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On the Cover: Thanks to Natacha ("Pibette") of Paris, France for the original photograph. Image rendering by Vince Janoski.

Ticking Off the Boxes

THE GLENFIDDICH SOLO PIPING CHAMPIONSHIP

Blair Castle, Blair Atholl,
Scotland

October 28, 2006

by Bruce Campbell

The Glenfiddich Solo Piping Championships, held at Blair Castle, holds iconic status in the piping world where it is universally regarded as the world title. That may be unofficial, but there is little doubt that the event ticks all the right boxes.

This year was unusual in that there were no North American contestants—although the balance was somewhat altered by the inclusion of Canadian Jim McGillivray on the judging bench for the march, strathspey & reel. The Ontario champion had played at Blair Castle five times himself in his illustrious competing career and so was no stranger to the Glenfiddich.

The piping event has been built up into such a major occasion that it has become like many other major sporting and arts events throughout the world where the event has actually become bigger than the playing. For a variety of reasons, the piping never seems to really match the hype, although there are certainly great performances in amongst what at times can be a really tension-packed day.

This year, there were two new faces in the competing line-up of ten:

Alastair Dunn from Glasgow and Northern Ireland and Alan Russell from Keltly. Both were at Blair courtesy of prizes won at the Northern Meeting and the Argyllshire Gathering—Dunn with the Gold Medal at Aviemore and Russell with a second placing in the Former Winner's March Strathspey & Reel at the same event. A first-time contestant has never won the event since its first showing in 1974 and in truth it was not going to happen this time either.

The morning started off with the piobaireachd event but not before *fear an tighe* Angus John MacLellan opened with the sad announcement of the recent death of Harry Denyer, who was awarded the Balvenie Medalist for services to piping in 2004. Harry had passed away after a short illness with cancer. This year's medal for services to piping for 2006 was awarded to Sir Iain MacKay, the great New Zealand Piobaireachd authority.

The requirements for the Glenfiddich see each competitor submit six piobaireachd and six MSRs, with the judges choosing the tunes the night before. This year's judging panels included Iain MacFadyen, Jack Taylor, and John Wilson for the piobaireachd and James Banks, John MacDougall, and Jim McGillivray for the MSR.

Iain Speirs had the



DEREK MAXWELL

Gordon Walker (left) and Angus McColl celebrate their finishes at Blair Castle.

daunting task of being first on in the piobaireachd, playing the big nameless tune, "Cherede Darieva" from the Colin Campbell of Nether Lorn Canntaireachd. Other than nerves, the early competitors have to battle the colder conditions of the castle's main hall with a draught seeming to drift across the stage.

This tune requires a good top hand which Speirs certainly had, and in the end took out a fifth placing.

The event was won by Angus MacColl, who benefited from being on in the afternoon session. He played "The Red Speckled Bull," a tune which needs a firm guiding hand to take it from the monotony of having too many similar variations. With four similar variations before the suibhal is even played, the tendency to drag the tune is an obvious pitfall, but MacColl grabbed it by the scruff of

the neck and pushed its phrasing along in a fine style.

Rather surprisingly, few of the other competitors gave their tunes anything like a robust treatment, and all too often the audience were subjected to jaggy playing.

Greg Wilson, the three times Silver Chanter winner, took out second prize with "My Dearest on Earth, Give Me Your Kiss." He played the Piobaireachd Society's amended Colin Cameron arrangement. He had a slip in the suibhal which would rule him out of contention for the major prize but this was a fine, bold tune on an excellent bagpipe.

Third placing went to Euan MacCrimmon who played his ancestor's composition, "Mrs. MacLeod of Talisker's Salute." Both MacCrimmon and Wilson played in the afternoon session.

The fourth prize was

Bridling That Sound

The “lost art” of setting cane drone reeds.

by PM William Robertson

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following tips for cane drone reeds are applicable in degrees to all types of reeds and are excerpted from the Great Highland Bagpipe Tutorials DVD by PM William A. Robertson.

MOST OF WHAT FOLLOWS relates to cane drone reeds, although much of what I say about setting and listening tests applies equally to synthetic drone reeds. Many pipers and bands fail to realize how important it is to have well set, good sounding, steady, and well tuned drones and pipes.

CANE REEDS

Test cane quality by looking for the light cream color and pressing reasonably firmly on the open end of the reed with your fingers to find it has good resistance and not rather soft or green cane that tends to absorb moisture and not last. The bigger looking bass reeds can indicate greater resonance, providing the tongue vibrates well.

Initially, some new cane reeds will have to be made freer by flicking the tongue several times and/or by placing a human hair or two under the tongue near the bridle. Naturally, allow some time for a new reed to resettle after flicking. Limp tongues might not be acceptable by being unstable, most likely when played. Avoid flicking cane reeds after they are “played in.”

Reeds should last well with care, although in time bridles that must be firm have to be replaced as they become less firm or slack.

BASS DRONE REEDS

Good sonorous deep sound is desirable in the bass drone. It helps to establish

good harmonics from well set up drones and tuned pipes. A good cane bass reed appears to generate more resonance than most synthetic bass reeds.

When selecting a new cane bass reed demand a really strong-sounding one with a firm tongue that has reasonable resistance when sprung or flicked. Avoid ones with slack or limp tongues, unless you find they work well.

TENOR DRONE REEDS

Generally good tenor cane reeds can be hard to find, perhaps due to their higher frequency, the cut, or shorter tongue. There is a particular need here for a really firm bridle in the optimum position for a good smooth and even steady tone.

SOURCE AND SELECTION

When selecting new reeds, look for cane that is light cream colored, is firm under finger and thumb pressure on the open end, and has reasonably good tongue strength as mentioned above.

When you blow the tenor reed on its own, listen for a known relatively higher-pitched sound that can be compared to a trusted good reed, provided the new reed has a very good firm bridle. Lower-pitched reeds might be acceptable by adjusting the bridle down the tongue and retesting until a desired sound is found without the reed tending to stop. Of course the bridle might be too slack on the new reed as they often are. Test again, holding the tongue firmly with the finger and thumb to approximate a firm bridle in the optimum position. Subsequently, if the reed sounds good, a new bridle can be applied later (see “Bridles”).



SYNTHETIC DRONE REEDS

Most makes of synthetic drone reeds produce a good, acceptable sound, especially the tenor reeds, providing the bridles are in the optimum position. If some still sound rather rough after testing and an adjustment, I suggest you consider other makes. The optimum bridle position is equally important with synthetic reeds as much as cane reeds, although the bridle pressure is fixed on most synthetic reeds.

BRIDLES

One of the meanings of “bridle” is “to control free movement.” That describes the function of the drone reed bridle well. The vibration of the reed tongue must be controlled at the right spot for good quality tone and lasting steadiness.

Cane drone reeds must have firm bridles and periodically need adjustment and renewal to maintain good quality tone and steadiness. To make bridles the traditional way, have a good length of two strands of the type of strong yellow hemp, hold one end down with your foot and twist it numerous times at length. Rub and coat thoroughly with thermo-wax (the hard black brittle variety) making sure that there are no visible signs of yellow hemp appearing through the waxed strand. The strand must be tacky or sticky to withstand moisture, and stay stable under appropriate tension on the reed.

The Piper's Breath

Breathing your way to good blowing.

by Vince Janoski



PPIPE BANDS, AND INDIVIDUAL PIPERS these days seem to get a pretty decent sound at just about any grade level. Many Pipe Majors and instructors have the necessary skills to set a band's sound well. There is nothing more impressive in a lower grade contest than to hear, say, a Grade 4 pipe band come onto the field with a clean, well set tone. Other bands may not be so lucky though, despite their best efforts. Probably the biggest contributor to a pipe band's overall poor sound has got to be pipers' poor blowing of the instrument.

Just about every band you've played with or encountered can claim to have had comments about "poor blowing" from a judge on their competition scoresheets. Lower grade bands are plagued with this problem. You can hear it as a spectator. Bands will start off great in an opening tune, then by the end of their set or medley, chanter tone is wavering. Sometimes certain notes sound okay, sometimes not. A band will attribute this to "blowing issues" and almost shrug it off as "nerves" or "inexperience," as if these troubles will fix themselves over time. Not so. Pipers are taught to play a proper toarluath with each gracing properly articulated, and similarly pipers must also be taught to blow their pipe to project a full and resonant sound. Often, little detail is shown to the learning piper on how to blow the bagpipe fully and properly.

THE BREATH

The key to good blowing is, simply, good breathing. Mastery of your own breathing process will enable you to control when and how much you should blow. Aside from setting up your instrument to be comfortable and air-efficient (as well as regular practice), how you breathe makes the greatest contribution to what we all consider "good blowing."

It may seem silly to think about breathing since we all know how to breathe, and pipers must worry about a host of other things as they play. A piper doesn't need to think about something as easily and automatically done as breathing as he or she plays, right? Not so right. Breathing is an important part of the wind musician's skillset. Woodwind players will spend hours training their breathing patterns to achieve the proper intonation, volume, and tonal quality on their instruments.

But, "the bagpipe is not like other woodwinds," you say? Perhaps. The bagpipe does not respond to the subtleties

of breathing the way a flute or oboe might, or does it? Isn't the dreaded "sagging D" or "dullness" in chanter sound a result of poor intonation, or the inability to sustain pressure in the bag? A Highland piper may not be trying to achieve a sustained note or altered volume with the breath, but the piper's breathing must have sufficient sustained energy at key points in his or her music in order to get a full sound on their instrument.

In order to change the way you blow, you must first be aware of the way you breathe. Being aware of your own breathing will also allow you to notice when it is changing as you play. You will pinpoint the spots where your blowing suffers and your pipe is not sounding its fullest.

EXERCISE

The good news is, as with any pipe music movement or tune you might be working on, it is exercise and practice that will help you develop better control over your breathing. Incorporating some short, basic breathing exercises into your normal rehearsal routine will enhance your breath awareness and ultimately, your control. Awareness and control will then allow you to better achieve a full sound on your pipe.

The following exercises are brief enough to include in total or in part either before a practice session, during the day at some point, before bedtime, whichever is convenient. The best part: They're easy! They progress in "difficulty," but they take no more energy than sitting and breathing. Stay with them, and you will start to feel the difference when you play.

PREPARATION

For each of the exercises, stand comfortably and straight. Maintain good relaxed posture. Keep your back straight and your chin up. Lay your arms comfortably at your sides. Most important of all: Relax. Close your eyes and focus on your breathing. Conduct each of the exercises by breathing through the mouth, not the nose. Each exercise will be using normal counts of music time. Imagine a tune in the proper meter as you go through each exercise.

You can adapt each exercise to fit different tune types. If you like, conduct each progression of exercises through a typical competition MSR using the rhythms of each tune as your count.

Hitting the High Notes

A day at the Warnock family workshop.

by Steven McGuckin

TO THOSE IN THE BAGPIPE BUSINESS, the Warnock family is synonymous with high quality reeds, bagpipes, and accessories. Here at a newly built, state-of-the-art workshop, where Warmac Bagpipes, The Pipers Cave, and William's Reeds all run smoothly together under one roof, it's easy to see why. The new workshop is located at the home where Andrew and James Warnock grew up together just outside Cookstown, Northern Ireland. Upon seeing this little, inconspicuous building, one would not suspect that this is the place where world-renowned bagpipes and reeds are being manufactured on such a large scale.

Although the workshop is fairly new, having just been relocated, the businesses it houses have been thriving ever since they were started by Andrew Warnock way back in 1958, Andrew was a cabinet maker by trade and, upon the suggestion of his father, put his skilled hands to use making bagpipes. In a short space of time, he established himself as one of the world's leading bagpipe manufacturers, with customers approaching from all corners of the globe.

Around the same period of time, Andrew's brother, James and their father Joe Warnock, had started to make pipe reeds as a hobby. It had taken them years to design the specialized tools that are still used today by Joe's great grandson Stephen, who has continued to follow in the family traditions and runs William's Reeds, as it's known today.

Joe and his son James, who ran a dairy farm, traveled through Spain and Australia seeking the finest quality cane for making the pipe reeds. Once they were satisfied with the raw materials they had sourced, they immediately began producing reeds, which soon ended up in pipes all over the world.

Today, the businesses are going strong. Warmac Bagpipes is still producing high quality bagpipes under the skilful eye of Frazer Warnock. Stephen Warnock and his colleagues at William's Reeds are still shaping and tying supreme pipe and practice reeds. Darren Warnock is managing the sales and marketing of both businesses at The Piper's Cave which has recently been bought back into the family after a brief interlude in the 1990s.



The Warnock brothers at their workshop.

Even with the band season now over for the year in Britain, Frazer, Darren, and Stephen, are still working nonstop to keep up with the demand for bagpipes and reeds, as the businesses continue to grow at an incredible rate. "We are continually being contacted by new clients," said Frazer. "It's a little daunting with a limited number of staff, but it's great that even today, almost fifty years later, more and more people are turning to us for their bagpipes and reeds. It's something every business strives for."

PIPES AND CHANTERS

At the back of the workshop, the newly added extension is filled with lathes, benches, and row upon row of stands, which hold finished pipes and chanters. On the walls hang the many tools needed to perform this skilled craft, mostly chisels and calipers, many of which were hand-made by Andrew Warnock especially for the job.

This area of the workshop is for Warmac Bagpipes, and during the week, Frazer and his colleagues can be found here, crafting and testing the world famous bagpipes and chanters. From morning till night the room is alive with the sound of lathes spinning and of finished bagpipes and chanters being tested. The lathe work is done by hand and the testing by ear, skills which take years of practice to master. Frazer is still very much in the learning process "Making bagpipes is in my blood, and although it takes a long time to perfect, to me it feels natural, so learning never becomes a chore." Frazer's highly skilled colleague, Michael McVeigh, was taught by Andrew Warnock himself, thirty-two years ago.

The pipes start off as long blocks of solid African blackwood, a dense and lustrous wood, perfect for woodwind instruments. These blocks are put on the lathe and turned with a chisel to form cylinders. They are then bored straight down the middle with different sized drills to form a step on

ABOUT THE TUNE

THIS ISSUE'S TUNE PULLS OUT A NUGGET from Donald MacDonald's c.1828 book *A Collection of Quicksteps, Strathspeys, Reels, and Jigs Arranged for the Highland Bagpipe*. It is easy for the modern solo piper or bandsman to become lost in the latest batch of whizbang hornpipes or reels. No doubt, the last twenty or so years has seen an explosion of excellent compositions that reflect a modern musical fashion. Along with this, there is also an explosion of tunes of questionable taste, tunes that seem merely designed for rhythm rather than melody. Nevertheless, it is the earliest collections that open a window into an older style of playing, one that was not as technically complex, but made the best use of the bagpipe harmonics. These are the tunes that are as purley Celtic as we can likely get for the bagpipe, and we can also get close to hearing what it might have been like to listen to the great Victorian pipers play.

The quickstep march was the "steak and tatties" of the civilian brigades and collier bands that formed the birth of the pipe band tradition. The tunes, 6/8s, 2/4s, and 4/4s, many of which are found in the early collections such as Donald MacDonald, David Glenn, and William Ross, are lively little gems with plenty of character. Many have transformed over the decades to become the classic tunes at the core of the solo and pipe band repertoire. As technique became an important element in competition, the old ditties were filled with gracenotes, but always at the heart of the best ones are the classic melodies that so resounded in the old brigade pipe bands.

"Fingal's Weeping" is a tune that seems to have either evolved beyond recognition, or escaped the hands of military editors when the classic regimental collections were compiled. The tune echoes the melody lines of some familiar tunes, but still retains its own personality. It could be a welcome addition to any pipe band's medley or performance set.

The transcription of "Fingal's Weeping" retains the idomatic open "tourluath-like" movement at the start of the tune and elsewhere. In the tune, this is not a stylistic scoring convention, but reflects the way the movement may have been played—big low As and all. The more crushed modern tourluath interferes with the rhythm and flavor of this particular tune, as well as alters the phrasing—one that was no doubt backed up by the simple regimental style drumming of the day. The gracings in the open lemluath of bar 3 of part 1 and bars 1, 3, 5 of part 2, a typical notation that highlighted the D, are removed and the D left alone to give emphasis and move the melody along. —*The Voice*

EDITOR'S NOTE REGARDING THE "CONTROVERSY OF COMPOSERS" TUNE COMPOSITION CONTEST

Folks who may have been trying to email their tunes to the email listed in the launch announcement for the Controversy of Composers tune writing contest in the Fall issue (tunes@thevoicelog.com) will have been having technical problems. As a result, we are extending the deadline from March 1 to April 1.

TRIVIA QUIZ

Past season regrets? Relax, and engage your piping and drumming brain for the answers to these puzzlers.

1. Who was the founding Pipe Major of the Inis Fada Gaelic Pipe Band?
2. Where is the Irish Heritage Pipe Band based?
3. Who is the Drum Major of the MacMillan Pipe Band?
4. What tartan does the Maine St. Andrews Pipe Band wear?
5. Who is the lead tip of the MacKenzie Highlanders Pipe Band?
6. Who is the Pipe Sergeant of the Myrtle Beach Regional Pipe Band?
7. Who composed the 2/4 march "Duncan McInnes"?
8. Who composed the reel "Lexy McAskill"?
9. What is the time signature of the jig the "Fox Hunter"?
10. In what regiment did Pipe Major Donald MacLeod serve?

Bonus question—



What professional sports franchise used this logo?

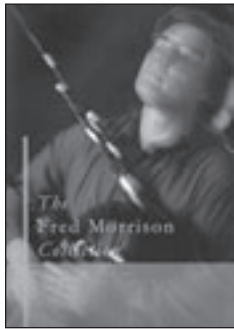
Answers: 1. James Hagan; 2. Avon Lake, Ohio; 3. David Ricklis; 4. Maine state tartan; 5. Steve Laughlin; 6. Josh Kipp; 7. Peter R. MacLeod; 8. Dr. John McAskill; 9. 9/8; 10. Seaford and Queens Own Highlanders. **Bonus question—** The Pittsburgh Pipers, an ABA basketball team in the 1970s, not to be confused with the current gaggle of Gold Medal and Silver Star group of pipers who live in the Steel City.

On the Shelf, on the Screen...

A flood of books and digital media for your piping pleasure.

THE FRED MORRISON COLLECTION: A COLLECTION OF TRADITIONAL MUSIC COMPOSED BY FRED MORRISON.

Fans of Celtic music rejoice! Fred Morrison has caved in to the pressures of his friends and fans and released his music in “The Fred Morrison Collection.” A compilation of tunes that will surely make itself felt in Celtic bands, sessions, and Highland piping performances for years to come.



Fred has become a fixture in the Celtic Connections and Piping Live! festivities in Glasgow. Frequent master of ceremonies Fergus Muirhead will often jokingly ask:

How many fingers does Fred Morrison have? Listening to the speed and rhythm of Fred’s playing, it’s easy to imagine there is more there than the usual ten. And looking through the written scores of *The Fred Morrison Collection*, one might need an extra digit or two to bring out the full rhythm and melody in these tunes.

Fred Morrison has secured his place among the “upper crust” of traditional Celtic musicians. His tunes, many of which are featured on his CD releases “The Broken Chanter,” “Sound of the Sun,” and “Up South,” always manage to keep a Celtic flavor even when venturing into idiosyncratic riffs of melody and rhythm—and all working within the scale and harmonics of the bagpipe. These are not your granddad’s pipe tunes, but your granddad would heartily enjoy them.

Anyone who has heard Fred Morrison live will agree that his performances are the closest thing to “jazz” that Highland piping has. Always an exuberant performer who wanders into improvisation, extending his own tunes with multiple parts that are rarely heard again performance to performance, Fred still manages to bring out the core of traditional melodies while creating the excitement and drive that is a trademark of modern Celtic music. These tunes are, simply put, very cool. Tunes such as “Big Duncan’s Reel,” “Frances Morton’s,” and “Cathy Annn MacPhee’s” carry you along with rollicking melodies that are exciting for the fingers and the ear. Given the body of Celtic music, it might be difficult to compose without recreating the melodies that feature in much of the traditional repertoire, but Fred achieves originality and style in tunes that are both lyrical and exciting.

Fred Morrison is one of the few traditional musicians who started out as a Highland piper at the highest levels of

solo competition—having won the Gold Medal at both Oban and Inverness before venturing into folk bands like Runrig and Capercaillie. These days, one is more likely to see Fred on border pipes or low whistle, and some whistle tunes are included here. Tunes such as “Passing Places” and “Tony’s Tune” are stirring compositions equally at home on the pipe. The border pipe has seen a resurgence in traditional piping, and Fred’s tunes make excellent use of the reedy tonality of the border chanter. “Portabello” is an excellent example of needing the depth of sound in the upper hand of the border pipes to get the full effect of the tune.

The series of photographs spanning Fred’s competitive and performance career is a welcome addition to the experience of perusing this collection. *The Fred Morrison Collection* is full of adventurous music to keep any piper busy for a long while. Players looking to arrange original personal performance sets do not need to look much beyond this book. (*The Fred Morrison Collection*, US\$25.00; www.fredmorrison.com)

THE GREAT HIGHLAND BAGPIPE COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE (DVD) BY PM WILLIAM ROBERTSON.

The ubiquitous nature of the home computer makes incorporating educational material electronically on these appliances a natural thing.

Certainly the modern piper is used to navigating the internet and computer software and incorporating a “multimedia” experience into their daily lives. Is it time for bagpipe education to enter the fray?

The Great Highland Bagpipe Comprehensive Guide produced by PM William Robertson is a

DVD comprising a “Beginner’s Guide” and “Comprehensive Guide” for more advanced students. The disc is packed with information and incorporates instruction text taking advantage of PDF bookmarks with linked audio and video examples. With so much multimedia in our daily lives, we modern pipers are used to seeing multimedia presented in certain ways. While the intent is there to turn piping tuition into a full multimedia experience, this guide is a great idea—but with so much multimedia to stand as an example, it’s poorly executed.

The content has evolved over the years of PM Robertson’s substantial experience. A military piper all of his life, PM Robertson earned



Well, What Do You Expect?

by Vince Janoski

AS WRITTEN ABOUT BEFORE (*The Voice*, Spring 2006), the winter months in the U.S.A. are becoming as active as the warmer seasons when we pipers and drummers are usually more active. New workshops, winter schools, concerts and competitions seem to be popping up all over the place. One simply has to set aside the time and money to be involved.

But is this explosion of activity truly good for U.S. piping in general? We all wish there were more of these activities to feed our enthusiasm for the music, and so, they have appeared in greater numbers. No surprises there. But what if the increased activity is really a misinterpretation of our actual wish for greater progress rather than simply greater activity.

It is the old “quality over quantity” argument. Yes, there are a greater number of events where one can see and hear and learn great piping, but they are all pretty much the same. The same competition boards. The same music heard. Is this really progress? Anyone lamenting the poor quality or bleak future of U.S. piping need look no further for the cause than the venues that are offered.

It is natural for us to adapt to meet whatever expectations are placed on us—whether those expectations are at work, come from family or friends, or, in this case, from competition performance. When the only venue or stage for a U.S. Highland piper is the competition boards, the expectations are not only implicit, they become the core of any preparation and education. Given this relationship, what can you expect? Poor quality piping makes a statement about the nature of the venue as much as any teaching.

It is the equivalent of “teaching to the test,” an argument that is at the fore of modern public education. Require kids to take a test that measures their education, and the education itself adapts to teach, not what is good for the growth of the student, but what is necessary to do well on the test. Is the school really then serving the student and is the test then measuring anything other than how well kids know what is on the test? So the argument goes.

A similar argument could be made in piping. If there are reasonable flaws when it comes to “testing” basic education skills when curriculum is standardized, can the overall standardization for piping and drumming certification as implemented by the new Piping Qualifications Board be free of those same flaws?

Certainly, the curriculum and certification levels offered up by the PQB can bring an increasing number of players “into the fold” at a level that keeps the playing standard acceptable, but it is really just more “teaching to the test.” Players will then be prepared for the same competition boards and circles, playing the same music the same way.

Which brings us back to “venue.” Sure, preparing for the competition platform can be rewarding, but if the music, and most important, players of the music, are to continue to develop and grow, we all need a change of venue. We all need the freedom to “strut our stuff” in different ways sometimes.

Scotland is seeing a renewed interest in its traditional music, and with it, young performers are diving in playing Highland pipes and incorporating them into their ensembles in sessions and concerts—and doing a bang up job of it too. Say what you want about the effect of this on pipe music itself, but the freedom of the performance stage allows individual artists to express their passion and enthusiasm for the music generally, and piping specifically. Could this passion be a result of meeting their own expectations as well as those of the audience vis-a-vis the venue of the performance stage? There is without a doubt some arse-kicking music being heard on these stages. The National Youth Pipe Band out of the National Piping Centre can be held as a prime example of this. Young players not only learn the craft of pipe band piping and drumming, they also learn to combine this with the more artistic aspects of stage performance. Is the high quality of music heard in this context a similar statement about the nature of the venues? How can this experience not have positive influence on piping—on the field or the stage?

Cultural issues perhaps make it more difficult to create additional noncompetitive events here in the U.S. So here is the challenge for all enterprising pipers and drummers and event sponsors: Instead of utilizing valuable resources to create more competitions that do nothing but reinforce the same things and keep everything stagnant, use those resources to create events that improve the art and artists. Creating more competitions is fun to be sure, but creating stages where pipers and drummers can expand as artists and performers can do more to make piping in the U.S. grow, as well as heighten the musical standards needed for successful competition and personal growth as musicians.