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Hi Friend,

Well, it is September already! What a strange year it has been thus far.

Normally, I would have been judging at many piping competitions this summer and attending others. I think the last competition I judged at in Scotland was the Vale of Atholl Pipe Band's annual competition for juniors in January. In the US, I judged at the Queen Mary in

February. The last piping event I attended would have been the Uist & Barra in March. Spring seems a long time ago as I am sure you will agree.

On the subject of judging, I began judging around 2000 when I was asked to join the list of solo piping judges. I had judged a few small events before that but 2000 was when I actually became involved in judging at solo competitions. I judge more to help out and feel honoured every time I am asked to do so; I do not go looking for events to judge at. I always try and treat every competition with the same importance whether it is a junior competition or the Silver Medal. All the competitors have prepared and presented themselves and therefore deserve the same fair



From the Vale of Atholl's 2015 junior competition. Judging with my good friends, Tom Johnstone and Andrew Frater.

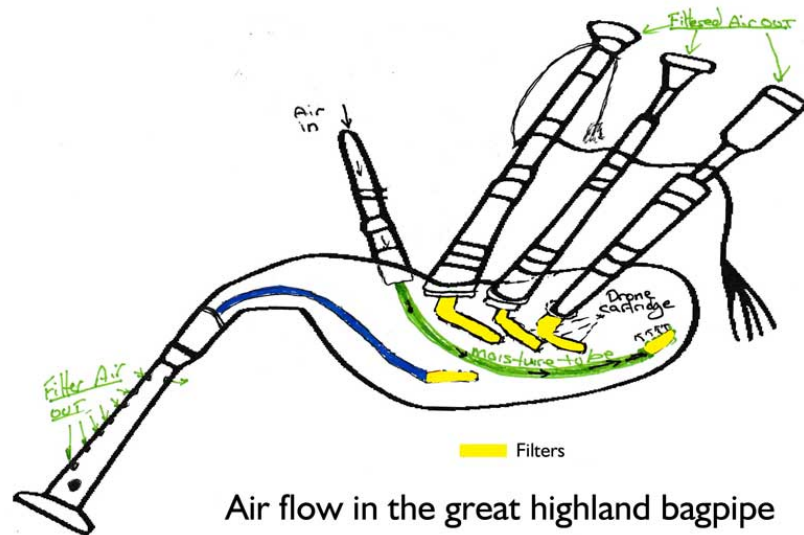


Stuart Liddell at this year's Uist & Barra: much success in recent years.

assessment regardless of the level of the competition. I also try and judge on what I hear that day, not on previous performances or on who is playing. Just on what is presented that day. I intend to put music and the bagpipe sound over everything else. If you do not have these two elements, you do not have the foundations of a performance. Too many competitors forget that the first requirement is to play a tune, on a good sounding bagpipe.

I am pleased to read that the University of Glasgow and the National Piping Centre are undertaking some tests into the safety of the bagpipe as it relates to the coronavirus. This is much needed. There is simply far too much nonsense written about this subject, mostly on social media. I, like you, look forward to finding out the results of the tests.

Without 'jumping the gun' or spreading 'fake news', I believe my Moisture Control System takes out humid air, leaving only dry, cold air coming from the pipe. My earlier designs created some dust so I experimented and added a bamboo filter cloth to rectify



Air flow in the great highland bagpipe

the issue. This was before the virus (Stuart Liddell is playing this set up, incidentally). The air that is expelled via the moisture control systems then through the reeds is free from dust and probably the virus. However, I have recently been experimenting with other flitter cloths that do 100% restrict/stop the virus but also allow air flow with out to much restriction and hope to start using this very soon. Do you know that a lot of face masks don't stop the virus?

I recall back in 1977, the *Piping Times* ran an article on how many breaths a piper took in one minute of playing. Donald Bain had by far the lowest rate of 14 and, if memory serves, the average for the rest was 23. Donald also had the driest blowing. There is a lot more to say about blowing and what is the difference between wet and dry blowers. It can all be explained and is partly explained by Donald's 14 breaths per minute – but this is a subject for another time; it is too much for this month's newsletter.

Many of you attempted Joseph MacDonald's [exercise](#) that appeared in

last month's newsletter. It's not easy to play cleanly, is it?! Here it is again for those that didn't try it last month.

S C A L E.

		G	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	A
Left Hand	Thumb, Holes.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○
Right Hand		●	●	●	○	○	●	●	●	●

○ sometimes with the little finger on

To continue my quotes from master players of the past, here is one that is even more relevant today than ever. It's from the great Pipe Major Willie Gray, he of the famous 2/4 march: "Another point of interest is that the present day piper is diatonically minded, and in

There is no natural C. or F. in the Bagpipe Scale, nor has it any Flats or Sharps, as neither the Compaqs of this Instrument, nor the Nature of its Compositions can well admit of any. The few that might be play'd would be an entire Deviation from the Genuine and Original Style of this Music, which we alone intend to difcover, with the Rules Invented for it, by the firft and moft Eminent Mafters of this Instrument.

A Difpofition of the Notes in the Taftē of this Music, ferving likewife as an Exercife of the Scales.



By this, the Scale is Exercifed, and a nice ear may eafily diftinguifh the peculiarity of the Style already appearing in this order of the Notes, as fhall be foon more plain. The blowing of them muft be Strong, Steady, and Equal, which at firft is a little hard upon every beginner, as it exercifes their Breafths and Lungs, but practice will give them additional Strength of breath, and make this familiar and Eafy, the Movement of each Finger muft be as high as poffible, that they may return with greater Force, For true Pipe Music, depending Chiefly on the difpofition and execution of the Fingers, muft be fo performed, with all the Strength as well as agility of the Fingers to make it well play'd.

consequence has departed from the correct scale for the bagpipe as given by Joseph MacDonald and Angus MacKay". In other words, the pentatonic scale, not a temperate scale.

I continue to be grateful to hear positive comment about my products. Word is getting out about them. The latest was yesterday when Mark Lamont sent me this email from the US: "Hey Bruce, I just wanted to tell you personally what a delight it is playing your new Balance Tone HR drone reeds. I put them in my Nails on Tuesday, and have not wanted to stop playing. Whatever you did with the new HR reeds, they strike in perfect, cut off perfect, and that's right out of the packaging, no adjustments made at all. Awesome reeds. I can't say enough good things about them, well done. It's a joy to play my pipes again."

Another comment from a customer in France: "The best pipers know what makes the nicest sound". It is comments like these that make it all worthwhile for me, and I am grateful to Mark and to everyone else who has contacted me recently.

After last month's newsletter in which I mentioned Andrew Pitkeathly, I was contacted by Graham Adams from Australia. Graham received lessons from Andrew's father, Bob outside of Blairgarry and for the three months the Queen was at Balmoral they had Andrew at his parent's house nearly every Sunday. Small world and great to make these contacts.

As usual, I wish to finish by thanking 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. I have a number that must be upload to the site already. 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 or video clip of you playing on the [‘Submit your comment/playing’ page](#). We are starting to get a lot of great reviews left on the site but not so many clips of people playing. Those people that know me, know I always encourage pipers of all ages and standards regardless of ability to have a go. Don't be scared folks, have a go and send your clips. It does not need to be long or clever – just have a go.



Enjoy your piping.

Bruce Hitchings MBE BEM.

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Highland Reeds | 07577 949562