



[View as Webpage](#)

Hi Friend,

I hope this month's newsletter finds you and your loved ones well and healthy amid this pandemic. It is something that has certainly impacted on all of us in many ways. As things stand, this year's solo piping and pipe band competition season has been decimated. Also, most workshops and schools scheduled for this summer have been cancelled or postponed including the Inveraray Workshop with Stuart Liddell, Alasdair Henderson, Murray Henderson and myself that was scheduled for this month. Other schools I am involved with are currently assessing their positions. In fact, just as I was about to send this out I received confirmation that the two German Schools I was going to be teaching at have cancelled. They are the Springschool 2020, Weikersheim in June and the Bagpipe Association of Germany Summerschool, Breuberg end of July.

Highland Reeds continues, however, and like many other small businesses, I am working from home making reeds and keeping on top of orders. I see that the Pound Sterling is down against the US dollar and the Euro, meaning that UK exports have become even cheaper. I have noticed a modest increase in orders for my products so I can only assume that more and more pipers are using this 'down time' to try my products for themselves.

One positive in all this is that most pipers seem to be putting in extra practice, and that's always a good thing. However, be careful how and what you practice. I remember Lewis Turrell MBE saying: "Too many people practice imperfections." At the 1958 Northern Meeting Lewis from New Zealand, became the first overseas piper to win the Gold Medal. His winning tune was *The Rout of the MacPhees*.

There are three aspects of your piping you should be looking at and they are all equally important:

**Technique** (finger exercises);

**Musicality** (playing the tunes correctly with the right expression);

**Sound** (the set up and blowing of the bagpipe). I'd like to offer here some tips on sound and how important the bass drone is:

**Sound** – The Great Highland Bagpipe is a pentatonic instrument. This means its harmonics and sound are pure. As we only play one note at a time on the chanter, the drones are pure in harmonics. This means that they are doubling – or halving – in frequency. On the other hand, instruments that play chords are equal temperament, using fifths or sixths.

(Musical tuning, a temperament is a tuning system that slightly compromises the pure intervals of just intonation to meet other requirements. ... Tempering is the process of altering the size of an interval by making it narrower or wider than pure.)

Pipe Major Donald MacLeod MBE put it well when he said many years ago:

“The scale of the bagpipe differs from the diatonic scale with which most people are familiar, but harmonises with the fixed bass of the drones.”

When Pipe Major Willie Ross MBE was once asked to describe the bagpipe he said: "The drones act as an amplifier to the chanter". Thus, the Great Highland



Bagpipe's fundamental first harmonic is the bass drone, the second harmonic being the tenor drones and the third the baritone harmonic (bass and tenor harmonics together). It continues: the fourth Low A, fifth C, sixth E, seventh High G, eighth High A, ninth B, 16th D, 20th F. The major scale being A, C, E, High A. You can see how these notes harmonise with the bass harmonics – 4/A, 5/C, 6/E (7/G) and 8/A. The minor scale – Low G, B, D, F – are in-between these harmonics and take more explanation than space permits here. Too many pipes these days don't have a proper bass fundamental.

Mozart once said, "The music is not in the notes, but in the silence between." I think that's a great quote. Similarly, I remember Duncan Johnstone saying years ago during a visit to New Zealand: "Hold the long notes; let the drones have a chance." So we can have silence (no embellishments) on notes and let the bagpipe sing (be heard).

Good luck with your practice and improving your sound. It is the one thing you can improve at this time.

Keep the circle tight and stay safe.

Always feel free to contact me with any aspects of my products. Email me at

[bruce@highlandreeds.com](mailto:bruce@highlandreeds.com)

*If you own any of my products I would encourage you to register them via my website. If you would like to buy any of my products, click on the blue button below which will take you to your local stockist:*

[Click here to view worldwide stockists](#)



As ever, enjoy your piping,

Bruce Hitchings MBE BEM.

• **June 19-26: I am a long-term instructor at the Rob McLintock California School of Piping and Drumming, in San Diego, California. This is a highly respected piping and drumming school run formerly by the College of Piping.**

• **July 10-17: The following week, I head to Arizona where I teach at the Jim Thomson Piping and Drumming School in Flagstaff (see photo, below).**

