

MCLAREN SYNTHETIC CHANTER REEDS

The McLaren Synthetic Chanter reeds have caused a bit of a stir on the internet. I have not tried a synthetic chanter reed before and had heard nothing but bad comments about those reeds previously available. Malcolm McLaren, the maker of these reeds has sent me three of varying strengths to test. The reeds arrive in cardboard packaging, which satisfactorily protects the reeds in transit.

The reeds have plastic blades, a bridle, and are otherwise made in a similar manner to other chanter reeds, being bound to the staple in the usual manner. The workmanship is very good indeed, comparable with the best cane reeds.



The first thing I noticed is that the reeds are very free blowing. I picked a reed of comparable strength to my usual cane chanter reed, but found that it did use a little more air when playing in the pipes. I ended up using a no. 17 strength reed. A no. 20 used a little too much air for me and no. 14 was far too weak in strength.

If over blown slightly the reeds do tend to emit a gurgling sound on various notes. It is important I think to get the strength that suits you precisely correct. I found the reeds quite flat on E in most chanters. They need to be tuned using tape on the chanter to balance the scale and then are very stable in holding their tuning. The harder reeds did not play a stable piobaireachd high G out of the pipes, but when played in the pipes seemed fine. The easier reeds were fine both in and out of the pipes.

The reeds have a tendency to choke slightly on occasions, but this is very minor and almost unnoticeable (as you will hear in the attached You Tube footage). They are a little more susceptible to pitch variation when blown poorly than I would expect from a cane reed, but again this is quite a minor issue. Moisture does not seem to affect the reeds at all.

The tone of the reeds is very bright, with strong harmonics. They were a little lower in pitch than the cane reeds that I have been playing. They are probably comparable to a Shepherd or Gilmour reed in pitch. There is an unusual tonal characteristic to the reed and not the sort of warmth one would expect from a well blown cane reed.

I think these reeds are a step forward in the production of synthetic chanter reeds. They are capable of being set up to play quite well and are also capable of being tuned quite accurately with some taping of the chanter. Once set up the reeds do not alter much at all. I must say, I have heard worse sounds from many bagpipes set up with cane chanter reeds. These reeds will be a favourite among those who play pipes infrequently and those who struggle with maintaining cane reeds.

I think the sound files placed on You Tube are an accurate representation of what can be achieved with these reeds.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rURTpmiUSGA>

The reeds are available from Malcolm McLaren and further sound files can be heard here: <http://reedsmlaren.com/index.html>

www.schoolofpiping.com