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Hi Friend,

I am a little late, but I would first like to extend my belated best Independence Day wishes to my many friends and customers in the United States of America. It is a country I have visited many times over the years, firstly on my trips to,

and through from New Zealand-Scotland, and then when my regiment, the Queen's Own Highlander Pipe Band toured the US with the Coldstream Guards military band. This was after our participation as the machine gun platoon in the Gulf War in 1991. We visited something like 72 cities in 82 days. At the end of the tour, I handed over the Pipe Majors position to Alasdair Gillies when the two of us played together in a performance at Madison Square Gardens in New York city.

I have enjoyed very much teaching at the piping and drumming summer schools in various states since 1997. I have always been impressed by the students' enthusiasm, dedication and enjoyment in learning to play the bagpipes correctly. I am looking forward to returning as soon as our respective governments give us the all clear.

There has been a lot of discussion in the piping and pipe band world post-coronavirus. Dr Robert Gray, Senior fellow and Consultant Respiratory Physicians at the University of Edinburgh and John Hughes, chairman of the RSPBA, both pipers recently took part in an interesting discussion

– [read the report here](#) – and the main thing we should take away from it is that this virus will be with us for a while yet. A big concern for pipers is that the coronavirus is transmitted mainly through aerosol water droplets from our breath.

My personal concern would be more with teaching on the practise chanter than playing the bagpipes. If teaching a student on the chanter and they exhale towards you this could carry the virus and Dr Gray suggested wearing face visors or, I suppose, a Perspex screen between you and the student would work.

Playing the bagpipes indoors could also be a concern. Whilst playing the bagpipes you are blowing down into the bag unlike members of a choir who push air through their vocal cords at close proximity to other members. If you have a [moisture tube](#) from the blowpipe stock to the back of the bag this will help condense your hot moist breath and [my moisture tube](#) has a series of small holes covered by a breathable cloth which will help protect against moisture and the virus.

Additionally, if you have my [drone or chanter moisture control systems](#) – pictured at the top of this newsletter – these act like a filter, with the air passing over the granules and condensing/drying out and exhausting dry, cold air and, presumably, clean air through the drones. Coincidentally, I had just added an additional filter cloth to my moisture control systems before the virus hit us.

Stuart Liddell has played my [moisture system](#) for the last decade now. He contributes some of his regular success to the consistency of sound he achieves as a result of the system. Stuart has been playing the system with the filters this year and finds them very beneficial. On a visit to him just before the lockdown, I found it interesting to note that he inserted the moisture system even to play for a few minutes.

For those non-believers in moisture control, it does not kill the sound. This, in fact, is impossible. The sound – or more accurately the harmonics – are produced by the drone reeds and the bores inside the drones with the sound going out the way. Drone valves can restrict the airflow and quieten the volume. However, my [valves](#) are easily screw-adjustable, and you can always open your bridles up to compensate for any volume loss. There is a reason why most of the top solo players are using moisture control systems. In fact, a moisture system in the bottom of the stocks creates a separate air chamber, regulating the airflow to the drones and therefore stabilising the drone harmonics that, in turn, stabilises the chanter sound.

This is a fact and one that is proven by a proper harmonic sound analyser.

The usual hand cleaning and sanitisation should always be headed to and also a regular cleaning of the bagpipe and in particular the blow pipes, moisture tubes and the inside of bags. Cleaning the blowpipe and tube with a mixture of hydrogen peroxide (bacteria) Borax (fungus) and with Rosemary oil/Tea tree oil, Isopropyl Alcohol or viruses every time you use the bagpipe would be useful.

I have written before on the myths of synthetic bags versus skin bags and don't intend to get into this again today. Whilst I could add a lot more actual facts I believe my views above prove the point. However, what this virus is reinforcing to pipers is that a sheepskin bag is ordinarily ideal for this virus. Thus, synthetic bags may now be preferable for health reasons. I recommend Canmore hybrid pipe bags and recently spoke with Iain Smith of Canmore Pipe Bags about this. His comments are interesting and I reproduce them here:

"There are much less moisture issues with Canmore pipe bags due to them being highly breathable. They are therefore less prone to the formation of harmful entities such as mould, spores and bacteria. However, we would still recommend cleaning your bag and pipes regularly.



"Our recommendation is that you wash the inside of the bag using a sterilising solution called Milton (normally used to sterilise baby bottles etc). Milton is a gentle bisulphate mixture and will not damage the bag. The bag can be rinsed in the solution at about 60°C, it is important to rinse the bag thoroughly with clean cold water afterwards to remove any residue, then leave the zip open to air dry. Once dry, close the zip before storing away."

* Finally, I wish to thank all those who have sent some photos and videos of me playing and teaching through the years. These will all go on to my new website. If others have images they'd be willing to share please email them to me at bruce@highlandreeds.com including a caption of event and date. I would also encourage anyone who is playing my products to leave a product review on the appropriate produce page or leave a comment, video clip of you playing on the 'Submit your comment/playing' page.

Thank you for reading this newsletter and for your support.

Continue to keep the circle tight and stay safe but most importantly enjoy your piping.

Slainte,



Bruce Hitchings MBE BEM.

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