

Welcome to Begg Bagpipes

-----Est 1980 Glasgow city centre's oldest bagpipe shop-----

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Piping on the web^{PS}

Newsletter - February

Dear Customer,

Welcome to February's edition of the monthly newsletter. The Crunch is affecting just about everyone but I am glad to report that Begg Bagpipes are exceptionally busy. The start of a new year is always a busy time as pipe bands and soloists gear up for the coming year's competitions and events (possibly even battles!). I am particularly glad this month to have Richard Parkes' top tunes - an element of the newsletter concept is to connect more with customers. I am quite shy generally and it's not in my nature for self promotion, but having the newsletter has enabled me to interact more with friends and colleagues in the piping world.

I had the pleasure recently of a couple of radio interviews, with the first one being broadcast on Insight Radio 101FM in the UK, Friday 6th Feb between noon and 2.00 pm - more on this next month if it turns out to be any good!

Yours Aye,

James C Begg

www.beggbagpipes.com

News - Celtic Connections - Royal Concert Hall 23/1/09

Strathclyde Police in concert with Bagad Cap Caval (shown in picture).



It was a great concert all round, with the Police being on great form and Cap Caval providing a nice contrast with a different playing style. The Police, under P/M Don Bradford and D/S Eric ward, played a note perfect performance - it was well presented with no unnecessary gimmicks or antics and the playing spoke for itself. The tunes perhaps for a lot of people were surprisingly traditional but they were broken up with P/M Bradford's exciting modern compositions which nicely weaved in between the classic tunes. We had an accompaniment from the keyboard player of Blazing Fiddles which was enjoyable to an extent - but perhaps the chording was not correct at times and seemed off the pace. However, it added interest as did the drum fanfare by Eric and the team which was very entertaining and gymnastically challenging on the drum sticks. The Cap Caval gave quite a stunning contrast and again great to hear something different. They appear very well geared up to the concert stage, with an assortment of binious, clarinets, percussion, keyboards, bombards, pipes and so on. The pipes were tuned to b minor which forced the pipe section into playing Breton material and it was slightly disappointing not to hear more of the Scottish side of things played in the Breton style. However, having tuned to the bombard, they had little time on hand. The tunes were not difficult to play and seemed similar to piobaireachd, in that there would be a theme followed by various movements using an array of alternating instruments for volume and effect.

So all in all 1,253 people enjoyed a tremendous concert on what was an early Saturday lunchtime setting.

Top Tip - Cords Part 1

So why do pipers pay so little attention to the bagpipe cords? The cords, be it silk or wool, are very important and don't just connect the drones together. They are of course providing a visual enhancement, but more importantly keep the two tenors and bass married in partnership. The drones need to be entwined together so that there is a feeling of togetherness and cohesion between the drones, the bag and yourself. The drones should lie squarely and in unison on the shoulder, not too far back and not too far forward, and this is where cord fitting is crucial. The main difficulty with fitting cords is that some people do not know what the correct spacing between the drones should be. We either get the accordion or the concertina effect, in that the drones are splayed and as wide as the Clyde Tunnel or so close that you could be bumper to bumper on the Kingston Bridge at rush hour! If your drones are falling off your shoulder it may be your cords are too far apart, but it may also suggest a wrong bag size or poorly fitted stocks .

I've seen it all too often on a very regular basis - so in next month's newsletter, I'll give you some guidance on how best to fit and position your cords.

The Top Three Tunes - by P/M Richard Parkes, Field Marshall Montgomery Pipe Band

It's always difficult when someone asks you for your favourite tunes, as they are always changing depending on what is in your repertoire, or what you have been listening to. I'm going to go for three which I have been taught or started playing in three different decades. In no particular order:

1. Susan MacLeod - a Strathspey by P/M D. MacLeod

I was taught this great Donald MacLeod strathspey by P/M Jimmy Banks when he was stationed in Ulster with the Scots Guards in the early 1980's. It's been a great tune in terms of solo and band success and I put a lot of that down to Jim's tuition. The tune has very subtle expression which must be delivered to give the best musical effect.



2. The B52 - a Hornpipe by E. Rigler

I travelled a lot to LA in the 1990's where I was introduced to the B52 cocktail by a certain Eric Rigler. I remember being in Eric's car while on a trip to his local surfing beach and he was playing me preliminary recordings of this excellent and very characteristic hornpipe. He asked me what I thought of the tune and of course I thought it was superb. Also, what a great title for a tune which helped shape FMM's musical direction.

3. The Fiddlers Rally - a Jig by G. Walker

I was on the look out for a medley finisher and was going through lots of CD's and recordings. As soon as I heard this tune being played by Angus MacColl on an "Awesome Pipers" album, I knew it was the perfect tune to finish our medley in 1995. It's a superb jig by Gordon Walker and a tune I never tire of. It's got a great melody and tons of drive and will turn out to be an all time classic.

Richard Parkes.

Thanks Richard, for your top tunes selection. Watch out for other world class pipers making their selection in future issues.

Special Offer - Cords

Why not treat yourself to a lovely new set of silk cords? Normal price is £32.50 including vat but this month's special offer sees them at only £20 including vat. Colours available from stock include black, red, navy, white, green, royal Stewart, and silver.

Other colours are available to order and if you are perhaps kitting out the whole band, let's do a special deal for you.

To order call ++44 1413330639 or email bill@beggbagpipes.com

Special Feature -How many Begg Bags do you see in the picture??



I thought it might be of interest to broadly explain the processes we go through to ensure Begg Bags are the best in the world and offer real value for money.

To start with, I spend at least 12 hours several times a year, in a smelly, noisy environment, dressed in wellies, apron and waterproof gloves in order to select the best raw pelts that are available (signed photographs of self suitably attired available on request!). Out of 1,000 examined on each visit to the pelt warehouse, on average only 240 are picked - that's 1 in 4. For this service of selection of size, weight and flawlessness, we pay a premium price per skin. At this point, I arrange transport to the tannery where the skins will be specially cured. This of course adds cost, and more again when the cured skins move to my workshop. We tend to do small batches to ensure maximum quality, but then don't benefit from any economies of scale. Most of the large tanneries cannot do our type of tanning and also have drum sizes that would tear the sheepskin apart. The tanning process itself is complex and long and it takes perhaps 3 to 4 months from initial selection for the skins to be ready in Glasgow to start making them into bags. Whilst we carefully select the skins in the first instance, we do on occasions discard some during the bag manufacturing process when any flay marks and pin holes become more visible. So some very valuable skins can be discarded into the bin which in some ways is such a shame - but it maintains our high standards of quality and is worth doing. At this point, we manufacture the bags all by hand and we are looking at 4 to 5 hours more work per bag - one sheepskin generates one bag.

So a great deal of effort, attention to detail and indeed "tender loving care" goes into making a Begg Bag what it is - a quality, hand crafted, special part of your bagpipes which will assist in delivering the best sound and performance you can achieve -and I hope you will agree, all at a reasonable cost and value for money.

YouReport

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Thanks

Bill Begg
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