



KELLENBERG  
MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL

# Piping Club

Introduction to Piping and Traditional Music  
by Robert P. Lynch

# What is “*traditional music*”?

- ▶ Songs sung and tunes played by the common people of a region and forms part of their culture.
  - ▶ Note: traditional musicians often speak of “singing songs” and “playing tunes”;
- ▶ “Music passed mostly unchanged between generations of informal players, usually without notation, and played mostly by ear.”
  - ▶ Note: traditional music is usually “anonymous”. We don’t usually know what individual composed a piece of traditional music; it’s not “owned” by anyone and is free of copywrite rules, for these reasons and because of how old it is.

# How traditional music survived

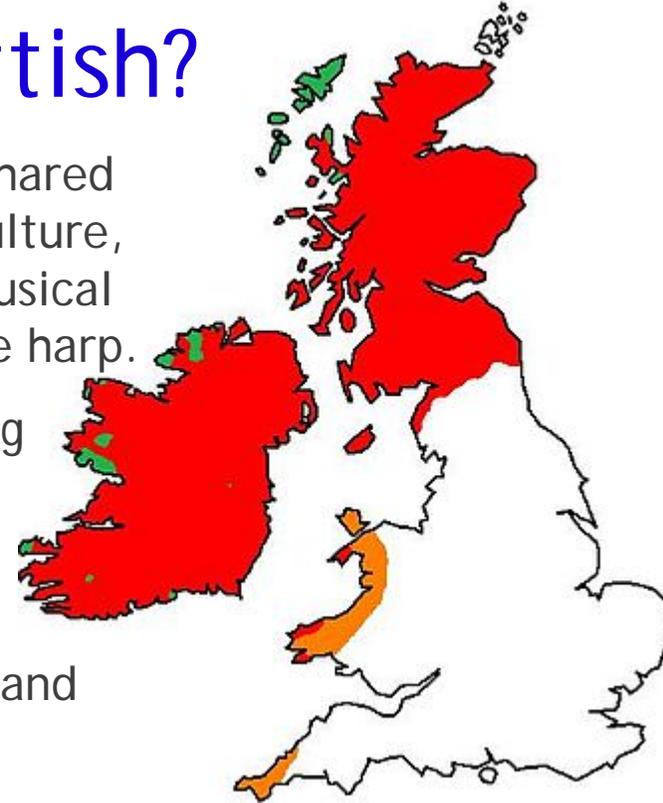
- ▶ Traditional music began as the music which people played to entertain each other. Singing, playing music, dancing and storytelling is how people amused themselves before there was electricity and forms of recording.
- ▶ When the “middle class” developed in parts of Europe where part of society had extra money to spend on things other than survival, music became commercialized.
- ▶ The idea developed that music could be owned, bought and sold for money, and the formal performance of composed music for people who had money to spend on it replaced traditional music.
- ▶ In poorer areas, this did not have as much effect; people who did not have money kept on entertaining themselves in the traditional ways, using traditional instruments, including the pipes.
- ▶ This was especially around the “edges” of Europe, especially in Ireland, Scotland, remote and coastal areas of France and Spain, and southern Italy and Sicily.
- ▶ In those areas traditional music continued, and, along with it, the tradition of playing the pipes.

# Terminology

- ▶ The correct term is “bagpipes” - not “bag pipes” .
- ▶ Colloquially (in day-to-day conversation), we usually refer to the instrument as “the pipes” .
  - ▶ Similarly, we use the term:
    - ▶ “piping” in place of “bagpiping” ;
    - ▶ “piper” instead of “bagpiper” ;
    - ▶ “pipe band” (or “pipers’ band”) instead of “bagpipe band” , etc.

# Are the pipes Irish or Scottish?

- ▶ For many centuries, Ireland and much of Scotland shared the same culture, sometimes called the “Gaelic” culture, including the same language, religion, music and musical instruments, including, especially, the pipes and the harp.
- ▶ They still share a large part of this culture, including piping.
- ▶ Both cultures continue to suffer from the effects of English colonialism, which had a long history of suppressing Gaelic culture in order to gain political and economic control.
- ▶ Laws were passed to make it hard or impossible for people in Ireland and Scotland to speak their own language or practice the religion of their choice, especially if that choice was Catholicism.



# The pipes in Ireland and Scotland

- ▶ The Scottish “Highlands” were, and are, the most Gaelic part of Scotland. The people there were the most resistant to the imposition of English control and culture, and had the strongest tradition of speaking their own language and playing the pipes.
- ▶ As punishment after the Highlanders were defeated in a military battle, and to obtain land for colonists, a large part of the population in that part of Scotland was forced from their homes, in the “Highland Clearances”. Many migrated to North America.
- ▶ As part of the attempt to end Gaelic culture the playing of the pipes made very difficult, possible even outlawed in Ireland and Scotland.
- ▶ In Ireland, the pipes almost died out.
- ▶ At a later point, however, piping was encouraged again in Scotland, but only on the condition that they be played in bands, as part of the British army. The Irish were not allowed into the army. Before this, pipers played as individuals, not in groups, and there had been no such thing as “pipe bands”.

# The pipes in Ireland and Scotland

▶ The best known form of bagpipes is the “píob mhór, Irish for “great pipes”, the “big pipes”. Scottish pipers like to call them the highland pipes or the great highland pipes.



▶ The next most well known pipes are the “uilleann pipes”, developed after the big pipes, in Ireland. They are not blown by mouth, but by a bellows under the arm (“uilleann” is the Irish word for “elbow”). They are quieter and have a wider range (two octaves) than the big pipes.



# Where are the pipes played?

Though the píob mhór is the best known type of bagpipe in the world, the map opposite shows the approximate distribution of the bagpipe as an ethnic instrument throughout Europe and the Mediterranean.

From Lapland in the extreme North to the Northern coast of Africa, from the Atlantic shores of Portugal, as far east as India, bagpipes have been played for centuries, were often the most-heard musical instruments.



# Bagpipes throughout Europe and beyond



# Parts of the “big pipes”

- ▶ The Mouthpiece
- ▶ Used by the player to refill the bag with air, as it is used up in playing. Alternatively, the air can be supplied by bellows, but some form of supply is necessary, otherwise the air in the bag would be used up and the pipes fall silent.
- ▶ The Bag
- ▶ The bag stores the air needed to produce the musical notes of the instrument. The air is pressurized by the player squeezing the bag under one arm. The pressure exerted has an influence on the loudness and quality of the notes.
- ▶ Drones
- ▶ Each drone tube is tuned to produce a fixed note in the chord of the key in which the pipes are to be played. The drones make the characteristic continuous notes common to most bagpipe music.
- ▶ The Chanter
- ▶ The chanter is the reed pipe which plays the tune. Different notes are produced by the player covering and uncovering holes along the length of the chanter. Pipers frequently practice tunes by blowing only a chanter, often a “practice chanter”, smaller chanter made especially for learning and practicing.

