

# Youngstars

The National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland  
Newsletter No.16

## NYPBoS pipers stage a fiery show

**FRENCH** artist and performer Michel Moglia's 1,800-kilogram 'Orgue a Feu' — fire organ — is not exactly a sitting-room instrument but, neither really, is the great Highland bagpipe.

On Sunday night, 27 November, a crowd of 15,000 people heard the National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland pipe corps play in ensemble with Michel Moglia's unique instrument at the spectacular finale of Glasgow's first Festival of Light, *Radiance*, at Glasgow's Rottenrow Gardens.

The event was exciting and memorable, with three 20-minute performances, at 5.30 p.m., 6.30 p.m. and 7.30 p.m.

Michel Moglia, a sculptor and classical flautist, became fascinated with the sounds produced by heat in a hollow tube and began building fire organs some 20 years ago. "It is not an esthetic of the flame that interests me," he told an interviewer, "so much of as the effect that it produces when there is a column of air vibrating through it."

The fire organ is a complicated pyramid-like

arrangement of about 200 stainless steel, titanium and glass tubes of different dimensions. It is played by moving gas burners of varying intensity around the openings of the tubes.

Basically, the rich-timbred sound is generated by vibrations set up by cold and hot air as they interact in a pipe at a partial barrier near the top of the tube. The diameter and length of the pipe determine the note that is produced. But the notes are acoustically complicated by other sounds that come from other sources within the organ and are not altogether predictable: "Imagine a mix of songs produced by whales, Tibetan trumpets, African flutes and jet engine reactors," said one reviewer.

In Glasgow, J.D. Twitch of Optimo, was working with Michel Moglia and his team and the NYPBoS pipers. And the fire organ was programmed so that additional light and sound sequences could be synchronised with an array of visual effects.

The NYPBoS pipe corps took the stage in three groups to *La Boum*. The fire organ began this se-

quence and was then joined by a specially arranged soundtrack that built up over the 20-minute sequence into a blazing closing presentation led by the NYPBoS pipers playing Mark Saul's *The Hell Bound Train* with the percussion backing track.

After a technical rehearsal at the Rottenrow Gardens on the Saturday evening, the pipers had just the Sunday morning to get down Jonathan Quay's arrangement of the tune.

"This was an unusual and exciting opportunity, a great challenge for the pipers involved," said NYPBoS director, Paul Warren. "It is too bad that our drummers weren't called for on this occasion, simply because of the way the whole show was presented, but it is the sort of high profile public performance that will help us to secure further interesting engagements.

"We were able to bring something very special to this festival and, in return this is an stimulating, enjoyable and very different kind of event to be involved with: just what we in the NYPBoS are about." ●



Photo by Ashley Coombes

# NYPBoS lead tip takes world title

DAVEY ROSS

**WINNING** the 2005 Juvenile World Drumming title was a tremendous thrill for Davey Ross — leading drummer of the National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland and a member of the grade I Dysart and Dundonald Pipe Band drum corps — and for his parents who was there to see their son compete.

“Getting the world title was very emotional for me and my mum and dad,” he said. “It meant a lot to me and my family.

“I didn’t get much of a chance to hear many players because I was last on, which probably made it worse — I had no idea how anyone else had played.”

In the lead-up to the event, he worked at his drumming hard — every evening. “I tried to spend as much time on the drum as possible. And mainly trying to focus my mind onto the job, as I had a lot going on in my life on the run up to the worlds, between university and work and so on.

“I gave it everything I had, mainly because this was my last year in the juvenile championships. I had never been placed in the Worlds before,” he said.

But he had cut an impressive swathe through local competitions in Scotland. And, as well as cutting it as a grade I pipe band drummer, had become a valued senior member of the National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland. And, in his spare time, he plays drum kit with a rock group and percussion and guitar with a small folk band: “Many of my friends are musicians of some kind,” he said.

For him, the “buzz” started early. He was hardly much more than a toddler when he and a young friend would “play” along with Runrig recordings. “We’d pretend we were playing in the band — and I was always the drummer,” he said.

Eric and Catherine Ross recognized their son’s early interest and, when the family moved from Glasgow to Dalgety Bay in Fife, Catherine Ross took David, then four and a half years old, along to the Inverkeithing and District Pipe Band. “My parents have always been very supportive,” he said. “I really could never have gone very far with my drumming without them.

“To be honest, when I first started learning the drums I was so young that, really, my lessons and playing in the band were more of a social thing. I thought of it more as a club where I made friends. It wasn’t until I was a little older that I began to appreciate drumming.”

After a year with the Inverkeithing band, Davey Ross moved to the Burntisland Pipe Band where he met and began to learn drumming with Mark Gibson.

“This is where I learned most of my skills as a drummer, and as a musician,” he said.



“Mark is a brilliant teacher who has turned out some brilliant drummers — people like Scott Birrell of Boghall and Bathgate’s grade I corps, John Henderson at Dysart and Dundonald and others... not to mention a number of drummers he has taught who’ve gone on to play very successfully in rock bands.”

Davey Ross stayed with the Burntisland band for nearly 10 years — “some of the best years of my life” — and, playing with the novice juvenile corps, had his first taste of winning serious events: world, British, European, Scottish and Cowal Championship titles were all taken by the youngsters from Fife. More titles were won by his juvenile corps. “Throughout my time there, I was taught by Mark Gibson. I have respect for all of the main guys in the drumming world, of course, but I don’t think I have a particular ‘hero’. But Mark Gibson is someone I looked up to as a youngster and he has been the most influential

figure in drumming for me.”

At the same time, Davey Ross was emerging as drummer of exceptional talent and as a valued corps member — as an identity in his own right.

He moved on to the grade I Drambuie Kirkliston corps under the leadership of Alex Dudgeon, with whom he won the Scottish drum corps championship title.

He also won selection, in 2003, as a founding member of the National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland.

“My experience with the National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland has been brilliant,” he said. “I can’t speak highly enough of it,” he said. “I have made friends for life in the band, played alongside brilliant musicians and in the most amazing places. The trip to China was a life changing experience.

“The NYPBoS has shaped many of its members’ futures, showing them that a career in their instrument

would be something they would want to pursue.”

In 2004, after two years with the Drambuie Kirkliston band, Davey Ross moved on to Dysart and Dundonald.

“Dysart has been a very influential band throughout the years of my childhood, as it is my local grade 1 band, and my tutor Mark Gibson played for them. When I moved to Dysart, it just made sense, and I always wanted to play for them as a youngster.

“Under the current leadership of Brian Purvis, my playing has come on by leaps and bounds, and I feel a lot of the credit for my progress must go to the all the drummers in the band who have helped me.

“You reach a point at which you begin to feel appreciated by fellow drummers and musicians on the basis of your ability ... drumming is a gradual progression as well: you are always learning something that can be added to your skills. It’s hard to pinpoint exactly when it was that I felt first like a ‘real’ drummer, but teaching has a big part to play in that. It makes you realise what sort of a drummer you are.”

Teaching is something Davey Ross has come to feel as a vocation.

“For a long time, my vision has been to have my very own drumming school back in Fife: something along the same lines as the National Piping Centre but for drumming — and not just for pipe band snare drumming but for percussion drumming as well.”

Several years ago, he began offering drumming tuition at Inverkeithing High School. “That’s where I really learned about myself and my teaching abilities; I got so much out of teaching there and realised that this is what I would love to do,” he said.

“I saw the demand among youngsters, young people wanting to learn but with nowhere really for them to go.

“Few bands now invest much time in teaching youngsters, which is a real shame.

“Unfortunately, when I moved through to university in Glasgow, I had to give up my commitment at the high school — but right now, I’m doing a business studies degree at Glasgow Caledonian University with the hope that it will help and equip me when I try to set up my own drumming school.”

Pipe bands and pipe band drumming are areas he sees having vast new areas still to explore.

“People like Jim Kilpatrick and Eric Ward have pushed the boundaries, which is great. But there is more to be done. It’s hard to pinpoint exactly what, because I’m not sure, however I think people will have to be open for more dramatic change if it is to take place.

“As I started going abroad and winning titles there was a lot more respect. I have many ideas on this, and could speak about it all day.

“The key to successful pipe band performance is the situation where the pipers and drummers work together on the music, instead an old way of doing things where the music was often thrown at the drum corps to get on with.

“The gap that has existed between pipers and drummers can probably be put down to a mutual lack of understanding. Pipers and drummers should probably learn more about how each other’s instruments work, and why things happen and sound like they do.

“Pipers could usefully try to learn a bit more about drumming and how rudiments can complement the tunes, and how this can develop the band’s ensemble performance. And the argument applies the other way for drummers.

“My experience has been that pipers have often looked down on my instrument, which is probably due to a lack of understanding. Although a snare drum clearly does not have the same range of pitch as the pipes, talent and experience are needed to play the

drums too, and to understand the music,” he said.

“Currently I see people like Jim Kilpatrick, Eric Ward, Barry Wilson and Paul Turner leading things very well on the drumming front; and Richard Parks and Robert Matheson in piping. However, I think that the next decade will see a massive influx of new people willing, ready and able to fill these people’s shoes,” he said.

“Pipe bands are being far more inventive with the construction of tunes and medleys, and I see them beginning to get greater recognition for their capacity to present quality musical performances as opposed to simply standing there playing sets of tunes.

“But I’d like to see pipe bands in general become more aware of their audiences — people pay money to see the bands play and, if it means facing outwards in the circle or whatever, fine.

“Greater audience awareness is an issue too when it comes to concerts performed by pipe bands. Seeing bands simply march on and play their sets doesn’t do it for me, especially when I have paid £15 to see them perform. In this regard, I have always been impressed with the 78th Fraser Highlanders of Ontario, Canada, which, at the moment, is one of the few bands to really make an effort to put a ‘show’, as opposed to a ‘performance’.

“But all bands should be trying to put on a better show for the public. For example, I wouldn’t rule out the idea of bands working with dancers more often than they do. Highland dancing is a large part of our culture and does work with pipe bands as I’ve seen on stage in concert with the National Youth Pipe Band.

“For a long time I’ve nurtured a goal of making pipe band drumming ‘cool’. As I grew up — I wasn’t wound up about it — but people just envisaged my drumming in the context of a very traditional pipe band. It frustrated me.

“Change is needed.” ●

# NYPBoS courses planned

**THE NATIONAL Youth Pipe Band of Scotland was looking forward at press time to mounting a full edition of its acclaimed *Making the Change* show at the Partick Burgh Hall on 4 December as the grand finale concert of the 2005 Partick Folk Festival.**

The show, a part of which was presented at the 2005 *Piping Live!* festival in Glasgow, was also to be the culmination of a challenging development and leadership course at the National Piping Centre that is intended to bring less experienced members to the fore, and give everyone opportunities to step up the level of their involvement.

“It will give those who are coming on an opportunity to shine,” said NYPBoS director Paul Warren. “I’m obviously hoping senior members will come along and support the concert but they will be in the back line.

“It’s quite a challenge for everybody. Even those who are auditioning will perform: everyone who takes

part in that band camp.”

Paul Warren said he was also planning to introduce a new *NYPBoS Training Course* — a pre-audition course for young players

“A lot of young people have come on courses, find them quite hard but have high expectations of wanting to be in the band — but they are just not ready for it and the rejection involved is hard for me to do and sometimes very disappointing for them,” he said.

The new course will have many of the features of an audition course but be a preparation for audition and a taster of the NYPBoS experience.

“It’s designed to expand the experience and understanding of those who come,” he said.

“It will look at the subjects we generally cover in the NYPBoS in terms of wider musicianship skills and help to prepare those who are interested without their having to formally audition.

“It will be a fun and learning experience,” he said, “and, while it will not include an audition with its at-

tenant pressures, it will better enable me to identify people who seem to be ready for the more pressured audition courses so they can attend with a realistic expectation of success.”

Paul Warren said the course would also help to establish a wider network of potential members... “and a better idea of the talent out there.

“It’s an important development.”

NYPBoS courses and camps scheduled over the next eight months include:

- 13-14 January: New Year band camp
- 12-14 February: NYPBoS courses 1&2
- 19-21 February: NYPBoS courses 3&4
- 8-11 March: Outreach tour (to be confirmed)
- 26-28 March: NYPBoS courses 5&6
- 9-11 April: NYPBoS courses 7&8
- 16-18 April: NYPBoS overspill courses
- 28-30 May: NYPBoS course 9&10
- 6-8 August: NYPBoS Summer Band Camp (t.b.c)



# A big New Year's in store

## CELTIC CONNECTIONS 2006

**CELTIC Connections, now in its 13th year, is the biggest winter festival of its kind in the world and there's a lot to achieve when we take our full-on *Making the Change* show on stage in the at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall's Strathclyde Suite on Saturday 14 January.**

*Celtic Connections* features artists from around the world alongside the very best Scottish talent in 12 venues across the city — so to be in the concert hall this year puts the NYPBoS in the spotlight and I'm delighted and thankful for it.

We play at 2 p.m. — a great time for a winter gig like this — and, following us at the Royal Concert Hall are some popular festival highlights including *Danny Kyle's Open Stage* hosted by Gibb Todd and, that night, the *Musical Ark* show with the likes of Aly Bain, Phil Cunningham, Ale Möller, Brian McNeill, Findlay Napier and Karen Tweed.

We'll be in good company indeed, and I know we'll meet everyone's highest expectations with a great show that has already had a test-run and into which we have put a lot more work and development.

The most exciting aspect of it for me is the energy and creativity that you have put into this show — it is your creation — and our *Celtic Connections* performance is where it will be seen by a big audience, and in full bloom.

Tickets are already on sale at the Glasgow Royal Concert hall box office and, thanks to outings like the *Piping Live!* concert in August, *Radiance* and the Partick Folk Festival, we have a higher profile in Glasgow than ever before — we should all expect to turn on our "best yet show" to a full house (and, if your friends and family want tickets, encourage them to get in soon).

What this all means is that — no matter how large

and up front or small your role — keep practicing, and keep focused over the Christmas-Hogmanay break. Those first two weeks of 2006 will pass very, very quickly and we'll be tuning our drones for *Celtic Connections* before you know it. We have to put our very best foot forward on 14 January, and we can be confident that our absolute best is very, very good indeed.

Another reason to keep your levels high is a yet-to-be-confirmed possibility that we will have an opportunity to play with Carlos Nuñez on Wednesday, 11 January.

Galician star Carlos Nuñez is a great friend of the NYPBoS and, if this comes to pass, it will be a thrill for our players to be back on stage with him.

MEANWHILE — let me wish you a very Merry Christmas and a brilliantly successful 2006! ●

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