

MUSINGS ON CHANTER STOCKS

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We are all often subject to the regular discussions among pipers about the tonal qualities of this reed or that. Most pipers would have a collection of drone and chanter reeds that they have tried in an attempt to get the sound that they are after. The latest seems to be the return to the sheepskin bag, and none of us would doubt the tonal qualities of these bags (and the possible associated problems). We strive for a specific sound and consider many aspects of the instrument in our quest.

Rarely do we however hear any musings about stocks. Drone stocks affect pitch, reed performance and stability. Cleanliness of stocks also makes a tonal difference. What however about the humble chanter stock. It is often overlooked in our perhaps unachievable quest for tonal perfection; but do different chanter stocks make a discernable difference?



The humble Chanter Stock!

Moisture Problems

Moisture problems are one of the biggest issues facing pipers in producing a quality sustainable tone. Too little moisture and we have a shrill chanter and drones tune high on the pins and stop. As the moisture build up the chanter develops a flat high G, perhaps a double toning F, other notes will also drop in pitch, we will lose vibrancy of sound, and the drones will eventually become unsteady and then gurgle and usually stop.

Plastic or “poly” chanter stocks do not absorb any moisture and you will find moisture beading around the reed seat of the chanter a lot earlier than one would if using a wood stock (much the same as plastic practice chanter tops). I have seen pipers who have changed to a shorter chanter stock for reasons of comfort and the same also applies.

Obviously, the longer we can keep the moisture going to the chanter to a consistent minimal level the better off we will be. You will be surprised at how much moisture a wood stock will absorb.

Stock Diameter

Commonly most stocks have an internal measurement of just less than 20mm. This will usually perform satisfactorily under most conditions. A narrower stock however can leave a chanter sounding dull and in fact it will seem harder to blow. The reed just does not vibrate freely.

On the other hand when a stock is enlarged even by a millimetre or so, the sound of the chanter will change and the bottom hand notes will drop in pitch. Often many pipers who have to significantly carve the bottom register of their chanter are doing so because their internal stock diameter is too large.

Uniformity

It would stand to reason that a band seeking uniformity of sound would benefit from uniformity in chanter stocks. Material used to make the stock; stock length and also diameter all make a considerable difference. Even as a soloist some issues that cause a degradation of sound can be overcome by changing a chanter stock.

I have often seen bands using split stocks. One chanter can easily be swapped for another, tried and tested and returned. The chanter also does not have to be removed from the stock and therefore a false chanter stock is not required. I do not like the open end of the split stocks once the chanter is removed and would not like to leave a chanter reed out of the pipes in one without corking the top somehow.

For reasons of moisture control it is preferable to use a stock made from wood and not plastic like many split stocks. I know that wooden split stocks are available.

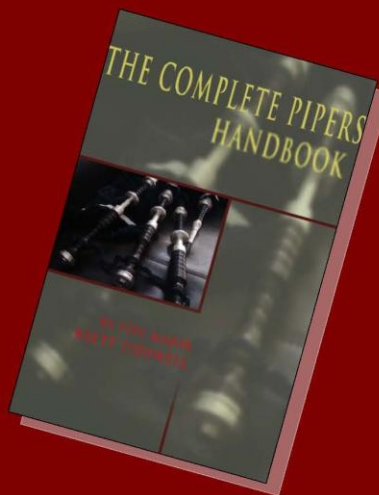
Chanter Caps

Capping a chanter after playing in a false stock of some sort is essential for good reed life. It will prevent the reed from going mouldy which reduces its life span, and keep it at its peak performance level for longer. The type of cap does make a difference. Cane is said to dry the reed too much. Wood is perfect with a closed top. Plastic can keep the reed too moist and mould can still develop. Often a small hole is drilled into the top of a plastic cap, if this is too big the reed can dry out too much.

Hopefully this has created an opening for some thought in a new direction for some and also the possibility of exploring a new source to improve the sound or performance of the bagpipe. There is no doubt some problems can be rectified by modifying or even replacing your chanter stock.

More information on this topic and similar issues can be found in “**The Complete Pipers Handbook**”

Now available from the new **School of Piping Shop** site at http://www.schoolofpiping.com/shop/advanced_publications.html and also numerous stockists around the world.



The Complete Pipers Handbook

is a must for every serious piper. Never before has a more comprehensive guide been published. Maintenance, set up, refinement, tuning, setting up bands, performance psychology and much more!

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