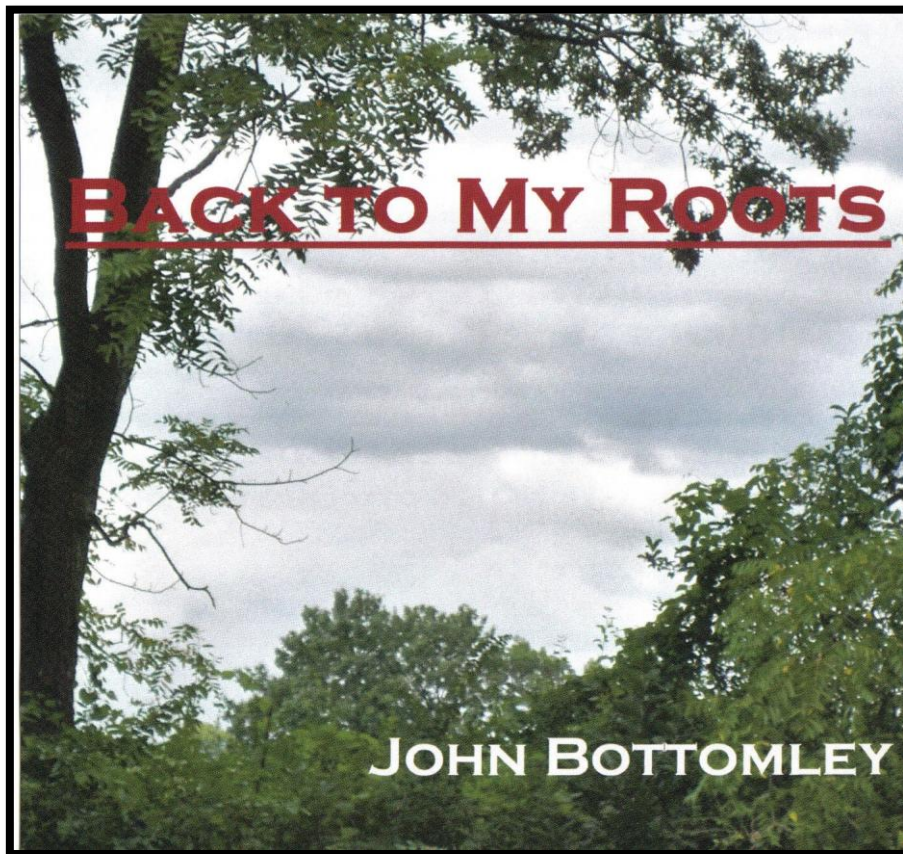


John Bottomley's "Back to my Roots" CD Review

By Brett Tidswell

John Bottomley for those who are unaware is an accomplished piper, with a background in the Guelph and Oran Mor Pipe Bands. He was also Pipe Major of the Baile Mor Pipe Band in New York. He has a long history as an administrator and instructor and has won many competitive prizes for piping and in particular Piobaireachd. John says that he got his Piobaireachd from Jim McKintosh and Ed Neigh, but is quick to point out that he does not play like either of them.

Piobaireachd, like all music is a reflection of the performer. How boring it would be if we all played the same. In piping Piobaireachd gives much more of an opportunity for the piper to display their individuality. John has a lot of character in his playing and many nuances that are both refined and demonstrate a well educated performance.



The cover design is very simple and John lets the music speak for itself with no biography or personal photographs. Each tune has a brief note that is interesting to read and the inside cover describes the different instruments and locations where the tracks were recorded.

This is always interesting to me. You can hear the differences in the instrument but also the variance of the locations. The album has not been over produced and provides a good clear sound without excessive reverberation being added.

The tunes themselves are well chosen. The “Old Woman’s Lullaby” is a classic short piece that is not particularly easy to play musically. So too the “Flame of Wrath” is a piece that can quickly lose its meaning if not played with appropriate aggression. John plays the first variation with a lot of cut, and the true breabach crunluath, which seems to fly against the more common trend of the short low G linking notes.

“Lament for Liam” was actually composed by John and the story is on the cover notes. This is a touching tune which is well written and nicely performed. “Massacre of Glencoe” is another common piece that should be in the repertoire of all Piobaireachd players. John Plays the “McGregor’s Salute” and includes a taorluath a’mach which is not usual. This does provide a pleasant contrast between the taorluath and crunluath variations.

The “End of the Great Bridge” is an often under rated tune and is a magnificent piece of music. The album closes with the “Lament for the Earl of Antrim” this is cunningly linked on the inside cover with a photograph of the road sign to Antrim (Aontroim). Along with a quote from Ravi Shankar about music that requires a little concentrated listening to be best appreciated! How true of Piobaireachd.

John played the “Earl of Antrim” to win the 2010 Eastern United States Pipe Band Association Professional Piobaireachd Championship.

An intelligent, well thought out album, with pleasant pieces, good contrast and performances that are well worth hearing. It is available at: <http://www.johnbottomleybagpipes.com/>

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