



# Bagpipe Bands and Tunes



**Wisconsin Highland Games**

## Bands

Bagpipe bands consist of pipers, snare (also called side) drums and a bass drum. Larger bands may also have tenor drums, which may have different sizes and pitches. Tenor drummers provide both musical texture and a visual flair as the tenors flourish the mallets. The band is led by a Pipe Major and the drummers are led by the Leading Drummer (sometimes called the Drum Sargent). While on parade, some bands use a Drum Major, who commands the bands movements via visual instructions using a mace. Many Drum Majors flourish the mace in solo competition and on parade, with high tosses and spins being crowd favorites.

Bands compete in different grades, ranging from the highest at Grade I to the entry level at Grade V. The majority of bands are rated IV and V, but a half dozen of the roughly four dozen bands in the Mid West Pipe Band Association rank at grades II and III (currently no Gr I bands in the MWPBA).

The bagpipes are often described as the most difficult instrument to learn to play well (it is incredibly easy to play poorly!). The Great Highland Bagpipe has a chanter to intone nine notes, low G to high A, with no additional flats or sharps. Low A ( $A_4$ ) is actually tuned a bit higher than B-flat, around 470 to 480 Hz. Three drones provide harmonizing tones; two tenor drones are pitched one octave lower than the chanter low A ( $A_3$ ) with the bass drone one octave lower yet ( $A_2$ ). The air bag actually sounds the drones and chanter, while the blowpipe inflates the bag.

The chanter has a double reed like an oboe while the drones use a single reed like a clarinet. Once the chanter and drones, are “struck in,” the bagpipe never stops playing: In addition to embellishments and grace notes, small changes in note duration (“pulses”) are used to establish structure within tunes.

The best bagpipe chanters and drones have traditionally been handcrafted from African blackwood with leather bags and cane reeds. The drones and chanters often have decorative parts in artificial ivory, nickel or silver. Given problems created by temperature and humidity changes, many pipers have moved to polypenco, a hard plastic, for the chanter and/or drones with plastic and carbon fiber drone reeds becoming better as well. Bags can also have artificial materials to avoid problems with moisture.

Scottish side drums are slightly different from marching band snare drums. Snare drums have a drum head on top and bottom; stretched across the bottom head is a wire snare that creates the staccato sound. Scottish side drums have two snares, one across the bottom of each head, which creates an even sharper

staccato sound. While snare drums cannot be tuned, the tenors and bass play in harmony with the pipe drones. The main tenor drums are tuned to the bass drones ( $A_2$ ) while the bass drum is tuned one octave lower ( $A_1$ ).

One band is designated as the “duty band” for a band competition. This band plays for the group tenor drum competition as well as the drum major contest. “Glendaruel Highlanders” and “Bonnie Dundee (6/8 marches) are tunes often used in these competitions. The duty band also leads the other bands in the Massed Bands during the Closing Ceremony, notably playing the “solo” parts of “Amazing Grace.”

## Tunes

Bagpipe “songs” are properly called tunes and fall into several categories. Marches are common, played in 4/4, 2/4, 3/4 and 6/8 time: The most well known march tune is “Scotland the Brave.” Dance tunes include jigs, reels, hornpipes (originated in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century but now associated with sailors), and strathspeys (a 4/4 dance that uses “cut-dot” rhythms as in the tune “Loch Lomond”). Slow airs (aka slow marches) are also common such as “Amazing Grace,” “The Bells of Dunblane,” or “The Skye Boat Song.” These tunes all constitute “light music.” The final category of music is Piobaireachd (pronounced “pee-Brock”), the art music genre of the bagpipe. Also called ceol mor (Great Music, pronounce “kee-El more”), piobaireachd uses subtle changes in note duration and tempo to infuse musicality into the tunes. Whereas light music (ceol beag, pronounced “kee-El bayg) uses standard music notation to record tunes, piobaireachd cannot easily be described using music notation. Instead, piobaireachd is often taught through singing.

## Common Massed Band Tunes

The tunes played today by the massed bands at the Closing Ceremony of the Pipes and Drums Competition are selected from the following list:

Amazing Grace	Green Hills of Tyrol
Balmoral	Highland Laddie
Barren Rocks of Aden	Scotland the Brave
Bonnie Dundee	Wings
Glendaruel Highlanders	

Lyrics, where provided in this pamphlet, are for the first verse plus chorus. Additional verses are often available and may be found on the Web. (Note: lyrics were often added to “Pop” versions of the tunes long after pipers composed the music.)

## **Amazing Grace**

Slow march (¾)

The English sailor turned Anglican clergyman John Newton wrote more than 280 hymns. Perhaps his most famous poem was penned to illustrate part of a sermon given on New Year's Day of 1773 to express his gratefulness for God's guidance and redemption after his participation in the slave trade. The poem was published as a hymn in 1779 but was recast to the tune of "New Britain" by William Walker in 1835. The tune was slowed down for the bagpipes and was first recorded in 1972 by a solo piper from the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards.

Massed bands usually play "Amazing Grace" from a "concert" formation with the duty band leading and finishing the tune; the massed bands play the second verse.

Amazing Grace, How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me  
I once was lost, but now am found  
T'was blind but now I see

T'was Grace that taught my heart to fear  
And Grace, my fears relieved  
How precious did that grace appear  
The hour I first believed

## **Balmoral**

March (¾)

Sir Robert Bruce was a soldier in the Gordon Highlanders serving in the Philippines in early 1942 when the Japanese took 75000 US, British and Filipino soldiers prisoner. About one third of the POWs perished. Bruce survived and wrote "Balmoral" after the war to honor his fallen comrades of the Bataan Death March. The tune most famously appeared in the movie "Backdraft" (1991) in which the Bagpipes and Drums of the Emerald Society, Chicago Police Department, play the march at the funeral of a fallen firefighter.

No lyrics are available for this tune.

## **Barren Rocks of Aden**

March (²/₄)

James Mauchline, a piper in the 78<sup>th</sup> Ross-shire Buffs (later the Seaforth Highlanders) composed the original tune in 1843 on the happy occasion of his regiment leaving the dry, barren volcanic shell that is the old city of Aden in what is now Yemen. Alexander MacKellar was the Pipe Major (1853-1862) of the 78<sup>th</sup> when the 78<sup>th</sup> was again stationed in Aden. While there, MacKellar arranged the nameless tune by Mauchline and named it "The Barren Rocks of Aden."

No lyrics are available for this tune.

## **Bonnie Dundee**

March ( $\frac{6}{8}$ )

James Graham, 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount of Dundee, became a staunch supporter of the Stuart cause after the overthrow of King James VII. He was a leader in the rebellion of 1689 and led Scottish forces to victory in the Battle of Killiecrankie. Unfortunately, the Scots had considerable losses and Graham fell in the battle, causing the rebellion to fail shortly after. Sir Walter Scott immortalized the Viscount in an 1825 poem about the battle, wherein Scott nicknamed Graham “Bonnie Dundee.” Originally Scott set his lyrics to an old folk tune written about the town of Dundee but an unknown composer set it to the current tune; British regiments quickly converted it to a march.

## **Glendaruel Highlanders**

March ( $\frac{6}{8}$ )

Pronounced glen-roo, this tune was written by Aberdeen Highlanders’ PM Alexander Fettes around 1860 to honor a young piper, John MacDougall-Gillies, whose family came from Glendaruel. The Argyllshire Volunteers took this tune as their march, probably in the 1870s, after Colonel John Campbell of Glendaruel, later the 9<sup>th</sup> Duke of Argyll, took command. The Volunteers later became the famous Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, which is now the Balaklava Company, Fifth Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland.

“Campbelltown Loch” is a folk song, recast by Andy Stewart to the Glendaruel tune in the 1960s, but it is not the Glendaruel march.

## **Green Hills of Tyrol (A Scottish Soldier)**

March ( $\frac{3}{4}$ )

If this tune sounds vaguely familiar, it is because the melody was transcribed to the pipes by Pipe Major John MacLeod in 1854 from a chorus in Puccini's opera “William Tell.” MacLeod was stationed in the Crimea at the time with the 93<sup>rd</sup> Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. The 93<sup>rd</sup> held off a bold Russian attack at Balaclava only to have the battle stalemated the same day by the failed “Charge of the Light Brigade.” Lyrics for “Green Hills” were written around 1960 by Andy Stewart, creating the song “A Scottish Soldier” that describes a Scottish soldier who wishes to die at home rather than in the hills of Tyrol (Western Austria) during the Crimean War (1853-1856).

## Lyrics for “A Scottish Soldier” (Green Hills of Tyrol):

There was a soldier, a Scottish soldier  
Who wandered far away and soldiered far away  
There was none bolder, with good broad shoulder  
He's fought in many a fray, and fought and won.  
He'd seen the glory and told the story  
Of battles glorious and deeds victorious  
But now he's sighing, his heart is crying  
To leave these green hills of Tyrol.

### Chorus

Because these green hills are  
not highland hills  
Or the island hills, they're not  
my land's hills  
And fair as these green foreign  
hills may be  
They are not the hills of home.

## Highland Laddie

March ( $\frac{2}{4}$ )

Adapted from some Scottish folk tunes, “Hielan’ Laddie” appeared in a collection of dances published in 1734. Highland regiments in the 1700s and 1800s used distinctive marches to announce their arrival. But in 1881, all Highland regiments were required to use “Highland Laddie.” Army recruiters also used the tune during their recruiting drives and the dance tune continues on in Highland dance today. The various regiments slowly returned to their distinctive marches until 2006, when they reformed as The Royal Regiment of Scotland and adopted “Scotland the Brave” as the regimental march.

Various lyrics for this have been written to commemorate battles, such as the Battle of Falkirk, to honor Bonnie Prince Charlie, and for hoisting ship’s sails. Piper Bill Millin of Simon Fraser’s (Lord Lovat) 1<sup>st</sup> Special Service Brigade played “Highland Laddie” at Sword Beach during the D-Day Invasion. (The movie “The Longest Day” mistakenly has the piper playing “Black Bear.”)

The first few verses of the Jacobite lyrics:

Where ha’ ye been a’ the day?  
Bonnie laddie, Hielan’ laddie  
Saw ye him that’ far awa’  
Bonnie laddie, Hielan’ laddie

On his head a bonnet blue  
Bonnie laddie, Hielan’ laddie  
Tartan plaid and Hielan’ trews  
Bonnie laddie, Hielan’ laddie

## Scotland the Brave

March ( $\frac{4}{4}$ )

Probably the two most recognized bagpipe tunes in the U.S. are “Scotland the Brave” and “Amazing Grace.” “Scotland the Brave” (also known as StB) sets the blood stirring and is synonymous with Scottish nationalism. The composer is unknown and the tune possibly dates to the 1820s.

Once the unofficial national anthem of Scotland, StB first appeared in music books in the 1890s as “Scotland for Ever.” (“God Save the Queen” is the official anthem of the United Kingdom. “Flower of Scotland” has surpassed

StB in popular polls and has been used as the Scottish anthem at international soccer and rugby events since 1990.) Lyrics for “Scotland the Brave” as currently sung were written by Cliff Hanley about 1950 for a Christmas review show. Surprisingly, it was not until 2006 that StB was adopted as the regimental quick march of the Royal Regiment of Scotland.

Hark when the night is falling  
Hear! Hear the pipes are calling,  
Loudly and proudly calling,  
Down thro' the glen.  
There where the hills are sleeping,  
Now feel the blood a-leaping,  
High as the spirits of the old Highland men.

### Chorus

Towering in gallant fame,  
Scotland my mountain hame,  
High may your proud standards  
gloriously wave,  
Land of my high endeavour,  
Land of the shining river,  
Land of my heart for ever,  
Scotland the brave.

## When the Battle's O'er

March (¾)

This is a retreat march used by soldiers returning to their barracks. The tune was written around 1890, possibly after the Boer War, by Pipe Major William Robb, of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. As with many pipe tunes, it is based on earlier tunes; in this case, it resembles the melody “The Last Rose of Summer” by the Irish poet and songwriter Thomas Moore, who wrote the lyrics for another well-known bagpipe tune, “The Minstrel Boy.” Lyrics for “When the Battle's O'er” were written by Andy Stewart in 1961.

I returned to the fields of glory,  
Where the green grasses and flowers grow.  
And the wind softly tells the story,  
Of the brave lads of long ago.

### Chorus

March no more my soldier laddie,  
There is peace where there once was war.  
Sleep in peace my soldier laddie,  
Sleep in peace, now the battle's over.

## Wings

March (⁴/₄)

This is the regimental march of the Corps of Royal Engineers (CRE) of the British Army. The tune was originally arranged by Bandmaster William Newstead around 1870 for military bands. Newstead used two different tunes to create his march: the march “Path Across the Hills” by an English composer and the piano-accompanied “Flügel! Flügel! um zu Fliegen” by the Bavarian poet, Friedrich Rückert. In 1889, the new Corps commandant discarded the tune as frivolous, but the Commander of the British Army in 1902, having been a subaltern in the Corps, made the tune the authorized tune of the CRE. “Wings” was transcribed for bagpipes sometime prior to World War I.

# **Are you interested in learning to play the Pipes or Drums?**

Local pipe bands are always looking to add members and provide instruction to beginners. New drummers are especially welcome.

## **The Billy Mitchell Scottish**

**[www.billymitchellscottish.org](http://www.billymitchellscottish.org)**

**[www.facebook.com/The-Billy-Mitchell-Scottish-Pipes-Drums-658480114163883](https://www.facebook.com/The-Billy-Mitchell-Scottish-Pipes-Drums-658480114163883)**

## **Celtic Nations Pipes and Drums**

**[celticnationspipeband.com](http://celticnationspipeband.com)**

**[facebook.com/CelticNationsPipesAndDrums](https://facebook.com/CelticNationsPipesAndDrums)**

## **Milwaukee Scottish Pipe Band**

**[www.milwaukeescottishpipeband.org](http://www.milwaukeescottishpipeband.org)**

**[www.facebook.com/milwaukeescottish](https://www.facebook.com/milwaukeescottish)**

Please talk to members of a band before you buy bagpipes or drums. They are a useful resource and can help you save lots of money.

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