

by John Slavin

NEW PRODUCTS

Wee-pipes for wee folk (and their dads)

THOMAS ZÖLLER

WHAT do you do when a child is ready to move from the chanter to the pipes but is too small to play them? There's now a solution to this problem — a set of Wee-pipes.

This new product is the brainchild of German piping teacher Thomas Zöller, who is a graduate of the RSAMD BA (Scottish music — Piping) degree. His interest in piping was first sparked by listening to the music of Planxty, which led to a love of drone-based music ranging from medieval music, hurdy gurdy to Far Eastern music and of course bagpipes. He started playing the French bagpipes before moving on to the Highland pipes, and then added small pipes and border pipes to his repertoire. At the age of 25, he decided to go to the RSAMD in Glasgow and after graduating started a piping school (www.dudelsack-akademie.de) back home in Hofheim, Germany.

His time in Scotland had a massive influence on him, as did one particular tutor. He explained: "I asked Allan MacDonald to become the patron for the school because I learned a great deal of music, and understanding for

the music, and the instrument, repertoire and history from him when I was at the RSAMD. He was a big inspiration for me and a great person and musician. I felt I wanted to pass on his style and approach to the instrument and the music."

The students at the Dudelsack-Akademie come from a wide variety of ages and backgrounds. But it was the difficulty faced by one of the younger pupils that started Thomas on his journey to design the Wee-pipes

He picks up the story: "There was a boy who was around eight or nine at that time. I got him a kids' practice chanter which I found had really bad tuning. I had to do a lot of things to it to make it sound OK. After a while, he wanted to go on to the bagpipes but he was just too small for it, as kids are.

"I had a friend, an instrument and bagpipe maker, called Clemens Bieger. He makes various bagpipes, small pipes and medieval instruments. I asked him to make a very

simple type of bagpipe which would have one drone and a really small bag. He also worked out how long the mouthpiece should be and put the practice chanter the boy played into that pipe."

The Principal of The National Piping Centre, Roddy MacLeod, attended the Dudelsack-Akademie's annual concert two years ago and saw the boy playing these new pipes. He asked about the instrument and Thomas explained that it had been developed in Germany and they wanted to take them to a wider market.

Thomas said: "I explained the idea to him. I found it intriguing that for really any instrument you can get a kids' version — violin, guitar and so on, but not bagpipes. We developed the instrument further and designed the chanter more specifically and came up with the pitch of C so that kids who play



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it in school situations could play with other instruments more easily.

"We refined the bag and the reeds and we worked together with Eezedrone for the reeds, and the bags come from James Begg — so we have high-quality components.

"Bieger, myself and Masaki put the instruments together here. Masaki used to work at The National Piping Centre and now works at the Dudelsack-Akademie and for Bieger-Pipes.

The Wee-pipes have a bass drone with nice combing and beading and it is a strong bass which gives a nice rich sound. The instrument is plastic and has a plastic chanter reed. The chanter has a finger spacing which is similar to a small pipe D chanter and we have tested them on several kids. As I explained before, the chanter uses the pitch of C, and into the mouthpiece we have designed a little water trap so you don't get too many problems with moisture. You can also take the mouthpiece off the bagpipe and put it together with the chanter to make a practice chanter, so you have your practice chanter and your kids' bagpipe in the one instrument."

Thomas reckons that the practice chanter is suitable for kids starting from around aged five, although it varies from child to child and Thomas added: "I remember giving the pipes

to a four-year-old and I thought she was too young to play, but she could deal with it. It really depends on the individual. It's easy to get the reed to sound as they are very low pressure and the instrument doesn't take much air."

Although the target market is young learners, one of the beauties of the instrument is that dads — and mums and pipers of all ages — can play it too.

Thomas explained: "We have developed a second reed for the drone which plays in the key of A instead of C. You can put the A reed into the drone, take the C chanter out, put the A chanter in and that way it becomes playable for an adult.

"If for an example an adult who plays pipes wants to encourage his child to play he could buy a set of Wee-pipes. If the kid doesn't take it on the parent could play it as an A small pipe, so the investment isn't for nothing. We thought it would be a great motivation for the kids if they see dad or mum playing it. The kid can just take the same pipes, take the A chanter out put the C chanter in and play himself. We have all these things combined in this instrument."

The project has proved such a success that the Wee-pipes are being launched at *Piping Live!* and will be distributed by The National Piping Centre, costing £295 plus vat. ●

Pipe Case

RG Hardie Pipe Case

A COUPLE of weeks ago I received a very nice gift of a new pipe case manufactured by R G Hardie – the only string attached was to write an honest review, so here goes.

The case is of a standard size measuring 62cm x 28cm x 18cm. British Airways give their standard hand baggage allowance as 56cm x 45cm x 25cm. So while the dimension for length is 6cm longer it is well within limits of breadth and depth. I have to say that I don't know if that argument washes with hard-nosed ground staff but I recently took the pipes to America in the new case and did not have any questions regarding its suitability as carry-on luggage. Once on the aircraft it fitted very easily into overhead lockers.

The case is made from a black waterproof synthetic material and comes fitted with carrying straps which can be joined at the handle by velcro. A strong zip is used to open and close the case which could be secured with a small padlock. In addition, attached to the base of the case, there are two adjustable shoulder straps which make carrying the case on your back for longer walks very comfortable, freeing up both hands for other use. There is also a single shoulder strap which can be used if preferred.

Internally the case is nicely lined with a black velour material and most importantly the walls of the



case are reinforced to give the pipes that extra bit of protection from bashes or knocks.

There is an external, expandable zipped pocket on the case giving plenty space for extra accessories or music and inside there are two mesh pockets attached to the inside of the lid which provide extra storage to keep the case tidy.

All in all this is a very good case, entirely fit for purpose and very reasonably priced at £65. I felt very happy that my pipes were both safe and secure and it was easy to carry – what more could you ask?

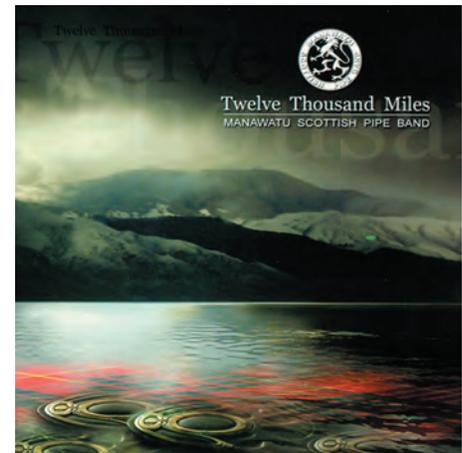
RODDY MACLEOD

CD reviews

Manawatu Scottish Pipe Band

Twelve Thousand Miles

OWN LABEL



THE FIRST time I heard the Manawatu Scottish was in the 2003 World Championships medley final. That day I became a fan, and when I was asked to review their newest CD I jumped at the chance.

Twelve Thousand Miles is the distance this group of dedicated musicians travel to compete at the World Championships, and is the title of this CD. From the inlay booklet to the quality of the recording, this product reeks of class, but does the content match the effort put into the design and recording quality? In a word, yes.

The CD opens with the hornpipe *The Road to Lipetsk* composed by pipe major Stewart McKenzie and is followed by three jigs of which the standout for me was Peter R MacLeod's *Donald MacLean*. The tone and quality of playing is what you would expect from New Zealand's most successful competing band for the best part of the last decade. The second track starts with two cracking hornpipes, pipe major Calum Campbell's *Caprice* and a personal favourite of mine, *The Hamster* by Roy Hamilton. Again, the band shows off clean, crisp playing, but there's just a hint of tonal issues in this set. The tonal issues appear in various tracks, but in no way spoil the enjoyment. Track three introduces tasteful accompaniment from Duncan Davidson on bouzouki and the band treats us to a couple of reels.

At track four the band start with Stewart McKenzie's air *Poyntzfield* and it becomes apparent the CD is starting to feature heavily on sections of past and possibly present competing medleys. The first soloist featured is pipe corporal Stewart Easton in track five playing a Chris Armstrong jig. He follows this with four cracking reels all played with a flowing, strong style that tells you this member of the band is a talented player with a strong background in the solo scene.

Track eight features Bruce Omundsen on the Scottish small pipes, and he offers us three of his own compositions all of which are very enjoyable. In track nine we are given *Yesus, Ya Jalalee Koo* which the sleeve notes say is a folk hymn from Ethiopia transcribed for the bagpipes by Timothy Cummings. The first thing that strikes you is the use of a baritone