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Piping on the web[®]

Newsletter - April 2010

Dear Piping Enthusiast,

Welcome to the April Newsletter and the so-called spring in Scotland - snow and blizzards but the Piping's Hot! This month sees the last edition of our popular Top Tunes feature, and I have the pleasure of making the concluding choices - I now know how difficult it is to select only three tunes from all the wonderful pipe tunes that exist! Next month, we start with a new feature called "The A-Z of Piping - a personal view by James C. Begg." It will be wide ranging and perhaps a bit controversial at times - I hope you will enjoy the series.
Yours Aye,

James C Begg

www.beggbagpipes.com



News

The annual Scottish Pipers Association Professional Piping Competition is being held at the College of Piping in Glasgow on Saturday 17th April. Founded in 1920 by a number of top pipers of the time, under the first president John MacDougall Gillies pictured opposite, the Scottish Pipers Association is one of the oldest associations of its kind. There will be some outstanding performances so if you are in the area, it will be well worth attending.

The Lomond and Clyde Pipe Band celebrated their 10th anniversary with a Grade 1 invitational pipe band contest held in the Radisson Hotel, Glasgow, and all the hard work put in by the Band and their friends paid off. Shotts and Dykehead were first overall which was perhaps not surprising but the runners-up story is something else. Competing in their very first Grade 1 contest, Inveraray and District, under P/M Stuart Liddell, came in second overall and ahead of many strong names - they actually won the MSR. Considering this band were at Novice Juvenile level in 2005, this is some achievement. They are also a very young outfit - watch out for great things in the future. Congratulations to the Fife Police and the Vale of

Atholl for sterling performances, being the other two bands who made it through to the final. Lomond and Clyde also came up with a novel idea of featuring the competition sponsors on two large, repeating powerpoint presentations on the wall of the hall.

Inveraray and District Piping Association are holding their now annual junior piping competition on the 3rd of April at the Inveraray Primary School. There is also a drumming event and loads of other events to enter so please give it your support if you can. Begg Bagpipes are pleased to be supporting it with the donation of a lovely, hand-made all-blackwood practice chanter.

[Check out the Inveraray Event](#)

Top Tip - Flattening a note.

Black pvc insulating tape has been a boon for piping, particularly now we that we have the correct diameter required for the job. Put the tape on the hole below the note needing flattened e.g if F needs flattening, place the tape on the E hole - remember it's always the top of the hole it goes across. We can only flatten a note with tape - tape on the bottom of the hole has no effect. The more you want to flatten a note the more tape you put on. Again, you can really only go 1/2 way across the hole and to some extent if this is the case, you may want to replace the reed as it is telling you something is not quite right. It's trial and error to get it spot on so just be patient and get your slightly flat note back in line with the scale.

You can't alter a note that is already flat and if it proves flat over a period of time and with different reeds, then you may have to enlarge the hole that is flat. This is not for the faint hearted. We do have makes of chanters that make the holes overly large so you can flatten it but this is perhaps of questionable merit. I would suggest 2 or 3 bits of tape are enough to use and deal with, but there are many bands who use tape on all the notes for precision tuning. So as the pitch we have continues to rise, which it has done for at least the last two centuries, the use of tape seems more prevalent. I'm not too keen on excessive amounts of tape as you can spend too much time fiddling about with it and less time playing - for some people it can become an obsession.



The Top Tunes Selection - by James C. Begg

Having now had many customers and friends providing their Top Tunes selection over the last couple of years, we have decided to bring this feature to a close and introduce a new topic next month. So to conclude, we have asked James Begg himself for his own Top Tunes and to put him on the same tight spot as he has put many

others before him!

Photo - The Jacobite Memorial at Glenfinnan

I generally like tunes composed in a traditional style and play many by P/M Donald MacLeod, P/M G.S McLennan, and P/M John MacLennan DCM. I also like those of P/M Angus MacDonald but usually end up trying to emulate his playing style rather than focussing on my own strengths. Check out the playing of Gordon Walker to see how individual touches can be added to classic tunes without going over the top or stretching way beyond the composer's intended boundaries. So here we go:



1. **The Glenfinnan Highland Gathering** - a 2/4 march by P/M Ronnie Lawrie. This is a relatively new composition from a giant of a man, both in terms of his physical stature but also from his standing within the Piping community. There can be very few piping events to rival the Glenfinnan Games for scenery and history, set in the shadow of the Memorial to the [Jacobites](#), at Glenfinnan, [Lochaber](#). (Old photo shown is of James at Glenfinnan in 1982, complete with full beard.) This is with no disrespect to other games such as those of the Uist games in the Scottish Outer Hebrides where the hospitality and raw beauty are second to none. The tune itself has a musical flow, with a lovely slow start which lets you increase the flow as the tune goes on - you can hang onto the high As as long as you want. In the third part, you can hold the 1st low A for a long time, cut the 2nd slightly but not too much and then hold the 3rd low A again - but for not quite as much as you first thought. This provides a good contrast to the high A in the 1st and 4th parts. The beauty of this tune is you can please yourself on how to interpret it. It finishes with a lovely smooth ending and lets you take off gently into a strathspey -perhaps Caber Feidh, starting with a huge, slow high g and before long, the cut and thrust of the strathspey leaves the somewhat melancholy march far behind.

2. **Caber Feidh** - the strathspey. Caber Feidh is one of the all-time classic

strathspeys but the reason I would suggest it's so good is that it can be played in different ways -initially, there were march, strathspey and reel versions and more recently, hornpipe and jig were added too. There are very few tunes that you can do that with. It also really suits the pipe scale and uses the classic, unique high g of the pipe scale to a good effect whilst linking to the low g too.

3. **Ca' the Ewes** - a reel, which somehow seems a more than appropriate choice considering my occupation! As an alternative, I would have perhaps played Sandy Cameron or the likes after Caber Feidh to change the key. I remember hearing Eddie MacLellan, who taught Hugh MacInnes as well as myself for a spell, play Ca' the Ewes with great effect. Eddie seemed to play at twice the speed of most people and one of his favourite sets was the Craggs of Stirling, Dora MacLeod and Ca' the Ewes. How Eddie kept the pace up throughout I will never know but it was stunning playing and always in time. The last part of the Ewes was immense -just as most people would be wilting, he finished in a flurry. As he stopped to re-tune, all you wanted was for him to keep going with more. Then after I had a tune, it was always "do you fancy a beer Jim?" I had my Raleigh moped at the time and made the journey from Hillington, Glasgow to his flat in Cathcart, Glasgow and back again with my pipes strapped to my back - oh what happy days! The Ewes has variety and interesting changes throughout - the change from taorluath to gracenotes at the end of the bar for instance and the clever phrase change running through the whole tune is excellent.

So there you have it - 3 great tunes to round off the Top Tunes series. I hope you have enjoyed all the varied selections and I would like to thank all the famous people from the world of piping who have kindly contributed.

James.



Online Special Offer

For this month, we have taken 15% off the price of a practice chanter kit. This is the equipment you require to learn the fingering skills to play the bagpipe. Click on the image to go to the site.

Look out for more great offers coming soon! At the point of purchase, we will price match any product of the same quality from another supplier.

Field Report - The Uist and Barra

The Uist and Barra Invitational Solo Piping Contest, held on the 13th March at the College of Piping, was very successful as usual, with a high standard of piping, great hospitality and first class stewarding by the experienced Jeannie Campbell.

Gordon Walker and Angus MacColl acquired the top spots but at times, there was little to choose between the players. The jig event was run after the MSR and went down well with audience, although perhaps this was a bit tricky for the pipers - it can sometimes prove difficult to quickly compose yourself for the jig after the complete focus and concentration that is required for the MSR.

The only complaint was that the room was too hot at the College - it really was absolutely boiling. The best moment was when Ian Speirs played a slow gaelic air and the audience spontaneously accompanied him in song - brilliant. He must have thought he had another drone going but it summed up the unique atmosphere of enjoyment and genuine friendliness of the Uist and Barra Society -see you next year.



YouReport

We had an email and photo in from Ray Cookson in Saudi Arabia and here's what he had to say:

"Great Newsletter as usual guys. Keep it up.

Here is a photo of what can happen to a real Begg's Sheepskin Pipe Bag if you look after it really well. He went down a treat here in Saudi Arabia playing some solo shows in December.

I had to warn the punters though that his hero and mentor is Emu and that he can cut up a bit rough if you get him in the wrong mood. Apart from that he is really

quite shy. Very much a bit like his owner I guess.

All the best. Ray"

What a great story - thanks Ray.

(Photo courtesy of Ellen Britchford, Dhahran Pipe Band, Saudi Arabia.)

If you would like to report on any aspect of the Piping World from wherever you live, we'd be pleased to include it in this Newsletter

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