

# **Ensemble In a Pipe Band**

# **Ensemble**

- **In the midst of the mayhem of a competition day, what is it that makes you stop and listen ?**
- **A quality pipe band sound.**
- **Clear, secure pleasant to the ear.**
- **Perfect blend of sound – no one section overpowering/dominating the others.**
- **Leads to “Transcendental Significance”**

# **Ensemble- Definition**

- **What Is Good Ensemble?**
  - Combination of well matched and balanced units
  - Producing a pleasing or harmonious effect
  - Sounding like one grand instrument
- **Component Parts for Pipe Bands**
  - Introduction
  - Intonation
  - Integration
  - Interpretation

# **Ensemble- Definition**

- **Sounding As One Grand Instrument**
  - **Playing in unison**
  - **With correct expression/phrasing and tempo for each tune type**
  - **With good execution**
  - **With instruments in tune**
  - **Balanced and well pitched**
  - **Striking in as one**
  - **Coordinated breaks**
  - **Playing compositions within the ability range of band**
  - **Well considered arrangements-mood, tempo changes etc.**
  - **Tasteful use of harmony**
  - **Sympathetic drum scores**

# Integration

- **Pipers Playing In Unison**
  - **Selecting the tunes**
    - » **P/M must ensure suitable for playing standard**
  - **Learning tunes on practice chanter**
    - » **playing over with P/M (2 bar phrases)**
    - » **learning to play complete tune with music**
  - **Memorising**
    - » **playing without music (home practice)**
    - » **with the desired expression/phrasing/execution (P/M`s responsibility)**
      - one on one practice
    - » **easy to forget expression when concentrating on memorising**
  - **Group Playing On Practice Chanter**
  - **Group Playing On Pipes**

# Integration

- **Coordination With Drum Corps**
- **Ultimate aim-tonal harmony and balance with the bagpipes**
- **How**
  - **P/M provides recording of material ASAP**
    - » **Drummers require more time - composing score**
      - writing score out
      - trying out with P/M
      - adapting
      - learning / memorising
  - **Chanter and drum pad trial**
  - **P/M should indicate at this stage any misgivings**
  - **Full band trial**
  - **Refinements as necessary**

**Bass and tenor scores should also be under consideration from the beginning**

# Interpretation

- **Selecting the tunes**

- **Within ability range**

- » **Must be able to concentrate on expression**

- simple tunes played well are often more musically satisfying than difficult tunes played not so well

- **Allowance for personal taste**

- **Consideration given to - key changes**

- **mood swings**

- **tempo changes**

- **time signature changes**

- **breaks**

- **harmonies**

- ( do`s and do not`s )

# Interpretation

- **Expressing / Phrasing the tunes**
  - Marches
  - Strathspeys
  - Reels (round & pointed)
  - Airs
  - Waltzes
  - Hornpipes (round & pointed)
  - Jigs (even pulsing & subtle pointing)
- **Accents**
  - Duple time            S W
  - Triple time            S W W
  - Quadruple time    S W M W

**Always with an ear on ensuring the drum score enhances the rhythm**



# Introduction

- **How To Ensure Good Quality Attacks**
  - **Pipe Maintenance - bag**
    - stocks
    - hemping of joints
  - **Reed selection / pitching - chanter**
    - drone
  - **A comfortable instrument is essential, with carefully selected reeds which you are confident of**
  - **Home practice - concentrate on not over or under blowing**
  - **Listening in the band situation**
  - **One on one intro`s with P/M**

**All instruments must be sounded in unison**

# Intonation

- **Pipes -Initial Tuning**
  - Chanters balanced well intoned and in unison
  - Clearly defined pitch intervals ( no obvious notes out of tune)
  - Rich sounding, with drones in full harmony( with chanter and each other) with maximum resonance
  - Overall rich and sonorous sounding
- **Drums**
  - Bright and in unison
  - Pitch must compliment pipes
  - Maintain control of volume/ dynamics with regard to overall balance
  - Clever use of the drum section can create the apparent change of volume from the pipes
  - Use of variance in volume to full, musical effect
    - » Include sympathetic silence for good effect
- **Bass and Tenor**
  - Bass must be full and resonant
  - Tenors tuned at sympathetic intervals to the chanter

# Achieving Good Intonation

- **Pipes**

- **Reed Selection**
- **Reed Weighting Uniform (within reason)**
- **Selecting the pitch (considering everything, including environmental)**
- **Balancing the start point or start points**
- **Setting chanters in unison - my method (given good conditions)**
  - » **Ensure pipes are blown to achieve stabilisation**
  - » **Tune two or three at a time (depending how much time you spend on each)**
  - » **Allow all pipers to blow again to get back to stability**
    - **Tuners need to hold back a bit to allow to settle**
  - » **Keep going round until all are tuned**
  - » **Use rest of time to find single note problems**
- **Keep pipes at pitch until performance**
  - » **Remember not to over blow and leave best sound in tuning park**

# Achieving Good Intonation

- **Setting Chanters (continued)**
  - **Discuss Strategies for Poorer Conditions**
    - » **Wet /humid**
    - » **Hot**
    - » **Positioning of the pipers in the circle**
  - **Drones may be tuned individually with each instrument, fine tuning where necessary in combined group to achieve best overall sound**
  - **Once unison is achieved, steady blowing (consistent air pressure) is essential for sustaining sound**
  - **Consideration of environmental conditions. Use common sense**

**NOTE: Sympathetic blowing or modifying of blowing pressure may be required at times to maintain intonation, depending on length of performance or conditions. This requires great skill and is not easily mastered.**

# Summary

- **P/M`s Role With Regard To Ensemble**

- Introduction - Commands**

- Setting / maintaining tempo
    - Ensuring pipes sound as one at correct time
    - Ensuring good practice of intro`s and adherence to sequence

- Intonation - Selection and tuning of reeds**

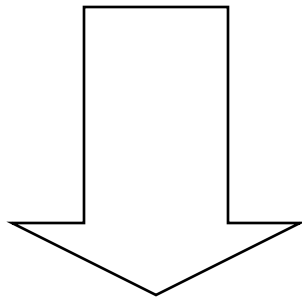
- Tuning of pipes-instruction on maintenance
    - Ensuring Good tonal qualities
    - Ensuring good balance with drums  
(input to - pitch/volume/dynamics)
    - consideration of environmental conditions

# Summary

- **P/M`s Role With Regard To Ensemble**
  - **Integration**
    - » Ensuring pipers integrate together and with the drummers to form a tight unit
  - **Interpretation**
    - » Selection and arrangement of tunes/sets/harmonies
    - » Ensuring correct expression/phrasing/execution
  - To create the ultimate in pipe band tonal balance
    - » All instruments work in complete empathy, one with the other, in terms of pitch, weight quality and fullness of sound
    - » Must be sustained to captivate the listener for the entire performance. \_

# **The Role of a P/M**

**One statement to sum up the role  
of a Pipe Major**



**To create the best possible  
ensemble with the resources at  
his disposal**