

Practice chanter

(The pursuit of perfect scale)

Pipers will talk endlessly about their pipe chanters and go to great lengths to get them just right, or what they believe is right. They will spend money on reeds and buy new pipe chanters to increase the chance of getting both the correct scale and pitch with good volume and resonance. This is entirely laudable and one of the wonderful aspects of today's affluence is that most of us can afford to do this. However, when it comes to the humble practice chanter which, for various reasons, most pipers play more than they do the bagpipe, then, too many accept a scale that is not true. This is foolish, because your ear inevitably become accustomed to the untrue scale of your practice chanter and this can affect your ability to set the pipe chanter. It also makes less good listening for yourself and those within hearing range and makes it less pleasurable to play.

It is worth seeking out a good practice chanter and a reed that, with or without an elastic band to mute it a little, will be easy to blow and sound a true scale. Most practice chanter reeds are now made with plastic blades and are very simple. The older, longer bladed type is very easily muted to an acceptable strength and volume by winding an elastic band round the blades to bring them closer together. There is no future in having a practice chanter that is hard to blow and annoys the people two rooms away. It is better if you can get a reed that does not need to be muted. Anyone with a modicum of D.I.Y. skills can easily make their own using a yoghurt or cream plastic carton from which to cut the blades, and well-waxed hemp to bind them onto a staple. Everyone should do this as the minimum training in reed making.

The other important thing to remember periodically and especially during these COVID pandemic time is to clean the chanter thoroughly with soap and water using a custom made brush or a long feather. This applies to the pipe chanter as well as the practice chanter.

A gummed up chanter begins to sound dull. A clean chanter will always sound brighter. Whether it is clean or dirty, do try to get your practice chanter to play a true scale. You will find yourself putting in more enjoyable practice if it is both tuneful and easy to blow.