose teaching weekend. The Society, does of course, encourage composition in the annual competition.

Pete Stewart's finding and playing of another piece of 17th Century music is a timely reminder also that modern techniques and modes of playing, in some instances, have become highly artificial. I find my response to Dixon and the older tunes is that they underline a subtle distinction between a tune being narrative and thus interesting to listen to and a tune being merely descriptive and disappointingly bland. Put another way technique can often mask expression.

David Taylor's tale of the old lady in her seventies wanting to play a tune on the pipes 'before she died' is a great reminder to 'give everyone a go' and that rankings of ability should not be taken too seriously. Do your best, admire those who do better, but take pleasure in what others do also. As one brought up on the subtitles of 'the highland sneer' at 'inferior performance' I did not realise I could become so sanctimonious, probably a sign of ageing.

As a member, thanks to the committee for all their hard work and all the participants for inspiring me. The LPBS membership fee is a musical bargain.
From Helen Ross
Stirlingshire

I liked the informative December issue of Common Stock, and its websites.

I find the following sites useful, though they are not specifically for pipers.

For words and digital tunes of folk songs: www.mudcat.org
For the dots of dance and folk tunes in staff notation:
http://trillian.mit.edu/~jc/music/abc/Fin'Tune.html

Best wishes

From Sandy Robertson
St John's, Newfoundland

I check the LBPS website regularly and am delighted how active the members and teachers are. Even those of us out in the wilderness eventually benefit from their good works.

From Bill Telfer,
Hong Kong

Six months is a long time between drinks, so little wonder that discussion/debate via the letters column of CS rarely gets off the ground, even though many of the letters are worthy of a response. An e-mail forum on the other hand permits quick reply, and interaction. Therefore LBPS members with access to a pc and modem might like to log onto www.yahoogroups.com and register with the bellowspipes group, bellowspipes@yahooogroups.com.

To me the article on bagpipe websites in the last issue was a bit 'far out'. There are numerous sites more relevant to LBPS members. Every issue of CS should now publicise the LBPS's own excellent and developing site. Then there are the sites and links of 'sister' organisations like the NPS and Bag Soc. I could go on.... (Give me a couple of days and I could send you my own favourite bookmarks!)

I liked Donald Lindsay's piece on session playing, and appreciate your new session book.

In my opinion the pitch of the D chanter, its resonance, facility for playing in G, renders it indispensable for sessions with other instrumentalists. Would anyone agree with me that many benefits could flow from writing tunes in conventional D and G notation rather than always in A/D, 'conventional' pipe notation for an A chanter? E.g. the others could readily read the tunes in the pitch we're actually playing. English revival pipers (e.g. our illustrious Chairman's tunebooks) have stolen a march on us here.

Craig Hohn has a further look at developing Uilleann piping techniques for the Scottish smallpipes. (See Common Stock Vol 15 No 1 page 8).

This is the second part of my lesson with Jerry O'Sullivan transferring Uilleann pipe techniques to the Scottish smallpipes. In this lesson we take on the four part reel "Farewell to Ireland". Jerry's approach to the nine note smallpipe chanter utilises fewer grace notes, rounder rhythm, and some specialised ornaments from the Uilleann repertoire.

The tune is widely played in Irish circles; but is it Irish? It clearly looks like a nine note pipe tune. The first three parts imply 'A' minor without ever playing the C natural, and the last part shifts into a strong 'A' mixolydian. Is there a 9 note Irish repertoire out there before the days of the Uilleann pipes? Robert Mathieson plays a "round" version of this tune on the GHB on his album "Grace Notes" (Lismor LCOM 5171), an excellent album of unusual GHB tunes.

Now for the tune:

Bar 1 - opens with a cran. This ornament is stronger than a birl on the cylindrical bore chanter, less staccato than the G/D/E gracing. Mathieson opens the tune with a dotted A quaver (see: RM bar 1), a strong alternative and a more common setting; try this with a slur from low 'G'.

Bar 7 - Jerry calls the high 'A' figure a "shake", made by sliding the thumb forward and back over the High A hole. It is a very fast and clear ornamentation once you get used to the sliding motion, a bright shimmering sound.

Bar 8 - R Mathieson plays a birl on the low A. (see RM bar 8). I like the effect of the birl but it is not as strong on the smallpipes as it is on the GHB. A cran would go nicely here as an alternative.

Bar 9 - similar to bar 7.

Bar 10 - this is a short roll; all graces including the final 'D' are evenly weighted.

Bar 1 7 - a run of crans on the 'A' and 'G'.

Advertisement

Half long Border Pipes in the key of "G" with bellows. Single Drone Student set made by Jon Swayne.
Excellent Condition Price £550
Contact Scott Davidson
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Contact Bridget Taylor
01260 223608 or e-mail bridget.taylor@diam.pipex.com

IRISH ORNAMENTATION ON SMALLPIPES
Bar 25 - Jerry plays what he calls a "backstitch" here, adapted from a closed fingered ornament on the Uilleann pipes. He simulates the chanter closure by dropping down to the low G and then playing the melody in closed fingering. It is also possible to play this ornament in staccato closed fingering if your chanter does not have vent holes: stop the chanter end on your leg in the same way Uilleann pipers do. I've written the basic melody of bar 25 in the more common setting and included the backstitch as an addendum.

Bars 25-26 as written.

Farewell to Ireland

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Conclusion: I enjoyed these two lessons with Jerry, and I hope these articles have been of some interest to LBPS members. It was a revelation to hear him play the first time, and it's had a definite influence on my own developing style. I like the drive of these old dance tunes, and I agree, with many of the opinions expressed in Common Stock, that sometimes fewer grace notes enhance the melody line. The use of fewer (and lower pitched) grace notes, combined with rounder note emphasis, slurs, and the specific ornaments developed on the Uilleann pipes, sound wonderful on the smallpipes, and add to the options of pipers developing their own individual style.

The Scottish smallpipes are well suited to play a wide variety of styles and music. Are there other tunes out there from other piping traditions that can be adapted to this simple nine note chanter? Any comments are welcome; send e-mail to chohm@linkny.com

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DENIS

On Sunday 4th March Denis held a party to celebrate his 85th birthday. A few days later he passed away. For those to whom his name is unfamiliar, look at the cover of Common Stock, Volume 10 No.2 (December 1995). The picture was taken at Brightlingsea where he had joined those protesting against live animal exports, and to lend emphasis to his views he played his Robertson half-long pipes.

Denis had been involved in piping since he was seven. At primary school in Newcastle he was leader of the school band where he played the Northumbrian smallpipes. He was involved in the resurgence of interest in the half-long (Border pipes) in the 1920s, when over 100 sets were made by Robertson of Edinburgh to equip school - and other organisations' - pipe-bands. Interest in the instrument waned due to war and other influences, then in the 1990s, through the Northumbrian Pipers' Society and the pages of Common Stock, Denis once again worked towards increasing awareness of, and enthusiasm for, these pipes.

A doctor and later a surgeon (as a consultant he used to practice the occasional tune while waiting for a patient!), his many other interests included silver-smithing and geology. He also played the Highland pipes.

At his request Joanna, his widow, will be lodging appropriate papers, photographs and other piping memorabilia, with the Bagpipe Museum at Morpeth where they will be made available to anyone interested.

J.H.A.
Jim Gilchrist, hardly clear of the 'flu, guided the proceedings in a rasping croak, and, as is the tradition, the evening pivoted around music, humour and a good crack.

We were welcomed - by the clarsach and fiddle of Maeve and Oma Gilchrist.

We were enlightened - by Stan Reaves (from Edinburgh's Adult Learning Project) with his outrageous Immortal Memory that took on two strands and tested our credulity even though we toasted the conclusion!

We were enthralled - as Holy Willie himself appeared in our midst and, with night-cap and candle, harangued us over our sins - before miraculously re-assembling himself in the shape of John Gahagan.

We were entertained - by the smallpipes under the competent elbows and fingers of Andrew Warren.

We were enchanted - by the singing of Mairi Campbell (with Dave Francis on guitar).

The players stopped to catch their breath, the dancers gasped for air:

The piper stood and loosed his straps and stowed his pipes with care
And as he made towards the bar a voice was heard to say
"You look to me the kind of man could play a sweet strathspey."

"Well I have that reputation and it's kind of you to say,
"But I've got a demon thirst on me - I haven't got all day."
"Well hold that drink a minute now and look at what I've here -
"A set of pipes worth more of your time than any pint of beer.

"The drones are turned from boxwood and the chanter's bound with gold,
"There's finest beeswax hemp and leather - here, I'll give you them to hold."

The piper looked in wonder as those pipes came out the case,
He strapped them on and closed his eyes: and quiet filled the place.

The Devil in the Kitchen, and The Rothiemurchus Rant
George The Fourth and Stumpie and The Bob Of Petercairn
As each strathspey outshone the last he swore he knew no more
But still the tunes came tumbling out from some forgotten store.

And as they did the piper turned and to the maker said,
"What enchantment is there here, and was it really me who played?
"There's fearful stories of these things I've heard the old folk tell,
"I fear the hand that made these pipes was guided straight from Hell!"

Well the maker smiled at him and said "I understand your fear,
"But the wood and leather's of this Earth - no magic is there here,
"I will admit these pipes could be the finest ever made,
"But that would count for not one thing if they were never played.

"For there's music in them right enough, but there's music in you too,
"And the one requires the other for that music to come through,
"The pipes unlocked the music that was waiting in your soul,
"And you unlocked the instrument and made the circle whole"

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Her unaccompanied song

The written word cannot adequately acquaint those who were not there with the atmosphere of that event. So rather than a blow by blow account, let me suggest a little of the flavour of that evening by mentioning the participants and printing the lyrics of that engaging song (her own composition) which Mairi Campbell sang. It can be heard on her CD "THE CAST"
PIPER PROFILE - David Faulkner

Those who attended the 1999 Collogue will remember David playing along with Jon Swayne and others. This interview took place during the Bagpipe Society's annual weekend "Blowout", and all around us was the sound of pipes and other instruments getting to grips with harmonies and tunes.

What sort of pipes do you play?

The main instrument I play is a set of pipes made by Jon Swayne. They're a kind of modified version of the Border pipes. People used to call them half-long pipes, but I think that is now being dropped and they are just called Border pipes.

What pitch are they in?

Well I use several pitches depending on what I'm playing. It could be low 'C' 'D' or 'G'. I tend to use 'G' mostly.

And are these separate sets of pipes, or do you interchange chanters on one set of drones?

They are all separate instruments. The six finger (tonic) note being 'C' on the 'C' pipe, on the 'D' pipe, and the drones of these pipes are all octaves of the tonic, the smallest one being the same pitch as the chanter.

Right, and some of these low chanters must have quite a stretch for the fingers, don't they?

They have got quite a stretch. I haven't got, I don't think, especially big hands, but you get used to it quite quickly. The 'C' pipes aren't that much bigger than the 'D' pipes, and are probably very similar to the Irish [Uilleann] pipes. It's not as bad as the low whistle.

When did you get interested in pipes - and why?

I think I developed - well I started to play in a Folk band after having been involved in all sorts of other music, and I started playing the whistle after having played the bass guitar. I was in quite a lucky situation in that the village I lived in in North Devon there was a man who had a Folk shop - old father Abrahams - and he used to sell instruments and Folk books on folk lore and music and stuff. And in conversations with him I learned he had a set of English Renaissance pipes or a copy of them - made by Bill O'toole. And Robert who had the shop wasn't using them, so I thought the thing to be doing was to get them out and get them working. So that's what I did really.

And did you do that yourself? Or did you have someone to help you?

When I started I had absolutely no idea [about pipes]. They made a horrendous noise. At that time I had no idea there was a particular relationship between the drones and the chanter. Eventually fiddling around - someone said they should be the same note - so I sort of tuned them. That set used Highland reeds scraped down in a sort of vicious way.

You use plastic ones now I think?

Yes, these are all plastic reeds. I think the drones reeds were brass. I broke the last one a little time ago - forgetting it was brass I bent the tongue double trying to open it. Now they're all plastic - made from yoghurt pots for the chanters.

Going back to the time you started up; you had this copy of a renaissance set, and you got some sort of noise out of them eventually, something you liked and wanted to progress?

Well there was a condition attached to my borrowing these pipes: there was a Morris Side in the village area called Ockington Morris, and I could only borrow them if I used them for the Morris Side, which laid the beginnings of my repertoire. I had to learn the tunes that they were using - which mostly kind of fitted. Otherwise I had to arrange them to suit. These pipes had a sharpened leading note at the bottom, and you could play a sharp or flattened top seventh. So that was the first part of my repertoire.

In effect you borrowed a set of pipes which you knew nothing about, got them working eventually, and managed to get Morris type tunes out of them that people could dance to. You didn't get any formal training in the fingering or anything?

No. No. I had been playing the whistle a bit before that, so there was a bit of a cross-over with that, but if things worked it was only by chance really.

So then you went on from that to these Half-long or Border pipes which you've now got. And you said they were modified in some way?
Basically the range is extended. You can go from the tonic note, "G", to the "C" above that.

Three notes over the octave.

And a flattened leading note below the octave.

You have a key on the set of pipes you were playing today. What is that for?

Basically a chanter switch, that stops the air going through the chanter. For these particular instruments it is quite useful. You can actually have the drones playing at full power and then switch on the chanter when needed. I find it useful for playing with groups, in sessions - losing a tune you can just stop it; it doesn't mean to say you have to stop the bag; you keep the drones going, and come back in when you know where you are.

Any other modifications? How do you get up to your three notes above the tonic? Is that by over-blowing or is it by pinching?

I think the pressure is slightly increased. There's a term in Border piping, I think, called "shivering the lit". I don't really know much about that. You can go to the note above the top tonic direct from most notes in the lower octave by moving the thumb very slightly to break the air flow, to trick the pipe into going up. But it does that most reliably on the first note above the octave, then you can kind of go quickly to the other ones.

But you couldn't go from a note on the right hand, for instance, to one of the other two top notes without having to pause first on top "A"?

There's probably something in between. You might be able to do it so quickly that the "A" doesn't sound. Generally you can't reliably go from the bottom octave to the top two [overblown] notes.

What about your lower hand. Do you have a back thumb hole for the lower hand?

Yes. Most notes you can do with just cross-fingering like on a recorder, except for the lower minor third. Cross fingering produces a third which is not flat enough. So just to get round that Jon [Swayne] put a hole at the back.

Do you find that when covering that hole with the right thumb it cramps your fingers at all? You have to keep your thumb well down.

...there was no proper way to play these pipes, and for me that was quite a useful thing, I didn't want to feel I had to do things in any particular way...

Initially, one of the reasons I chose Jon's pipes was because they had a very definite broken tradition with the Border pipes. I don't know anything about the traditions of people playing now, like Matt. But, what I did do, when I was looking for repertoire I started to listen to music that fitted the instrument. I used to listen to Blowzabella quite a lot, and through that it was very easy to get into the French music because the repertoire of some of the French pipes fit this instrument so well. And at the time a whole lot of people were playing it here. There was, and still is, very little kind of English bagpiping around. I listened to some of Gordon Mooney's playing and Hamish Moore's playing - they were kind of breaking new ground in numerous ways. And listened to the Northumbrian piping as well. And it's picking up bits from all these places really.

And your gracing. Is this something instinctive with you or is it something you've cultured?

I think it's probably something I've cultured. I have listened to other sounds that I like, and tried to emulate them. Whether I'm actually doing them in the right way, I don't know. Basically you just play a very pure sound, then you can affect it by doing different things with your fingers. Because you can't make it louder or quieter the only thing you can do change the way the air is moving through. And I enjoy messing around, trying to find the kind of things that work. Sometimes things just don't work. You can do things that are very extreme on the instrument,
and under the right circumstances those things can work, at other times they don’t. You have to use your judgement. I do think, though, there is a common bagpipe technique. There are only so many ways you can kind of split notes. In Highland piping there is a very emphasised way of doing it, and there are bits of those techniques used in French piping and Spanish piping, I think it is the degree to which they are stressed that makes a difference. And also the tune, the way the tunes work. You can tell a Highland pipe tune just by the way it’s written, not necessarily by the way the person’s playing it. It’s the same for French tunes.

We started talking about other people you have played with. You mentioned another piper and an accordionist. I know you are in the Eel Grinders - any other groups.

Well there’s a trio I play in with Jon Swayne and Don Ward, which plays pretty much the music that Jon has written - a low ‘C’ pipe and two ‘G’ pipes. And there’s a kind of a bigger version of that with six pipes and a percussionist which is called [Deferus?] that has a high ‘C’ pipe, 3 ‘G’ pipes and two low ‘C’ pipes. That started off playing a set of variations that Jon wrote on a Playford tune. I play with a music and story-telling group using two pipes and percussion, and I play with a Ceilidh band which has got quite a line-up of trombones and bass guitars and melodeons, fiddles, and an occasional hurdy-gurdy.

The story-telling group, though, you don’t play while the story-telling is going on - or do you?

Most of the times, no. Sometimes we do pieces of music that are integrated. Some of the music can be intertwined through a story, especially when a story can be a major epic like an Icelandic saga, or big Irish myths and legends. I might use pipes or whistles.

I’ve seen you dancing and playing the pipes at the same time. Can you tell us more of this - I have a feeling it is one of Dixon’s tunes...

Well it can be any tune. I think moving with your music has got to be a good thing - you know, keeping your feet in time. It is one of my ambitions to play some Dartmoor stepping tunes and then step dance at the same time: I haven’t managed that yet.

When you held the workshop here on piping - you were talking about one or two things I thought you wanted to extend further but were unable to at the time because others were throwing in questions (quite rightly) on other things. For instance you were talking about the lightness of the fingering. You came out with an expression - I can’t quite remember what it was - something like feeling the air coming up underneath your fingers.

Well people can play with a lot of tension in their hands, and can end up with cramps and all sorts of problems. It actually came from a conversation with Jon and Blowzabella doing gigs, and what it was like playing in a big amplified situation, and I asked him if he knew he was playing the right notes when he couldn’t hear himself, and he said he could feel it. If you do hold your chanter lightly enough you can feel on your skin the vibration of the air against it. If you do it too lightly then it starts squeaking. I think it is a good exercise just to see how lightly you can do it, then when you go back to how you were doing it before you can perhaps see if there is a lot of tension in your hands. The more relaxed you can be about it the better.

This morning we had a lecture in the barn on posture and how not to hunch yourself up and so forth. Have you any thoughts on that at all? I noticed while you were sitting playing just now you looked fairly relaxed.

Well I try to make myself aware of it and sit straighter. Because if you are playing your pipes you can be sitting there for an hour or so - a couple of hours - and at the end of that you have got so used to being hunched that you stand up and you are still hunched. And at the end of the day you can go to bed hunched, and you can get up in the morning and be a bit more hunched. If you don't straighten yourself out you can end up with all sorts of problems. And I think piping can be very bad for your posture. I know some Irish pipers have terrible problems where they have to play lifting the shoulders right up, and stooped over. I think it is something you have to be very aware of really.

Do you practice in front of a mirror yourself?

Sometimes. You don’t see yourself playing. You might think you are sitting up straight - like people who think they are moving; you say do a bit of moving and they do a little bit and think they are doing all sorts of exaggerated motions when they are just about standing still.

One of the other things you said at that workshop was that the sound of the drones could damage your ears. So you plugged your ears and then you couldn’t hear your metronome so you strapped it to your forehead. Do you actually do that, or was it just for the fun of the day?

Well if you want to experiment, probably more so with the conical bore chanters, not like the small pipes, they are slightly louder; slightly harder sound. If you actually have a little play with the ears bunged up, and then if you take your ear-plugs out and play again when you’ve been trying to listen carefully to what you are playing, it is very loud. I don’t think my pipes are particularly loud - but if I’m in a room playing them, and I’ve been practising with the ear-plugs in, and then take them out, your ears have got used to hearing less. And when you actually listen to them again afresh you really notice the difference then. But most of the
time I think it is really good practice to play with the ear plugs in. You can only go deaf once.

That begs the question do you normally play with the drones over your shoulder or a

I do both really. If I'm playing with other musicians I tend to have them across my arms so that I can hear other things easier. If I'm playing on my own I might have it in my ear so that - you can hear the drones.

The reason / asked that is / you do have them over your shoulder the small drone sounds stronger in your ear.

Yes, it does. I think that might be the reason that I initially stopped doing it. Because I don't have them over my shoulder so much now.

Am I allowed to ask you about Dixon? When I last talked with you, you were playing quite a lot of Dixon, but not making it known generally.

I've learned a few tunes. I think more people should learn it; it's great music. It is challenging music.

Which particular titles could you recommend?

Cuddy Claw'd her is a jig I'm learning just now. There is such a body of music to choose from it is difficult to know what ones to do. To be able to play them is a challenge. So you almost have to learn it and really get to know it before you decide whether you actually like it or not. Because there are so few other people playing it it's hard to decide.

Finally - anything you wish to add?

I think the main thing is to really enjoy piping. A bagpipe is an instrument with a drone. And lots of the pleasure is having that going on, and really using the relationship between the drone and the chanter, and just hearing it. I think a lot of people who play don't really kind of listen to it. And if you don't listen to it and enjoy it you might as well be playing a banjo!

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PIPER'S CORPSE IN SATANIC MURDER HOAX

The Piper of Peebles is a poem in Scots by The Lamb-Leader, William Anderson, a schoolmaster of Kirriemuir, dated 26 November 1793, which survives in four chapbook copies in the National Library of Scotland, dating from 1794 to 1869.

At 15 pages of octosyllabic couplets, it's too long to print here in full [writes Jack Campin], but it's a colourful and well-written story, albeit a little short in musical information.

It's set in the distant past: -

Fan common fouk had scrimper skill,
An' Gentles scarce had wealth at will;
Twa hunder year, or mair sin' syne -
Fan fashions werna near sae fine.

which gives Anderson an opportunity to take off into a two page discussion of old Scots costume, spinning and weaving before starting the story (he's described as a "weaver in Kirrimuir" in later editions; his knowledge of textiles seems professional). The hero of the tale is then introduced:

About thate times, besouth Kinghorn,
A country Laird became forlorn
Wi' bags o' debt - a birden fair
For ony honest mind to bear.

But daily dogg'd, an' dunn'd, an' deav'd,
Wi' creditors, that clam'ring crav'd,
He tint the heart, an' cudna eat
Wi' melancholy, half his meat.

He dream'd of gloomy prisons grim,
An' dreary dungeons dark an' dim,
With iron doors, padlocks, an' bars,
(As stark as mith out-wear the stars,)
Where he was trail'd to lie on strae;
An' starting waken sobbing wae!

This being a Scottish yarn, we know who's going to appear next:

A man came riding, mighty bra',
Upon a beast as black's a craw;
Clear siller bells in bunches hang
At his horse mane, an' sweetly rang:
An' yet for a' his princely pride,
He had nae servant for a guide.

and what sort of offer he's going to make

I understand, wi' debt ye're drown'd;
An' I hae hail ten thousand pound,
That nane alive kens ought about,
An' I intend to lay it out. -
Hence, Satan! to your black abode,

The Earth's the LORD's, and all

Exclaim'd, "Thou subtle source of sin,

An' sternly on the stranger frown'd,

He bang'd his arms about it round,

An' yet he fain wad keep the cash.

To write wi' blude, he wadna' fash,

Of servitude, displeas'd him sair.

The article, forever mair,

uniquely Scottish Faustus:

The Laird sud be his servant syne.

That after fifteen years, in fine,

He then drew out the bond an' read,

The sum was there, exact an' just.

Till it was counted - he boot ride

An' i' the tail, it plainly said,

Within an hour - The Laird might

An' positively a' protest,

Be i' the room, but you your lane

I'se bring the bag, an' bond to sign,

At twal o'clock- Be sure let none

Be i' the room, but you your lane

An' if I never come again,

The siller, Sir, is a' your ain:

Wha wadna write their name wi' blude,

For sic a lusty lift, an' gude?

Twelve o'clock, of course, is

That hour foul hags broomsticks bestride,

An' thro' the air exulting ride,

An' actions damn'd, debauch'd, an'

To their nocturnal revels rude,

An' at the Laird's feet, frae his horse

A pistol loot a loud report,

Held down his head, to hark, or speer

To speak a word - he came in haste;

The company, to tell the Laird

An' order'd an' o' them that faird

Came riding up, as on express,

A gentleman in decent dress,

While suppin' at the sav'ry skink,

A gentleman in decent dress,

Came riding up, as on express,

An' order'd an' o' them that faird

The Gentleman upo' the beast

Held down his head, to hark, or speer

Some secrets, ithers sudna hear.

As seemingly, they thus consort

A pistol loot a loud report,

An' at the Laird's feet, frac his horse

The stranger fell a blacken'd corse.

So the Laird is hauled off to Edinburgh

and charged with murder, protesting his innocence. In his defence he asks to have surgeons inspect the corpse for bullet wounds:

Tome Doctors came to seek the hole

That thro' his body sent the soul;

But fan they loos'd his breast, they

In name of my Almighty God!

whereupon the Adversary vanishes through a portal into Namelessly Other Dimensions with a flash, a bang and a smell of brimstone, leaving the laird in possession of the money.

Now, the reader should realize that an 18th century Prince of Darkness was almost as persistent as a modern-day poll tax collector and somewhat more ingenious. So, after living in comfort for fifteen years, the laird is at a wedding when:

A vast o' fouk a' round about

Came to the feast, they din'd thereout,

Twa pair o' Pipers playing gade,

About the table, as they fed:

Mirth spread her mantle o'er them a',

But sorrow was na' far awa'.

While suppin' at the sav'ry skink,

An' takin' whiles a waught o' drink,

A gentleman in decent dress,

Came riding up, as on express,

An' order'd an' o' them that faird

The company, to tell the Laird

To speak a word - he came in haste;

The Gentleman upo' the beast

Held down his head, to hark, or speer

Some secrets, ithers sudna hear.

As seemingly, they thus consort

A pistol loot a loud report,

An' at the Laird's feet, frac his horse

The stranger fell a blacken'd corse.

So the Laird is hauled off to Edinburgh

and charged with murder, protesting his innocence. In his defence he asks to have surgeons inspect the corpse for bullet wounds:

Tome Doctors came to seek the hole

That thro' his body sent the soul;

But fan they loos'd his breast, they

swore

ble had been dead ten days afore -

They cudna touch him for a stink,

An' kendna' what to say or think.

With odours, an' the lyke, belyve,

They drown'd the dreadfu' smelling

dyeve,

Syne gribbled him, but gat nae

wound,

His hyde they said, was heal an' sound.

The town thereupon leaves the perfumea.

corpse on display for a week in the hope

that somebody might be able to identify

him. No luck, until:

That day, there had come in a crew

Of Cairds, wha drank till they were

fou,

An' on the street, the strolling gang

Fell out, an' faught, an' grat, an' sang.

Amo' the rest, a muckle wife,

Fell out, an' faught, an' grat, an' sang.

Anither wife too made remark,

Fell out, an' faught, an' grat, an' sang.

She kend it brawly by the sleeve,

An' on the breast, they might

An' positively a' remark,

Ae felt his sark, it hadna bands;

Syne gribbled him, but gat nae

But fan his visage she survey'd -

Preserv'st" in sad surprise she

pray'd!

"That's the Piper of Peebles! Wha

Has buskit him, fan dead sae brac?

I saw him yerldit, I can swear -

Frae his lang hame fou came he there?

He has a clunker in his crown,

In Peebles Piper - pawkie lown,

An' positively a' protest,

It was the Piper, better drest,

Than fan he liv'd, for he was poor,

To prove her testimony true.

She breech'd herse, an' brought the crew,

And charged with murder, protesting his innocence. In his defence he asks to have surgeons inspect the corpse for bullet wounds:

Tome Doctors came to seek the hole

That thro' his body sent the soul;

But fan they loos'd his breast, they

swore

ble had been dead ten days afore -

They cudna touch him for a stink,

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In Peebles Piper - pawkie lown,

An' positively a' protest,

It was the Piper, better drest,

Than fan he liv'd, for he was poor,

To prove her testimony true.

She breech'd herse, an' brought the crew,

Of twa ply twisted, blue an' red.

and the laird is released to live into a peaceful old age.

As I see it, there are several morals to be drawn from this tale:

1. Any decent wedding gig needs no less than four pipers. Standard union terms. Been that way since the 18th century, guv.

2. Never try to finalize a contract when you're in a devil of a hurry.

3. When burying a piper, always put a stake through his heart.

4. When faced with malignant beings trying to claim their dues, try phoning the Lord as well as Tommy Sheridan.

5. A piper's best friends are usually dissolve gamblers.

6. "Gribble" is a word crying out for revival

7. The only place you'll see a well-dressed Border piper is on an undertaker's slab!
**DECORATION**

Paul Roberts

Perusing the latest edition of Common Stock [Vol 15 No 2, Dec 2000] I notice that at least three contributors once again raise the issue of "appropriate" decoration in Border/Lowland piping. Personally I think it is perfectly appropriate for Highland pipers to transfer their music and style to bellows pipes, indeed, for anyone to play whatever they want and however they want on any instrument. However, for those of us intent on recreating the music of the era there is a real issue here - what kind of decoration did the 18th century Border pipers use? The subject is not as opaque as many seem to think. I've been meaning to write a proper article on it for ages, in the meantime here's a relatively quick summary of my own conclusions.

1) Take a bow, Mr B. W. Wakefield of Kentucky for at last suggesting what should have been obvious to enthusiasts years ago! Yes, pipers in England and lowland Scotland and eastern Ireland in the Georgian era undoubtedly used all the standard baroque decorations. A wide range of standard gracing were common to both popular and art music in this era to all instruments. The two most important were probably the shake or trill and the turn. The basic shake consisted of repeated beatings of the finger above the melody note and was usually represented on the stave by the symbol tr. The turn is the same figure as the modern Irish roll, performed by playing the first note above and then below the melody note, and was usually represented by the symbol \( \text{tr} \). There is evidence that in piping the shake may have often combined both these movements i.e. the shake was often resolved in a turn. In art music this was known as the turned shake.

2) There were some decorations which seem to have been particular to popular music, and some that may have been popular to piping - these include the figure modern Highland pipers call the 'A' birl.

3) The aforementioned birl and the double `F' (which is just a short shake) are the only modern Highland decorations that were definitely also used on bellows pipes. However, though the Highland line was probably the most important cultural border in Britain at the time, no border is absolute. It would be surprising if all the Highland techniques were absolutely exclusive to the area, indeed it would be surprising if they all originated in the area. If bagpipes could enter the region from the south in the first place, then clearly bagpipe techniques could also travel in both directions. Personally I feel that the "rolling" doublings (e.g. double `E', double `A') work well on bellows pipes with their music, but that the "grunting" grips and throws (taorluath, lemluath etc) are best avoided. Ultimately this has to be an issue of personal taste.

4) Border pipes, smallpipes and Union pipes were played throughout northern England and lowland Scotland often by the same people. It surely follows that Northumbrian and Union piping should hold more clues to Border pipe technique than does Highland piping. I would certainly recommend a good perusal of the Pastoral/Union pipe tutors produced by Geoghegan, O'Farrell and Colelough.

5) There are many clues to decoration in the structure of the music. For example it is clear Border pipers must have used something like the Highland `G"D"F"E"' movement or Union and Northumbrian pipe tipping.

6) On the odd occasions I've heard Border piping recently the use of the vibrato trill seems to have become popular. I have to take some credit/blame for pioneering this back in the early 1980s! In fact there is no direct evidence that century English and Scots pipers ever used vibrato, though there is circumstantial and comparative evidence (e.g. from French and Irish tradition and from baroque fiddle technique) that makes it likely. Incidentally, Dixon used the tr symbol on high `A' where a conventional shake is not possible. There are several possible decorations he could have meant and one serious possibility is the vibrato trill.

7) Anyone familiar with Peacock and other old pipe/fiddle collections will be well aware of the use of elaborate runs as a form of decoration. This was common to all "folk" instruments back then and is absolutely fundamental to recreating a period bellows piping style. It can be heard in the playing of some 20th century traditional musicians - try Tom Clough, Billy Ballantyne and Johnny Doran to get a feel for this crucial technique.

8) Even if we were able to outline in detail every decoration applied by period bellows pipers it would not form a body of "correct" decorations to be rigidly applied by every piper in every situation - this much is obvious from modern traditional music. The rigidity of the Highland pipe tradition, and its restriction of personal expression, is exceptional. Play what feels right and to your own capabilities. And yes, there are references to period pipers using decorations of their own invention.

Make no mistake, decoration will have been very important in 18th century bellows piping as it was in all other music of the period. The connotations of the term "gracing" give some indication of how far decoration and embellishment were valued.

I hope to extend and elaborate on all this properly in the future. In the meantime, I gave a talk on 18th century English fiddle style at the Sidmouth festival last year, much of which is equally relevant to English and lowland Scots piping in this period. If anyone is interested I will send them a copy of the talk plus some detailed and thoroughly mind-blowing information on baroque decorations from Nieck's Dictionary of Musical Terms (1884). £2 (cash, cheque or stamps) or $3 (cash) to cover my photocopying and postal expenses would be appreciated!

Paul Roberts, 14 Campden Road, Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire HX7 6BZ
Dynamics in piping

John Daily

Dynamics, or the relative loudness emitted from an instrument, is a subject that we pipers do not usually consider. We have enough to think about, I suppose. But the pipe chanter does have its own subtle dynamics, note by note, and these vary from one type of chanter to the next. In this article we will examine the various kinds of dynamics available from different types of pipe chanters, how they affect the music we play, as well as how we might take advantage of them to produce the best music.

I don't promise a scientific study. These are observations and, hopefully, insights based on my own experience. Many are very basic. This is not an attempt at scholarship either. Better scholars than myself will possibly find evidence contrary to or in support of my observations in historical documents. That is interesting, but does not concern me here. These observations are based on my own use of my own sets of pipes that I have set up myself. You may observe different results from your pipes. Some of my observations are based on very fine subtleties. These subtleties are enhanced on a well-balanced, well-tuned pipe with a beautiful tone. You might not hear them otherwise. And, finally, there is always the matter of personal taste.

We don't think much about dynamics because one of the distinguishing features of a bagpipe is its constant flow of sound. Another is the piper's inability to produce a variety of volumes for affect, such as pianissimo and forte, as readily as a fiddler can. A piper can change the dynamic of the drones, but we usually practice very hard to keep it constant. A constant dynamic in the drones produces the most beautiful tone. Inconsistent pressure on the bag produces a surging fluctuation. This is considered poor "blowing" technique. A more accurate term than "blowing" for what the piper does is "squeezing."

General dynamic features distinguish different kinds of pipes. Highland pipes are loud. Border pipes are not as loud. Scottish small pipes are not nearly as loud, although small pipes from one maker may be louder or quieter than those made by another maker. The reeds and small differences in bore sizes will determine relative loudness within one type of bagpipe.

Each kind of pipe has its own characteristic dynamics as well.
The same tune will sound different when played on a cylindrical chanter from how it sounds on a conical bore chanter, not only because the tone will be different but also because different notes will dominate it dynamically.

Take "Sandy Duff" as an example of this. Play it on a Scottish small pipe, and then on a Highland pipe. On the small pipe the first high 'A' really opens the tune up with strength. In the second part you have the phrases that juxtapose the top hand notes with the bottom hand notes, making the top hand notes pop dramatically out of the bottom hand notes, which practically disappear in the sound of the drones. On the Highland pipe the high 'A' disappears into the sound of the drones. "Sandy Duff" still sounds great on the Highland pipe, but the melody does not pop off the chanter from the start the way it does on the small pipe.

On the other hand, so to speak, take the tune "Cameronian Rant" in reel time as it appears in Barry Shears' book, *The Cape Breton Collection of Bagpipe Music*. This strong bottom hand tune nearly disappears into the drones on the small pipe. The lovely grace note punctuation sounds shrill while muffled melody notes blur together. But the tune thumps along aggressively on a conical chanter. The second part provides a very nice dynamic contrast to the first, moving to the opposite end of the chanter.

"Caber Feidh" is a tune that sounds great on both kinds of chanters, but for different reasons. Like "Sandy Duff" it begins on the top hand, making a strong first impression on the cylindrical chanter. But like "Cameronian Rant" it has used the bottom hand to make very strong statements, rhythmically punctuated by grace notes. When I play it on the small pipe I feel the need to finish it off with a return to the first part.

There is a traditional, perhaps half-conscious, use of dynamics in pipe music composition. The typical four part Highland pipe competition march, for example, begins with a thorough use of the notes of the conical chanter, while emphasizing the bottom, loud notes to make the initial statement. The second part rises to the top hand and usually lives there. The third part pounds away on the bottom hand, contrasting low 'A's with low 'G's a good deal of the time, featuring the heavy bottom hand toarluath ornament in many cases. The final part may again reside in the top hand or run about the length and breadth of the scale, but it almost always resolves with a couple of strong, bottom hand phrases.
There are hundreds of examples of this - a quick look at the classic march, "Captain Carswell," will confirm this observation. Jigs, hornpipes, strathspeys and reels follow, or play with, this basic dynamic pattern. It is part and parcel of the melodic patterning. The two together with rhythmical patterning make the tune what it is.

When I hear Highland pipers criticize small pipes they often say the tunes sound half dead on the small pipes, that the notes and doublings don't pop off the chanter in the same way they do off the Highland pipe chanter. In general, they feel the music loses most of its power and beauty on the small pipe. They also criticize the small pipes for "chirping." There is truth in all of this, because of the dynamics of the small pipe versus the Highland pipe as stated above.

Unfortunately, these same critical pipers often do not recognize the unique dynamic and tonal qualities of a well made, well reeded and well played Scottish small pipe. Their ears must be so attuned to the modern, Highland pipe norm that it is difficult for them to recognize or consider a different kind of sound, tone and dynamic. Sometimes they characterize the small pipe as a "practice instrument." Many of the mass-produced, plastic-reeded, mouth-blown small pipes popular with Highland pipers are, indeed, practice instruments. The chanters on most of these sets are actually practice chanters and a different animal altogether from a well made Scottish small pipe chanter. Although the dynamics are the same, the tonal quality of these practice pipes is tremendously inferior to a proper Scottish small pipe.

There are pipers raised in the Highland tradition who have internalized the sound of the small pipe at this point, fifteen years on from its invention. They have made new tunes especially for it. A contemporary composition provides an interesting example of a tune made for the Scottish small pipe in the form of a modern hornpipe - Anna Murray's "Hazy Day." Anna plays this sweet tune on her recording, Into Indigo. She told me the tune was composed on the small pipe, and it certainly fits on the small pipe with a real sense of purpose. On the Highland pipe it doesn't show off its lush qualities to their best advantage, although it still sounds great. The first three parts of the tune are in B minor, a key that seems to fit better on the small pipe in "A" than the Highland pipe, but that may be a matter of taste.

"G" grace note can be overused very quickly on any pipe, but it can mar a small pipe performance of a tune like "Jenny Dang the Weaver." The high 'G' grace note is softer than the notes it graces on the Highland chanter.

Interestingly enough, after I played my new Highland pipe chanter in 'A' made by Hamish Moore, for a few weeks I went back to the B flat chanter. The sound seemed surreally shrill and thin, and the ornamentation chirping in the extreme. Your frame of reference matters a great deal in your response to a quality of sound.

The dynamics of the Highland chanter in 'A' in comparison with the Highland chanter in B flat are worth mentioning here. The bottom hand is stronger on my 'A' chanter, while the top hand is ethereal. There is more difference in loudness between the top of the chanter and the bottom than there is on the B flat chanter. One of the things my teacher, Colin MacRae, who was taught in the '40s by a piper who won the Silver Star in 1899, always complains about at the contests these days is what he characterizes as a weak bottom hand. When I played a pibroch for Colin on my 'A' pipes, however, he was thrilled to hear the strength in the bottom hand that he has missed for so many years. Unfortunately, I did not actually play the movements any better on the 'A' chanter than I did on the 'B' flat chanter. It was the chanter itself that produced the sound Colin wanted to hear. The sound of the toarluath and crunluath movements was different as well.

When you consider that most pibrochs are bottom hand tunes, it makes sense that pipers who used a chanter with a loud bottom hand, and quiet top hand, would use the strongest notes for the themes of Salutes, battle tunes, rowing tunes, Marches and Gatherings. A quick glance through Angus MacKay will show this to be the case. When the upper hand is employed, as in a "thumb" variation, the sound is very quiet, almost inaudible, when compared to the sound of a modern chanter. This lends credence to the supposition that the old chanters were once set at a lower pitch than they are today.

Guitar accompaniment effectively buries the middle and low notes on a small pipe 'A' chanter unless the volume of the chanter is enhanced significantly. Later in the same set Anna plays R.S. MacDonald's modern classic, "The Last Tango in Harris." This shows how a tune that takes advantage of the disappearing high 'A' on the Highland pipes will sound like a series high 'A' bleeps on the small pipe, with the low hand melody disappearing into the guitar and bass accompaniment. Guitar accompaniment effectively buries the middle and low notes on a small pipe 'A' chanter unless the volume of the chanter is enhanced significantly. But even then the end result may be a lost and bleating high 'A'.

Dynamics are also important to consider in how a tune is graced and ornamented on one type of chanter versus another. Frowning Highland pipers complain about small pipes "chirping." This results from the loud high 'G' on the smallpipe. The high 'G' grace note can be overused very quickly on any pipe, but it can mar a small pipe performance of a tune like "Jenny Dang the Weaver." The high 'G' grace note is softer than the notes it graces on the Highland chanter.
The ‘E’ alto drone performs a very important service... to the top hand of the chanter by reinforcing the quieter, high notes. The drone configuration on the traditional Border pipe is bass, tenor and ‘E’ alto. The ‘E’ alto drone should "disappear" into the overall sound of the pipes. The sounds of the drones and chanter ought to come together seamlessly, as we know, but the ‘E’ alto drone when set up and tuned properly ought to be "invisible." The E alto drone performs a very important service, however, to the top hand of the chanter by reinforcing the quieter, high notes.

Attention to dynamics will also serve us in the technique and placement of grace notes and ornamentation. New styles of grace notes and ornamentation have and will continue to develop for the small pipe and Border pipe as more pipers devote themselves to these elegant instruments, and we begin to hear them with ears that are not trained only for the Highland pipes. The significance of the tradition of the Northumbrian small pipe cannot be underestimated as this organic development takes shape.

Attempts to impose or define the "correct" methods are, I think, premature and stunting. What follows is a description of my own experience, offered with the hope that there might be something you, gentle reader, might find useful.

Experiments using ‘F’ and E grace notes in place of the high ‘G’ on the small pipe and Border pipe have produced some very satisfying results, but again this may be a matter of taste. Hamish Moore was the first to suggest this to me on the Border pipe. Jock Agnew has also used ‘F’ as a grace note effectively on his Border pipe.

Single low ‘A’ or low ‘G’ taps, or shakes, are very useful separations of notes of the same pitch. These are common in many piping traditions. Double taps make great punctuation, but require control and restraint. Half doublings are also very good alternatives to high ‘G’ based doublings. Old style doublings are very useful, where you play a double grace note on top of the theme note, such as two successive ‘D’ grace notes on ‘C’. These old style doublings give the emphasis you want without a shrieking bleep on every up and down beat. And they do not require a tremendous amount of relearning.

One way to use the high ‘G’ grace note is to play it on the off beat, or back beat, after an unadorned theme note on the beat. This gives your tune lift and syncopation, playing off the expectation of a high-pitched bleat appearing in the music with the regularity of a metronome. You will find this off beat high ‘G’ grace note followed by ‘D’, ‘E’ or ‘C’ grace notes or shakes in the jigs of Terry Tully. To my ear this works especially well on the small pipe and Border pipe.

Heavy low hand ornaments, such as the birl, grip, bubbly and toarluath do not rip from the small pipe chanter with the same percussion they have on the Highland pipe. There are historical reasons for not using these movements on the Border pipe chanter, but the very nature of my Border pipe chanter does not encourage them. My Border pipe chanter will crow like a startled peacock if I attempt a toarluath from the upper hand. Grips can also produce this squawk. Burls work well, however, especially when played open. There is no forgiveness in this chanter.

Northumbrian style ornaments work as well as or better than any Highland pipe ornament on my Border pipe chanter. These are for the most part slight lits or dips around the note being graced, and in general are very spare. I play Border music on my Border pipes because I enjoy it, but also because it sounds better for the reasons stated above. I would play more Highland style music on it if the Border chanter accepted it without protest.

The small pipe does enhance the sound of edres and chedres. They lend the sound of an Irish cran to a tune when opened up so that their rhythm comes through. They are quite nice in jigs, though you will very rarely see them in published jigs. They usually appear in reels and hornpipes, but try them in a jig the next time you find a place that will take it.

One aspect of Highland ornamentation technique that is taken for granted among most of the small pipers and Border pipers I hear, live and on recordings, is the very quick, even, uniform way in which all doublings are played. I have met enough old pipers to know that this is not the way it always was. The first low ‘G’
in the throw on might he emphasized by a nearly unrecognizable pause. Barry Shears uses this heavy low 'G' grace note in most of the throws on that he makes on the Highland pipe as well as the small pipe. You can hear them on his recording, A Cape Breton Piper. Double 'F' is another doubling where you might accentuate the first 'G' grace note in order to add-subtlety to your expression. That is considered poor technique in a competition, however.

My Border pipe chanter allows cross fingering and tasty vibrato, but it also demands solid, clean fingering. Strong fingers on the chanter produce st’long, popping notes. And this in itself is a way to do away with too many chirping grace notes. I can “wallow” in and between notes much more effectively than on a Highland pipe, getting sounds that are very similar to the Uillean pipe. The tone is nasal in comparison with a Highland pipe chanter, giving it a different harmonic "taste." There is no "wallowing allowed on my small pipe chanters.

Use of an open ‘C’, with only one finger down as opposed to the College of Piping direction to put both ‘C’ and ‘G’ fingers down on the bottom hand, allows me to make very satisfying low grace notes. Jock Agnew also happily employs the open ‘C’ lute chanter was designed that way - Ed. Colin MacRae was taught the only way to play the sequence of ‘C’, low ‘G’ grace note, low ‘A’ common in cello mor is with an open ‘C’. The closed will not provide the necessary slap to low ‘G’. He says the old chanters were made to sound a true ‘C’ when played open.

As new tunes are made to suit the unique sounds of these two bellows blown instruments, as more individuals devote their piping time and energy to them, ornaments will continue to change and develop. This is an exciting time. Attempts to impose direction or limits on this development are misplaced, I think.

Key to the process will be pipe-makers producing instruments of higher and higher quality. Musicians will have to do their part by blowing steady and setting their instruments up to produce a warm, complex tone rich in harmonics. We must play in tune, as well as use the best technique. Just as important as any clues we can glean from historical documentation will be a thorough understanding of the potential of our instruments. I hope this article showed you something new about dynamics and prompted fresh approaches in your own piping.

**Making Elder Drone Reeds (EASILY)**

Over the years I tried making elder drone reeds with little success. I sought help where I thought I might find it but found little expertise in the art. I did however find some lore and a few old wives tales. I was inspired to keep on trying because I have seen quite a few good elder reeds, I love the tone and I believe the old-timers seldom used anything else.

(To digress just a moment, I have actually made an elder chanter reed. It worked quite well, took some time to whittle, and was mellow in tone - as expected - but was perhaps in reality a bit ‘dull’. Chanter reeds can be made from any material with an acceptable level of longitudinal rigidity, but cane does a fine job of it and is much easier worked than most potential alternatives.)

Antique drone reeds, which turn up now and then, are invariably made from elder. The earliest pipes had, what might seem today to be wide bore drones, but when elder reeds are used the balance becomes much nicer. It may just have been my technique, but I could not get my 18th century Pastoral drones to work with cane at all. The first elder reeds fitted worked perfectly well and without much trouble. (I only wish the chanter was as easy to fit!).

The present story begins July 1999, during Willie week, when Pat Mitchell and I were discussing elder drone reeds. Pat said that he could remember somebody saying that the answer was to make them ‘green.’ That sounded inspirational to me - like it might just be the answer. I went home with this thought and eventually cut my elder in February - paying attention to the ‘lore’ that you cut in late winter, before the full moon - when the sap starts rising. I also, of course apologised to the tree before cutting because as you no doubt know, every elder is an old witch in disguise and unless you apologise in advance all sorts of misfortunes can befall you.
Immediately after cutting I removed the bark and the pith of around 30 sticks and cut the tongues. It felt like instant success. The tongues were so easy to cut I could hardly believe what immediately seemed to be the obvious, having spent considerable time previously trying to figure out how to get a neat, leak-proof cut with a scalpel on hard, seasoned elder. I brought them indoors and left them in a cool corner of the living room. After about two weeks I finished them and tried them out, finding that about 50% of them were quite good. They must have taken about two to three minutes each to make.

Here are the details of my experiences plus any useful additions gleaned from others which may be of help or interest.

Where to cut.
Wilbert Garvin tells me that Frank McFadden used to go up Black mountain, above Belfast to cut his elder. I always imagined that this could have been to get slower growing wild and un-trimmed stuff, but maybe it was because Black mountain was just the handiest place for him to go and he liked the view of the city from up there.

When to cut.
I will not risk the wrath of the witches, and advise one to cut only in very late winter, before budding begins. Be quick about it, elder is one of the first plants in my county Down garden to bud in the new year.

What to cut.
Quite simply do not bother to cut any elder which has been trimmed in recent years. The dimensions and type of twigs that are required will only come from plants which have been left alone for a long long time. Elder when cut, will grow at a very rapid pace in that and the following seasons, producing very thin and distorted walls. This is useless.

If you are not sure try squeezing the twig to find out if it collapses easily. It shouldn't. Another tell-tale sign is the colour. Quick grown elder - at least around here - is purplish rather than brownish/grey. The final test is to cut a sample and ascertain the wall thickness by looking at it. The walls should be nearly one millimetre thick for the smallest tenor reed and about 2mm or so for a bass.

Cut straight pieces of about two to three and a half inches long, which are clear of any nodules or deformities. Elder reeds, particularly the baritone and bass are generally much shorter than cane reeds would be. It is worth noting that the smaller tenor reeds can be made more easily from elder than from cane and, as most of us know, good small cane is hard to come by.

First steps.
Make all sorts of lengths but generally stick to around one and a half inches to two inches overall for tenors and two and a half to three and a half inches for baritone and bass. Lengths are not so critical because the bores vary so much. You could find you have a two-inch bass and a three-inch baritone although the bass will have a much wider bore.

Remove the bark and then the pith. The bark comes off very easily. The pith needs a stiff iron wire flattened at the end, or small drill to get it out. Geoff Wooff suggested a ceramic tile saw blade, which is excellent for cleaning out. Work from either end and the middle piece will then usually push out with little difficulty. Try to remove all the pith and finally blow out the remaining loose particles.

The tongue should be cut on the most concave part of the stick. Elder is not usually perfectly straight and if you cut on any other face the tongue will distort outwards during the drying process and will never make a good reed. I discovered by experiment that cut the way I suggest, there is no need to tie the tongue closed for the drying out process.

Using a single sided razor blade, or an old style blade broken in two (watch your fingers), cut the top of the tongue about one third to under a half way through the tube. Keep the cut at roughly the angle shown in the drawing and make sure it is equal on both sides. When it is in as far as necessary bend the blade so that a little split occurs. The nice thing is that unlike cane it will not split very far. Turn the blade into the split and cut the tongue down carefully, without trying to split the wood (as you would with cane). You need to stay in control of the tongue shape. Working gradually outwards, bring the tongue to the inside wall and remove the blade. The tongue must remain reasonably airtight so care is needed during this operation not to run off the required line of cut. The length of tongue depends on the type of reed wanted of course, but it is not hypercritical. If all looks good at this point, take some heavily waxed (cobbler's wax) hemp thread and wrap about six turns around the reed below the cut.

Finish the reed by tapering the end to suit the reed seat and cover it over by wrapping with waxed hemp as usual.

Geoff Wooff told me that many old ones he had seen were wrapped at both ends. Perhaps this was to stop splitting in later life - or when drying out so I take no chances and wrap both ends, just in case. It certainly does no harm.

Leave it somewhere so that air can pass around it but not in direct sunlight or heat.
After drying. At least two weeks later try to finish one and you will soon discover if it has dried well enough to use. If it seems OK block the top with a drop of sealing or cobbler’s wax. Now suck it and see. Just air? Not to worry, it has a good chance. Elder will not work unless it is quite heavily weighted on the tongue, even resorting to lead or iron shot embedded in the wax at times is acceptable to connoisseurs. This also flattens the pitch of course, and these reeds can be flattened a remarkable amount. The tongue may be found to be too stiff and if so scrape it at the fulcrum as you would cane to ease it up. If it is too weak - or too flat, you can try tying a waxed hemp bridle just above the fulcrum. Even if it stops when blown hard with the mouth try it in your drone. Many elder reeds sound as if they will never work when blown or sucked by the mouth (and vice versa).

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ONE WOMAN’S COLLOGUE

Helen Ross

We met for the Collogue at about 9.30 at The Original Hotel. Roslin has lots of drinking places, being 6 miles distant from Edinburgh, and thus benefitting from the old licencing laws concerning *bona fide* travellers on Sundays. There were about 40 enthusiasts at the meeting, including two Japanese, an Alaskan, and several from the south of England. All pipe performers, and most of the audience, were men. (I understand that this happens in order to counterbalance clarsach colloquies, which are manned entirely by women). Julian Goodacre talked about the use of the Baritone Drone (repeating much of what he had written in Common Stock, Vol.14(1), June 1999, pp. 6-9, because he claimed to have lost the copy and no longer knew what was in it). He demonstrated the beauty of an E drone with an A tune, and the clash of the same drone with a D tune, but failed to offer any practical solution as to how to switch this drone on and off when playing a set of tunes in different keys (so I shall continue to leave mine off). We then had a workshop on Tullochgorum and the Reel of Stumpie, with examples of variants from Rab Wallace and Matt Seattle on pipes, and Mairi Campbell on fiddle. These tunes have many names and versions. They are to die for (and also for playing, for dancing, for listening, and for singing). Tullochgorum gives rise to "What the Deil ails ye?"; Stumpie gives rise to various wedding-related activities, such as "Hap and row", and "Jack's be the Daddy on't". Mairi recommends playing Stumpie as a fast reel for the Dashing White Sergeant (but I like it as a march for the Gay Gordons).

Next came the AGM, which produced some argument about whether performers should be required to play without music at the competition. We voted against the use of dots. Good hot lunch. Then some tunes on modal chanters from Nigel

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THUMB TWIDDING

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This was followed by a discussion on teaching pipes, with a forum of Gary West, Davie Taylor, Jock Agnew and Barnaby Brown. Barnaby, who studied music at Cambridge and wrote a thesis on pibroch, made a passionate speech about how neglected our own traditional British music was in official music circles - apparently there is nothing about it in Grove’s dictionary, though other minority cultures are represented. Barnaby explained about the modes in pibroch: there are various bimodal systems, which are pitch collections and not chords, and these are arranged in patterns of...
alternation or repetition. Davie Taylor advised using E rather than G grace-notes on the small pipes, because E is not as loud and discordant as G. Pete Stewart played an interesting 5/4 tune, "The Dalkeith Bagpipe Tune". We finished with some tunes from Davie Taylor, Gary West, Iain MacInnes and Nigel Richard - quite unrehearsed as they were substituting for Vicki Swan and Jonny (who failed to arrive owing to car trouble). Had some soup at the other pub, the Roslin Glen, and then went round to Rosslyn Chapel at 6.45 p.m. By that time it was dark, and raining hard.

The concert was brilliant and the atmosphere superb. It was sold out, and people were packed in. The performers sat under the candle lights, looking like the angels in the carvings, while the Green Man grinned down. Jim Gilchrist presided admirably. Nigel Richard played cittern and Matt Seattle the Border pipes. Barnaby Brown played Highland pipes, Montgomery Small pipes, and Pictish triple pipes [Launeddas? Ed.]. Simon McKerrell, John Saunders, Fraser Fifield and Fraser Macdonald played various instruments together. John Saunders' new baby slept through it all. In the interval I chatted to a well-dressed middle-aged woman, who looked a cut above the average piping punter. "Do you stay round here?" I asked. "Oh yes," she said, with justifiable pride in her voice, "I'm Barnaby's mother."

Afterwards we went back to the Roslin Glen hotel, where the music was slow to start. Jock Agnew and I eventually started things off by playing duets on concertinas (Jimmy Allen and The Herd on the Hill). After that some pipers got going, and wouldn't stop. The locals were amazed, and gathered round to listen. We were the last to leave the hotel. We then went round to Jim Buchanan's, where we had some more to drink and a good crack till the small hours.

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**LBPS 18th Annual Competition 2001**

*Bill Telfer*

*Jock asked me to jot some notes about the experience of coming from overseas and taking part in this Event*

The LBPS competitions have a reputation for laid back ambience, emphasising enjoyment of the music rather than the competitive element. I nevertheless found out the hard way that it's easier to have fun if you're well prepared.

**Mistakes to avoid in future:**

1) Opting to park as close as possible to the pleasant venue, in the heart of the Old Town (at £1 an hour), entailing slipping out to dodge traffic wardens and shift the car every 2 hours. Next time I'll travel by train or park and ride.

2) Arriving late. (Well, it was to be a laid back affair wasn't it?). Then discovering I was eligible for the first event of the day, whereupon finding a drone reed in the bag left me with only a few minutes to extricate it and get tuned...was I flustered?

3) Over-anxiety to have the pipes well played-in for the Border Pipes Open, the last class of the day, led to spending too much time back-of-house tuning etc., missing out on hearing many of the performances.

4) Having made prior arrangements for the evening, then finding there was to be a session in the pub immediately after the competition. Tantalising and disappointing given that such sessions are a rare pleasure where I come from.

**Highlights:** Renewing auld acquaintances and making new ones; discussing, comparing (and in free moments and back corners, trying out) one another's instruments; discovering that Jock's and my pipes were in tune with one another, and after one run through on the back stair entering as a duet; my dear daughter, piping-tolerant but no aficionado, affably spending the day with me, but dodging the start of each class lest she be asked to judge!

**Suggestion:** I was already travelling by the time the pre-Easter issue of the Newsletter was posted, so I missed it. In any case it doesn't explain the "Classes and Rules" the rules, which were only seen on arrival at the venue; earlier notification and more details about the programme format and rules would be welcome.

**A Coincidence:** Receiving the Goodacre trophy, which turns out to be half a Montgomery chanter, when I'm already owner of the other half, i.e., a prize awarded years ago when there was an overseas section of the competition. Needless to say I'm already at work with the superglue.
PIPING COMPETITION RESULTS

Intermediate (6 entries) [The Julian Goodacre Trophy]

1st Bill Telfer  Purple Bamboo Melody, Lassie Gae sit on my Cowhill, Holey Ha’penny
2nd = Bill Bennet  Rose of Allendale, Go To Berwick Jonny, Roxburgh Castle.
2nd = Stuart Letford  Ay Waukin’0, Seeking the Galloway, The Lassies of Melrose Jenny Dun the Weaver (jig, then reel). High Road to Linton, Tail Toddle.
3rd = George McKend  Teribus, Lament for Freeman’s Whistle, Helen Loughborough*. Stool of Repentance
3rd = Tom Dingwall  Teribus, Corn Riggs, My Love She’s but a Lassie Yet, Calloipe House. Rocking the Baby

Pipe and Song (4 entries) [The Jimmy Wilson Memorial Cup]

Davie Robertson "Are Ye Sleeping Maggie"
2nd Donald Lindsay "Huntingtower"
3rd Peter McCalister "Bonny Doon".

New Composition (7 entries) [The London Trophy]

Donald Lindsay "All the way to Newcastle"  (see p.40)
2nd Hamish Moore* "The Brush Shop in Victoria Street"  (see p.40)
3rd Jim Hurson "Hannah Wilson’s Jig"  (see p.41)

Duet for Pipes and other Instrument (5 entries) [Dunfermline Tassies]

1st Ester Kuck (Bodhran) and Christian Tewdordt (Border Pipes)  Congress Reel, Maggie’s Pancakes, Easy Club Reel.
2nd Jenny Delmonte (fiddle) and Tom Dingwall (smallpipes)  Rowan Tree, Pumpkin’s Fancy, Man From Skye, Banjo Breakdown.

Veterans (for those over 65 only!) (3 entries).

1st Jim Hurson  Blue-eyed Boy, Congress Jig, Tom O’Rourke’s, Silver Spear.
2nd Jock Agnew  O’er The Dyke, I’ll Aye Ca’ In, Meggy’s Foot.
3rd David Stevenson  Seasoned Piper, March of Soldiers, French tunes.

Novice (2 entries)  [The Heriot & Allan Quaich]

1st S. Forrest  Souters of Selkirk
2nd Niall Anderson  Fingal’s Weeping, Mary Weep no more for Me.

Open Solo for Scottish smallpipes (8 entries) [Colin Ross Trophy]

1st Peter McCalister  Drops of Brandy, Flower of the Quern, O’Rourke’s Reel, Pladdy, The Railway & various.
2nd Donald Lindsay  Last Cradle Song, In the Kitchen, Blackberry Bush.
3rd Vicki Swan  Metamorphosis

Duet for Pipes (4 entries)  [Mains Castle medals]

1st Stuart Letford & Bill Bennett (smallpipes)  Johnny Cope, Hag at the Churn, Rocking the Baby, Girl from Drunganoan, Mason’s Apron
2nd Donald Lindsay & Niall Anderson (smallpipes)  Teribus, Corn Riggs, My Love She’s but a Lassie Yet, Calliope House, Rocking the Baby.
3rd Bill Telfer & Jock Agnew (Border pipes)  Where will my Goodman Ly, Drops of Brandy.
Open Solo, Lowland/Border Pipes. (5 entries) [Hamish Moore Quaich]

1st Malcolm Robertson  Lasses that baffle us, Drink the Worts and spill the Beer, Donald Willie and his dog, Chloe’s Passion.

2nd Bill Telfer  Johnny Cock up your Beaver, Wally as the Marquis Ran

3rd Christian Tewdordt  Tyrone Margaret, Dusky Meadow, Lady Glen Orchy

*(For those who have a curiosity in this direction, Hamish played using the 1st, 3rd and 4th fingers of his left (top) hand. See Common Stock Vol 14 No 1 June 1999.)*

All the way to Newcastle  Donald Lindsay

Robert Cresser  Slow Waltz  Hamish Moore

*(NAME CHANGE. Same tune, but differently named in the competition!)*
REVIEWS

LBPS SESSION TUNE BOOK

This book of session tunes, compiled by Jock Agnew for the Lowland and Border Pipers’ Society, is a convenient size with a spiral binding which opens flat or can be propped up. The music ranges from traditional Highland pipe tunes to the Lowland and smallpipe repertoire, including Burns and Dixon. All are graded easy, medium or hard, but none are rated more than medium hard.

All the music is written for the smallpipes in ‘A’ with chords for other instruments, but with no grace notes which are quite rightly left to the player. One of the tunes ‘Leaving Lewis,’ is set for both ‘A’ and ‘D’ smallpipes, and two of the tunes ‘Chevy Chase’ and ‘Mary Scott,’ have harmonies. Although most of the tunes are well-known, it would have been helpful to have indicated the type of tune such as slow air, march, reel etc. Also, with a number of smallpipes having a key for high ‘B’, there is a place for showing where this note could be played, such as the second part of ‘The Mill Mill O’.

However these are minor quibbles for a book which is a welcome addition to the growing body of music for Scottish smallpipes, which are becoming increasingly popular for playing with other instruments. This user-friendly book is very reasonably priced [£4.50 members, £6.50 non members + 50p postage surface mail] and would fit into any pipe box. It would be a boon to anyone who takes their smallpipes along to a session.

David Hannay

GATHERING OF THE CLANS
Vol 2. A collection of music, photographs and historical essays. Compiled & collected by Barry Shears

These 130+ tunes were, it must be remembered, composed and notated for the Highland bagpipes – which presents no problem to the players of Scottish smallpipes and Border pipes.

The historical essays include some fascinating vignettes on both well-known and not so well-known pipers who have contributed to the musical traditions that live on in Nova Scotia. Then follows 77 pages of music after which there are 9 pages of notes on the tunes, (though it would have been helpful to have had the page numbers of those tunes immediately alongside).

Of the 130 tunes, some 56 are marked "traditional," and most of these are arranged by Barry Shears. The majority are great to play, particularly on Border pipes, but I would specially recommend you try the strathspey Sir Archibald Grant of Monymusk, a lovely arrangement of that tune, I had a wife of my own, the only 9/8 jig, and Farewell to the Creeks as a 6/8 jig.

The gracings, while appearing to be set for Highland pipes, in most cases also work well for smallpipes. Only about a dozen tunes use grips and toarluaths, and while some of them are rather heavy on the ‘G’ grace note, they can usually be ‘adjusted’ by the
smallpipe player (to an ‘E’ or ‘D’) if they become too intrusive.

The marches are mostly, in my opinion, best suited to being played on the big pipes, as is of course the one Piobaireachd - ‘Faitte Mhorar Blonistead. But this leaves 46 reels, 30 jigs, 22 strathspeys, 6 hornpipes and 1 I air and Waltzes for the small-pipe player to get his or her teeth into.

Although the reel Oron Na Teine has a tantalising reference to “Melody traditional, Words by Am Bard Ruadh”, no words could I discover! And occasionally I found that I recognised the tune, but not its title. For instance the jig The leg of the Duck first played as a 6/8 march from William Ross’s 1885 collection, where it is called Bodddach-a-lander.

One tune - J Scott Skinner’s 1-teorct the Hero - has seconds printed alongside, and although I couldn’t (naturally) play melody and seconds together, it does appear to have been treated in the usual pipe band style i.e. note for note harmony.

Now I have mentioned mostly traditional melodies up to this point, but there are some really nice contemporary ones. As a taster it is well worth playing Barry Shears’ Amt Maes Reel, and John Daily’s Biodag Chalain. I have marked many more that I intend to return to - let me just mention Brenda Stubbers’ lament The Longest Night which is really haunting.

This book is rich in music and reminiscences. I could go on, but best I intend to return to - let me just note for note harmony.

Barry is the leading authority on piping in Cape Breton. His three books, including the recently published The Gathering of the Clans Collection, Vol 2 [See adjacent review - Ed], are as important and influential as any of pipe tunes published in the last two decades. They sparked the new interest in Cape Breton piping of the last ten years among “alternative” pipers and influenced pipe band medleys as well. The history and photographs they contain are as important as the tunes themselves. For those of us who know these books, the release of this CD is very exciting and long anticipated.

The CD features a very old MacDougall of Aberfeldy Highland pipe with a beautifully reedy chanter and Hamish Moore smallpipe in A. The smallpipe drones are rich and nasal, but you have to listen hard to hear them through the guitar and piano accompaniment. Barry's strong fingers and rhythmic style show off the smallpipe chanter very well. Bottom hand movements, which tend to disappear on the smallpipe, come through clearly. After listening to this CD many times other recordings featuring the Scottish smallpipe seem lacking when compared to Barry's bold and athletic fingerling. Barry works the chanter the way a fisherman works the rod and reel with a big salmon on the line.

"The Foxhunter" is very much at home on the smallpipe in his expert hands. The old favorite, "Hector the Hero," brings the best elements of old and new together in a seamless and graceful way. Strathspeys appear in the high powered and difficult to master Cape Breton fashion. Reels, too, flow in a style that is traditional and personal, easily recognized but completely unique, the real mark of an expert who has devoted his life to the music. And, listening to Barry play a set of jigs it is difficult to imagine there could be anything wrong in the world.

The liner notes are well written and informative. Barry gives the background to the tunes themselves, and pays homage to many traditional pipers who preceded him, especially those he was fortunate enough to learn from directly. Unique among contemporary pipers with claims to Cape Breton piping traditions, Barry took every opportunity to spend time with such old pipers as Arthur Severence, Alex Currie, Archie MacKenzie, and Dave MacKinnon before they passed away. He offers the CD as a tribute to these culture bearers.

There is one complaint I must acknowledge. I wish the listener heard Barry on the solo pipe. Only a piping geek like myself would complain about having too much accompaniment from the best musicians in Cape Breton, but there you have it.

There are other reasons why this is an important recording, having to do with proprietary arguments swirling around Cape Breton and Gaelic piping styles in the more mystical corners of our little world. The quality, honesty and vitality of this recording make it unimpeachable in that regard. It is wonderful music because that is just what it is.

John Daily

THE SMALLPIPES SURVIVAL GUIDE (68 pp) by Ray Sloan available from Ray Sloan at Lyndhurst, Simonburn, Northumberland. Price £6.00 plus £2.00 p&p

I fell upon my review copy of this illustrated manual of care and maintenance for the smallpipes with eager anticipation and was not disappointed. My keen interest in tapping into Ray Sloan’s (RS) vast store of knowledge and experience is mainly due to a deplorable personal characteristic of not being able to leave things well alone. Here at last is a manual not just for the likes of me but for all bellows-blown pipers who want to get the best out of their instruments.

The book has 68 pages and numerous clear diagrams and drawings, and is divided into 8 sections and 6 appendices. The first three sections contain (1) a preface by RS, (2) an introduction by Jim McGillivray, and (3) an historical sketch with some carefully chosen words on Bellows Pipes of the Borders by Matt Seattle. The fourth section on “Getting Started” is straightforward practical advice on bellows technique but with three disconcerting misprints on page 19.

Moving on to drone tuning technique on p.21, I came across a statement that the tenor drone notes to low A, bottom finger hole on the chanter. Should this not be second bottom hole or am I being pedantic?
The fingering charts in the appendix are useful and apply both to Borders pipes and SSPs.

On p.22 on General Maintenance (cautionary notes on caring for your pipes) there is an instruction to apply neatsfoot oil to the bore of one chanter on a weekly basis. To oil or not to oil is a controversial issue since opinion is very much divided on this subject (see Common Stock, Vol 15 No I "Oiling the wood"). Personally, if it is done carefully, I believe it to be beneficial - but to oil once a week might be excessive. It surely depends on the type of wood your chanter is made of and how often your pipes are subjected to variations in atmospheric humidity. Since we are playing bellows blown pipes moisture from the breath is not a problem. However, moisture from the atmosphere is readily absorbed and oiling will reduce that.

On p 27 in a section on care and maintenance of bellows a very useful technique is described for removing the inlet bush by popping it out from underneath. This was but one of many examples of good advice and practical knowledge that pepper this manual.

On the matter of drone reeds, RS conflicts with Highland pipe manuals (College of Piping) when he says the reed should NOT double tone, and suggests flicking the tongue up to encourage it to vibrate.

Section 8 is an important section about chanter reeds and problem solving and is followed by the first appendix, which is a chanter reed trouble-shooting chart. In the introduction Ray mentions what he calls a very glaring omission, namely a chapter on Chanter Reed manufacture and maybe a section on plastic drone reed maintenance and manufacture. However, these instructions can be found elsewhere (see Common Stock, past issues or try the Internet) and I don't think he should castigate himself over this perceived gap. There surely comes a time when one has to make a wrenching decision to draw the line and let one's work be published for the world to take or leave. There will always be people saying "why didn't you include this or that?" This section alone to me is worth the very modest price of the book.

Jim Buchanan

A SWARM OF DRONES - this CD, available from the Northumbrian Musical Heritage Society of British Columbia (c/o) Rob MacDonald, 920 West 17th Avenue, Vancouver BC V5Z 1V4), is a recording of the closing stages of Vancouver's first "Alternative Bagpipe Festival" in August 2000. It features live performances on Scottish smallpipes, uilleann pipes and Northumbrian smallpipes, by Alan Waters, Phil White and Dick Hensold. In all, 18 tracks of music are presented, and several of these consist of sets of tunes, so a good deal of music is available and much of it is expertly played.

It is a brave man who will attempt descriptive Piobaireachd on the smallpipes, but this is what Alan Walters does in The Desperate Battle of the Birds, playing fine sounding Scottish smallpipes in 'A'. Mention should also be made of another rarity, those different methods of tone-production that are often said to be a feature of the uilleann pipes, actually heard for once in Phil White's expressive rendition of The Wounded Hussar, where the agonised groans and cries of the unfortunate member of some forgotten militia are realised with frightening realism. This gives way to an epic series of jigs and reels, played in open, rolling style despite a hand injury which Phil had suffered earlier!

The Scottish smallpipe playing is notable for its clean and precise gracing (this after all being one of the main pleasures of small piping) and the Irish tunes are likewise properly ornamented.

With Dick Hensold's contribution one is on less firm ground. It is good to hear a 'D' set of Northumbrian pipes, but the chanter is the clarinet-being-practiced-next-door type, and the drones are not harmonically active. This is wrong for tunes like Lea Riggs and Cut and Dry Dolly and the situation is made worse by some neo-baroque doodling in the Carolan tune Cahan O'hara which pays no attention to the surrounding drone harmony. These episodes are apparently newly composed, the original tune not being long enough. On the other hand, if you ever wondered what the Swedish bagpipes sounded like, here it is on track 13.

There are some extraneous noises on the recording, which however manages brilliantly to convey the good-natured conviviality which those lucky enough to attend events of this nature enjoy.

John Burke

Reviews

"nevertimetonplay" - Scatter the Mud

I often whinge on about the state of piping in Canada. Most can't see past the GHP and aren't aware of any idiom other than the Pipe-band cliché. When my mood gets too dark, on goes the Battlefield Band or the Tannies onto the player.

Now I have a Canadian group to stand with the best contemporary Scots folk. Scatter the Mud's arrangements and lyrics are well-crafted and witty, and Cam Keating is a gifted piper. In fact, he's the best sort of piper, as he makes you want to pick up your practice chanter at once and try to learn the tune. He brings a welcome innovation to the instrument. On one track he plays the Highland chanter like a Bombard, with some nifty cross-fingering and his work on the smallpipes has kept me away from my Northumbrian set since I got the album. For my money, the best track on this album is the funny/macabre 'Little piece of me'. If Vincent van Gogh had played smallpipes during a jam session with the Beatles in a country-western bar, this is what he would have sounded like. A great track and if there's ANY justice it'll become a standard.

I must admit that there are tracks I don't like - slow over-mellow vocal pieces make me grit my teeth - but the instrumental tracks are great, the best being An Clar Scatala/Richard's Vaho set which I believe will become one of the Really Great Tunes.

Rob MacDonald
Concert for Highland Bagpipe, Tin Whistle, Percussion and Pipe Organ by Duo Contrario – i.e. Herbert Bartmann (GHB, Scottish smallpipes, tin whistle and drum) and Thomas Blum (organ). GEMMA DC21052000

Web site www.duo-contrario

This is an unusual album. The combination of pipes and organ initially requires a period to adjust the shell-likes to the sonorous, piercing, clinical, baroque bagpiping juxtaposed with the majestic, evocative, depth and tone of the church organ.

Thankfully, and it does not take too long, Bartmann and Blum’s musicianship and technique either wins you over by track 3, or, if you still do not like it, will leave you astounded at their audacity in delivering such an innovative approach.

While many of their contemporaries turn to the latest technology in their search for newer digital sounds, Bartmann and Blum have plundered the past and reaped a rich harvest of analogue sound.

From the opening track one to track twenty-five, Blum, the organist, is impressive. His atmospheric playing is on a continuum that ranges from moody to magnificently triumphant and serves to slightly soften the sharper, more piercing chanter sound.

Bartmann has easily transferred his learning, skills and experience from the great pipe to the smallpipe. On track 18 he stamps his authority with an opening flourish of rippling bubbling notes. The rest of this track just gets better and better.

This may not be a CD to suit everyone’s immediate tastes. However you might want to consider spending some time allowing this CD time to grow on you and mature and you will be pleasantly rewarded. The inclusion of a web site is of tremendous help as it enables you to listen before you buy as well as listing their live gigs.

Jim Fraser.

Bag o’ Cats - Out of the Bag
Greentrax Recordings LTD
CDTRAX 193
www.bagocats.org.uk

Although not purely pipe music, this album places heavy emphasis on the Border pipes. Of the 11 tracks, 6 contain pipes. Fraser Fifield is the main piper, with Nigel Richard taking the odd holiday from his accompanying role.

Nigel, Dick [Lee] and Fraser have all written tunes for the pipes on the album and between them have pushed the boundaries of pipe tunes as far from the Highland-style strathspey and march scene as possible. The arrangements are very imaginative with a great deal of Eastern European and Asian influence. The time signatures and keys are constantly changing in a fluid torrent of music.

Highland, Cape Breton and even Border playing pipe styles are not to be found on this album and it is very refreshing to hear such high quality of playing breaking away from the Celtic tradition on this instrument.

The pipes first appear on the third track, Inverleith Park: a gentle air, in which they blend beautifully with the other instruments. This jumps straight into an Eastern number called Glen Kabul, full of enough cross fingerings and the changes in time signature to tie your fingers in knots. Track 6, (Popocateptl, the name of a volcano), was originally written for a much larger piece of music for the Vale
of Athol pipe band to play. It is a very descriptive piece of writing, full of musical twists and turns, even a sound that is not hard to imagine being the baying of cattle. Track 7, King of Laois is the only tradition track, but this is just to remind the listener that home is not too far away, before jumping straight back into the fray of Eastern rhythmic and tonal mix.

In all, this album has not left my CD player since it's arrival, a holiday for the ears, piping pushing the limits, encompassing traditions from other cultures and blending them in the most exquisite fashion. It is thoroughly recommended.

Vicki Swan

- Reviews -

This is the third tunebook by Julian Goodacre, specifically devoted to tunes for the English revival bagpipes.

The pipe case size book contains 49 tunes of which 27 are new compositions by a variety of pipers active in the English bagpipe scene and the other melodies are traditional tunes arranged for the bagpipes. The music is clearly and simply notated, I suspect by the ABC Master, Chris Walshaw who contributes several fine tunes and arrangements. My particular favourites are Robin Hood's Bay; The Cambo Question by Julian Goodacre and Any Second Now by David Faulkener. The book is worth buying just for these alone, but there is a plethora of other excellent material, traditional and new such as The Piper's Fling, Fartewell, Sayes Court, Lavender Blue. This little book is another significant contribution to the ever growing documentation and tune resources available to those who enjoy the English bagpipe sound, with its hints of France and the Parvas of Leicestershire. Ring Julian and buy one. Gordon Mooney.
Meetings and Events

July 14th & 15th. Vancouver. Workshop & tuition for Scottish and Northumbrian smallpipes. Contact Rob MacDonald (604) 6179575


August 25th - 27th North Hero Piper's Gathering, Vermont U.S.A. Instructions on Scottish smallpipes, Uilleann pipes, Northumbrian pipes and English pipes. Contact Mike Dow (207) 363-7924 or e-mail Rick Damon mailto:rick.damon@dartmouth.edu

November 17th 18th Annual Collogue. Bimam House Hotel, Dunkeld, Perthshire. Details to follow via the Newsletter.

EDINBURGH. 1st Tuesday of the month. Castle Bar Cafe, Johnstone Terr (near Edinburgh Castle). Contact Nigel Richard 0131 551 1726

GLASGOW, Smallpipe sessions every Thursday, 8 p.m. onwards. St Andrews in the Square (central Glasgow) in the Cafe Source bar. Contact number 0141 548 6020. (There is also a singer's session on Wednesday nights).

NORTHEAST. 1st and 3rd Thursday of the month at the Swan pub, Greenside. Contact Steve Barwick 0191 286 3545.

LONDON. 3rd Thursday of every 2nd month (except July). London Scottish Regimental Headquarters, 95 Horseferry Rd. Contact Jock Agnew 01621 855447

BRISBANE, Queensland. Meeting every month. Contact Malcolm McLaren (07 3820 2902) for details of day and venue

LBPS WEB SITE www.netreal.co.uk/lbps/