

Setting a Pipe Corps in Hot Weather

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Introduction

As a Pipe Major, or the one who is responsible for the sound of a band, there are a number of steps that should be taken to offset the effects of forecasted hot temperatures as much as possible before the band is due to perform. Always monitor weather forecasts leading up to a major event so there are less surprises on the day.

Pitch

Pitch should be carefully monitored in the week leading up to the event as it is always going to be high when the weather is hot. There is a 'red line' for pitch on a bagpipe, above which it no longer sounds like a bagpipe. Pitch should be set well before the contest, and factor-in the conditions that will present on the day. Lower grade bands need to be very careful with their pitch, ensuring that it is not too high, as this will result in a thin and insipid sound that will put you off-side with the judges or the listening public from the moment you strike-up. Try to stay down at a pitch that promotes stability and a full, more rounded sound. Sure, hot weather can later have a say in all of this, but careful management of instruments and some thoughtful preparation can lead to some control over what happens on the day.



Moisture

Obviously lack of moisture is going to be an issue on the day. Dry reeds will be sharp, particularly on the top hand, and will sound shrill, thin and also be unstable. If playing a leather bag, a small amount of water can be added. If playing a synthetic bag, a damp cloth or sponge can be inserted into the back of the bag. Canisters (Ross system) should have a little water (a small capful) added to the rocks in the chanter section and instruction should be given to the band to not dry the chanter section before the event. In any case, moisture should always be left in this section of a canister, even in wet weather. In normal conditions ensure that only the top 1 - 2 centimetres of rocks are dried from the chanter section. Leave the rest alone. Chanter reeds need some moisture in order to stabilise and sound full, especially on the top hand notes.

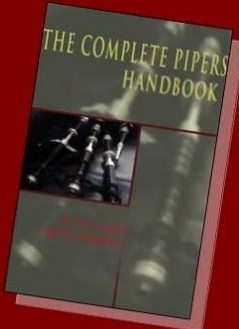
Stability

Pipes will continue to rise in pitch if played in the sun the whole time, and you will be forever chasing your tail as a result. The wood absorbs heat and warms the air inside the drones, chanter and also the bag. Playing in the shade gives you a more constant environment that will help to stabilise the band, however the pitch will change as the instruments are exposed to direct and full sunlight when you move out from the shade to perform. The usual rule of thumb is to tune in the shade and do a last minute check of chanters and a quick tune of the drones in full sun before going on to compete or perform.

Finally

Ensure that all pipers are well hydrated, as they are the ones performing on the day and will make the band sound good or cause it to crash if they feel terrible, pass out or lose concentration. Instruments should be well maintained and checked before the event and then given a last minute once over before tuning starts on the day to ensure everything is airtight, joints haven't shrunk and the reeds haven't dried out and are using too much air.

There is a lot more of this type of information to be found in Brett Tidswell's book, "The Complete Pipers Handbook" which finds the freely available School of Piping website and is available here: <http://www.schoolofpiping.com/handbook.html>



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!

Available from: www.schoolofpiping.com selected stockists.