Great Highland Bagpipes

The Great Highland Bagpipe (Gaelic : A' Phìob Mhòr) is probably the best-known variety of bagpipe. Abbreviated GHB, and commonly referred to simply as "the pipes", they have historically taken numerous forms in both Ireland and Scotland.

A modern set has a bag, a chanter, a blowpipe, two tenor drones, and one bass drone. The scale on the chanter is in Mixolydian mode with a flattened 7th or leading tone. It has a range from one whole tone lower than the tonic to one octave above it (in piper's parlance: Low G, Low A, B, C, D, E, F, High G, and High A; the C and F could or should be called sharp but this is always omitted). Although less so now, depending on the tuning of the player, certain notes are tuned slightly off of just intonation (for example, the D could be tuned slightly sharp for sound effects), but again, today the notes of the chanter are usually tuned in just intonation to the Mixolydian scale with a flattened 7th. The two tenor drones are an octave below the keynote (Low A) of the chanter) and the bass drone two octaves below. This "A" of the GHB is actually slightly sharper than B-flat, around 480 Hz, and within the realm of competitive pipe bands, seems to get slightly sharper each year. In the 1990s, there were a few new developments, namely, reliable synthetic drone reeds, and synthetic bags that deal with moisture arguably better than hide or older synthetic bags. Regional usage The GHB is widely used by both soloists and pipe bands (civilian and military), and is now played in countries around the world, particularly those with large Scottish and Irish emigrant populations, namely Canada, United States of America, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. It has also been adopted by many countries that were formerly part of the British Empire, such as India (where it replaced the local bagpipes, called moshak and shruti), Pakistan, Nepal (famous for their Gurka soldiers), Arabic countries such as Egypt and Oman, and Uganda (where Idi Amin forbade the export of African Blackwood, so as to encourage local bagpipe construction, during the 1970s). In Oman, the instrument is called habban and is used in cities such as Muscat, Salalah, and Sohar. The GHB was also adopted in Thailand; around 1921, King Rama VI ordered a set to accompany the marching exercises of the Sua Pa, or Wild Tiger Corps (a royal guard unit which had previously practiced to the sounds of an oboe called pi chawa). Although the bagpipes arrived from the British Isles with a user's manual, no one was able to figure out how to play them, so the bassoon player Khun Saman Siang-prajak went to the British Embassy and learned how to play the instrument with the British soldiers, until he was satisfied. He then returned to teach the Thai pipe band, until they could perform properly. The band, which plays Thai as well as Scottish tunes, still practices at Vachiravuth High School in Bangkok, which is named for Rama VI.[1] Pollig Monjarret introduced the GHB to Brittany during the Celtic revival of the 1920s Breton folk music scene, inventing the bagad, a pipe band incorporating the GHB, the Scottish pipe band drum section, the bombarde and recently, almost any added grouping of wind instruments, e.g. saxophones, brass instruments, such as the trumpet and trombone, etc. Well known bagads include Bagad Brieg, Bagad Kemper, and Bagad Cap Caval. In Brittany, the GHB is known as the biniou braz, in contrast to the biniou kozh, the small traditional Breton bagpipe. In Ireland, a presumably related instrument is seen in a woodcut by Derrick (an Elizabethan Englishman), in his book, entitled, "Derrick's Image of Ireland", circa 1580, showing a piper leading a group of soldiers and playing a two drone instrument with a long chanter. This instrument apparently died out in Ireland during the 1700s. In the late 1800s a number of Irish pipers attempted a romantic revival with the Brian Boru pipe (see below). Another version of a revived "Irish" bagpipe was essentially a GHB with a bass drone and a single tenor. This has been coined the Irish Warpipes in recent times. Design The Great Highland Bagpipe is classified as a woodwind instrument, like the bassoon, oboe or clarinet, although its design is decidedly different from any other instrument. Although it is classified as a double-reed instrument, the reeds are all closed inside the wooden stocks, instead of being played directly by mouth as other woodwinds are. The GHB actually has four reeds; the chanter reed (double), two tenor drone reeds (single), and one bass drone reed (single). See Bagpipes. Music The Gaelic word pìobaireachd simply means "pipe music", but it has been adapted into English as "Pibroch". In Gaelic, this, the "Great Music" of the GHB is referred to as Ceòl Mòr, and "light music" (such as marches and dance tunes) is referred to as Ceòl Beag. Ceòl Mòr consists of a slow ground movement (Gaelic ùrlar) which is a simple theme, then a series of increasingly complex variations on this theme, and ends with a return to the ground. Ceòl Beag includes marches (2/4, 4/4, 6/8, 3/4, etc), dance tunes (particularly strathspeys, reels, hornpipes, and jigs), slow airs, and more. The Ceòl Mòr style was developed by the well-patronized dynasties of bagpipers - MacArthurs, MacGregors, Rankins, and especially the MacCrimmons - and seems to have emerged as a distinct form during the seventeenth century. Compared to many other musical instruments, the GHB is limited by its range (nine notes), lack of dynamics (ability to change the volume of the notes), and lack of rests. The latter due to the fact that the airflow to the reeds is continuous until the player stops playing completely. The GHB is a closed reed instrument, which means that the four reeds are completely encased within the instrument and the player cannot change the sound of the instrument via mouth position or tonguing. As a result, notes cannot be separated by simply stopping blowing or tonguing so gracenotes and combinations of gracenotes, called embellishments, are used for this purpose. These more complicated ornaments using two or more gracenotes include doublings, taorluaths, throws, grips, birls. There are also a set of ornaments usually used for pìobaireachd, for example the dare, vedare, chedare, darado, taorluath and crunluath. Some of these embellishments have found their way into light music over the course of the 20th century. These embellishments are also used for note emphasis, for example to emphasize the beat note or other phrasing patterns. These three single gracenotes (G, D, and E) are the most commonly used and are often played in succession. All gracenotes are performed rapidly, by quick finger movements, giving an effect similar to tonguing or articulation on modern wind instruments. Due to the lack of rests and dynamics, all expression in GHB music comes from the use of embellishments and to a larger degree by varying the duration of notes. Despite the fact that most GHB music is highly rhythmically regimented and structured, proper phrasing of all types of GHB music relies heavily on rubato, the ability of the player to stretch specific notes within a phrase or measure. In particular, the main beats of each bar and phrase are played in strict time, but the off-beats of sub-divisions within each beat are flexible.

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