

Pipes of War

THE HISTORY

Scotland does not claim to have invented the bagpipes, but it does claim to have developed them into an art. Roman legions once marched to the pipes, and even the Indian snake-charmer today uses a pipe which, although it has no bag, is basically the same as the Highland one. Most countries in the world have tried their hand at the bagpipes (even England, where there was a pipe band at court in 1327), but only in Scotland have they survived long enough to become a great musical instrument.

THE INSTRUMENT

The Highland (Great Highland, Half-Set, Miniature or Parlour) Bagpipes are blown by mouth, whereas the Lowland and Border pipes are blown by a bellow held under the arm. The bags have been made from the whole skin of a sheep, however, modern bags are made sometimes from leather, rubber or other types of synthetic material. The pipes were originally made of bone or ivory but are now made of hardwood.

THE MUSIC

The melody is played on one mouthpiece pipe (the chanter) which has finger holes, the other pipes (up to six) are called the Drones. Broadly speaking there are two types of music; the march, strathspey and reel variety, which were composed for dancing or for armies on the move; the other the ceol mor or great pibroch (The salute, The Gathering and The Lament) which are the symphony music of the pipes.

PIPER FACTS

The bagpipes have been banned twice in Scotland, the first in 1560 after the reformation and again in 1746 after the battle of Culloden. The ban being so severe that a piper (James Reid) was executed in York in 1746 as a rebel because the pipes were deemed to be an instrument of war. It is also known that over 500 pipers were killed during the First World War.