

TUNING A CHANTER WITH A TUNER – Brett Tidswell

Without question the most accurate way to tune a chanter is with a well trained ear. There are so many tonal variations that can be achieved over and above just accurate pitch and there are also numerous variations caused by blowing discrepancies etc. that can affect the end result.

However we are not all blessed with perfect pitch, and there has to be some way to obtain that well trained ear in the first place. Playing long sustained notes and listening to the effects against the drones is one way. Listening to various notes against one drone and moving the drone up and down to learn the differing sounds if the drone is flat or sharp in pitch against the chanter is another method.

A tuner like the Saul Tuner or Pitch Pipe that is set to the chanter scale can be of great assistance to learn how to get the notes close to being in tune and then slightly varying your blowing to more accurately tune against the drones. Blow softer and the chanter comes into tune against the drones and your chanter note is a little sharp. Blow harder and the sound improves and the chanter note is a little flat. This can be done with every note on the scale. More detailed tuning advice is given in “The Complete Pipers Handbook”, so I will not dwell too much on that topic here.

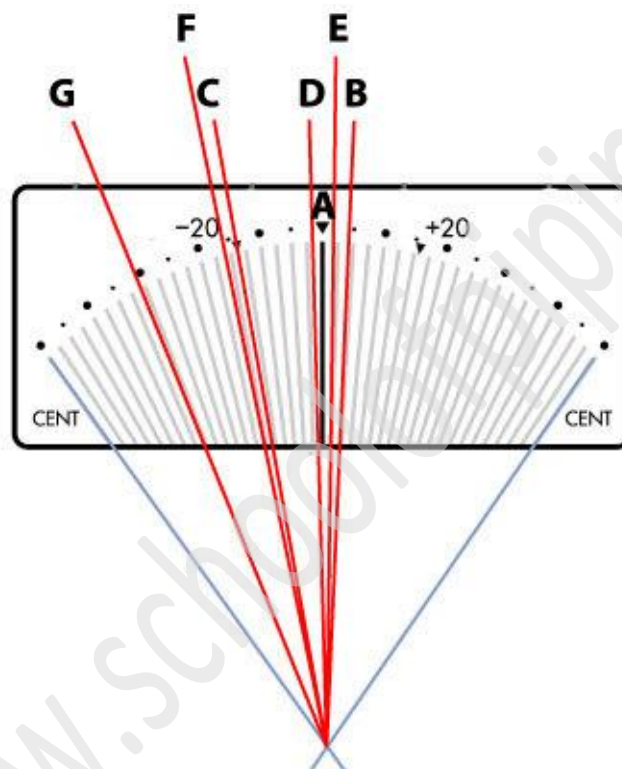


Another inexpensive option is a cheap chromatic tuner such as the Korg units that are readily available. Obtaining the mathematical details as to where a chanter should tune from Kinnaird, drone reed makers, Bob Rogers from South Carolina produced an excellent graphic representation of the dial on a chromatic tuner to show where each note should appear. Bob has kindly allowed us to reproduce the diagram which is shown below. The chanter can be improved using your ear and testing each note against the drones, but this method is quite

close. I find E or Low A to be good reference notes to keep returning to; to ensure the person using the tuner has not varied their blowing from the original strength or the chanter has not changed in pitch. Using this chart, I found high G to be very flat and to my ear I believe it should tune about 1 cent below F.

Always play a chanter for 10 – 15 minutes to let it settle a little before making any changes. Ideally a good 30-40 minute playing session and then refining the chanter is ideal.

Thanks Bob, a handy diagram to own and understand.



The most comprehensive guide available today for the set up, maintenance and refinement of the Bagpipe is "The Complete Pipers Handbook". Sales of this publication help fund the freely available school of piping website. Copies can be purchased here:

<http://www.schoolofpiping.com/handbook.htm>

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