

# The Tartan Telegraph



Carving by Stephen Roe

## *The Warp & the Weft: WinterStorm IX*

By J. Beau Buffington

If every elevated vista is preceded by a series of harrowing steps and missteps, nimble traversing of literal and metaphorical gorges, and periodic oblivion of the path, then WinterStorm IX was a textbook example of the way to the top of the mountain. Food poisoning on the first day of our intended trip had left me utterly incapacitated in spite of the fact that I had volunteered both my wife and myself for a 3-day stint. Thankfully, Friday saw a clearing of my internal atmosphere only to be replaced by a downturn of meteorological conditions: A dusting of snow had created a blizzard-like veil between Springfield and Kansas City.

At many points during the drive, only one lane was cleared while the other lane was a snow-

packed, ungrated and wholly untested trail. Four hours later, after numerous traffic jams, slow-downs, an overturned tractor-trailer and one small vehicle on the wrong side of the freeway missing a large part of its trunk and bumper (which could be found scattered downstream from the impact site) we made it. We quickly assimilated into the staff of neon orange-shirted volunteers, which were once again managed by the incessantly energetic, Duracell bunny-like Beth Wilson.

My favorite task on Friday was running the tuning lights for the Gold Medal piobaireachd and light music events. It afforded me not only one of the best seats in the house, but also it allowed me to share in the sheer gravity of the moment. A competitor would appear on the stage and begin to

### CALENDAR OF EVENTS

#### March 14

St. Patrick's Parade  
Downtown Springfield on the Square

#### Date TBD

Michael Cooney and Ged Foley  
Irish Piping and Guitar  
Venue TBD

#### April 3-5

St. Louis Tionol: A weekend of sessions, concerts, sessions, workshops, and more sessions

[www.tionol.org](http://www.tionol.org)

#### April 6

Kilt night at Galloway Station  
Monday 7-9 pm

#### May 1 - Oct. 30

Wilson's Creek Farmers Market  
Every Friday 5:30-8 pm  
Battlefield City Park

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blow the drones, and I was to start the timer as soon as I heard the chanter. The lights, meant to help expedite the tuning process of the competitor, would cycle thru a sequence of green to yellow to red like a mini, horizontal traffic light.

My palms soon started sweating profusely at the idea that I might start or stop the timer

before the competitor had truly commenced. I knew only one or two of the Gold Medal tunes, so if I started or stopped the lights inappropriately, this distraction for competitor or the audience might not create a fair contest! Last minute instructions on the use of the tuning light remote control by the MHAF vice-president – and a further re-education by the volunteer that I was replacing (“Give the competitors an extra minute before you start the timer,” he commented “the judges are feeling generous!”) – only added to my sense of nervousness.

My initial fears were quickly put to rest by the sheer quality of the performances. It is little wonder that the highland bagpipe became the instrument of choice for medieval highland chieftains: the sound of a well-tuned instrument creates a spell-binding force field around the player. A master piper creates such an aura of utter control that it almost appears as if the piper is practicing a form of acoustic levitation – a sonic galvanization forged before your very eyes! Such was the magical vista to which the Gold

Medal competition transported the audience.

Saturday found me transporting Colin MacLellan, Fred Morrison and an overhead projector to their respective classrooms. MacLellan's presentation on the Silver Medal tunes was well-attended by several pipers from Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, British Columbia as well as professional pipers from across North America. MacLellan spoke at-length of melodic

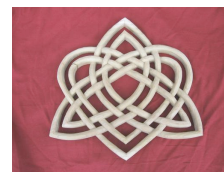


**Colin MacLellan**

and phrasing variations for each tune and led the group in focused practice-chanter work. He then concluded with a piping performance of his father's beautiful composition – *The Phantom Piper of Corrieyairack* at the Community Christian Church. Of course, Colin's fa-

ther was the great piper, Pipe Major and instructor at the Army School of Piping, Captain John A. MacLellan, M.B.E.

If there was ever a piping and drumming Hogwarts academy, WinterStorm would be a natural candidate. On this weekend, the center of the world of Scottish piping and drumming is truly transported from Glasgow, Scotland to Kansas City, Missouri. If that's not a first class sleight-of-hand, then I don't know what is! I still can't help but marvel at how the WinterStorm event has raised the standard of piping and drumming in the Midwest and will continue to do so for generations to come. WinterStorm has become the premiere piping and drumming event in North America. No doubt, this is due in large part to the extraordinary work of the Board of the Midwest Highland Arts Fund in planning and executing the event.



For more details on the U.S. Gold Medal contest including audio of the winning performances, check out Ken Eller's excellent blog, The Captains Corner:

<http://thecaptainscorner.com/blogarchive20.htm>

## Tartan of the Season: Chisholm

From <http://www.rampantscotland.com/clans.htm>

The name Chisholm is from a Norman French word "chese" meaning "to choose" and the Saxon word "holm" meaning "meadow". According to legend, two Chesolm brothers saved the life of one of the Scottish kings in the 14th century and were granted land in Inverness-shire. After the 1745 Uprising, many clansmen emigrated, some voluntarily, others helped by periods of increased rents and forced clearances. In 1887 the chieftainship passed via an heiress to a James Gooden-Chisholm in Surrey. However, descendants adopted the Chisholm name and are now among those who form the Council of Scottish Clan Chiefs. The clan chief is referred to as "The Chisholm". The Chisholm clan motto is "Feros ferio" which means "I am fierce with the fierce". More recently, Jori Chisholm of Seattle, Washington won his third U.S. Piobaireachd Gold Medal at the 2009 WinterStorm competition in Kansas City. Mr. Chisholm even has a Wikipedia entry at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jori\\_Chisholm](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jori_Chisholm). The next issue of the Tartan Telegraph will contain the first part of an interview with Jori from February 2009.

# Midwest Highland Arts Fund *WinterStorm*: A Real Pipedream

By J. Beau Buffington

*This review of the Midwest Highland Arts Fund WinterStorm was originally published in the 2005 Spring edition of "The Pulse," newsletter for the Midwest Pipe Band Association.*

## I Had a Dream

When I was thirteen, I had a dream that I was in Scotland amidst a friendly roomful of pipers; mythic, almost saintly figures such as Donald MacLeod, G.S. McLennan, Willie Ross, and Angus MacPherson reached out to me and encouraged me to play from the dimension of dream. If I had grown up almost anywhere but where I did – Halfway, Missouri (pop. 171), a roomful of encouraging pipers might have been a possibility. But now that I'm grown, in the 21st century heartland of America at the WinterStorm Piping and Drumming workshop, my adolescent dream has become a reality.

## Under One Roof

When my girlfriend first brought the WinterStorm website to my attention in December of 2003, I decided that a Saturday night piping concert might be a cool, albeit costly, date for us. Kansas City was a good three-hour drive from our home in Springfield, Missouri. But, when would we have the opportunity to see Andrew Wright, Willie McCallum, Stuart Liddell, Jack Lee, Alasdair Gillies, John Cairns, and Mike Cusack under the same roof again? Under the same roof? Wait a minute. Was I reading this correctly? These piping heavy-weights were coming to Kansas City, Missouri? There had to be some mistake. But, just in case there wasn't, I called a guy named Mark Stanfield with a number under "Contact Info."

"You read it correctly; they're all playing here. Are you a piper?" he asked.

"Well, yeah, I haven't done much with it lately."

"Do you want to learn from these guys? This is a great opportunity. You won't regret it." I wasn't a hard sell for Mark; he was very personable and sold me on going to the workshop in a few minutes.

The weekend did not disappoint. I would go so far as to even say that it was literally a dream come true. So, the answer to my original question of 'when would I have the opportunity to see these guys under the same roof' would be *the next year*. But this year, I took better notes. And I even suggested the workshop to one of my own students with the same line of reasoning Mark had used last year, "This is a great opportunity. And you won't regret it." And just like me, my student had no regrets.

## Wee Chunks of Beat

Beyond the superb quality of instruction and exceptional organization of the WinterStorm weekend, I was interested in learning the lore of piping – that unwritten understanding of the music that only a master piper can give directly. This was what I had hungered for most as a teenager playing Highland pipes in Polk County, Missouri. (This was before the World Wide Web made information an instantaneous phenomenon and brought pipers of all types into a virtual

community). For example, knowing WHY Donald MacLean never returned to Oban (he apparently did) as in "Donald MacLean's Farewell to Oban," seemed to breathe new life into the tune. Or, in the words of Jack Lee, "proper phrasing in a march is, to use a term from classical music, *rubato*. This is 'stealing time' or adding the 'wee chunk of beat' to give character to the melody." A story that I distinctly remembered from last year was told by Alasdair Gillies about his father's lessons with the great Peter MacLeod, "He had a wooden leg. A lesson with him cost 1/2 a Crown, but if he hit you with the leg, he'd give you some money back. My dad used to hope that he would get hit by the leg so he would have enough money to buy a fish and chips on the way home." Nothing like piping to work up an appetite.

Some other highlights include Mike Cusack's description of jig phrasing, "The best advice I ever heard about jigs, I learned from a bass drummer. The jig rhythm is like this, 'jiggity-jiggity-jiggig.' So for this tune Archie Beag, the rhythm for the first two bars would be 'jig-ejiggity-jiggity-jig jig-ejiggity-jig-ejiggity'." Leave it to a drummer to teach a piper about proper phrasing!

The Saturday night concert was more piping and drumming talent than I had ever seen under one roof. Yet, it still amazes me that the top players of the Piping

and Drumming Universe-veritable Olympians in their own right-are not playing in front of thousands or tens of thousands. (Arrowhead Stadium might be a bit ambitious for the next year, and one could not improve upon the venue: the acoustically perfect Community Christian Church). However, the consummate tone and impeccable execution of the pipers, along with the percussive pyrotechnics and drumstick linguistics of the

drummers seem to be a universal language that longs to communicate to a wider audience.

#### A New Level

Beyond the surface of doublings and d-throws, birls and skirls, the WinterStorm weekend has become an annual highlight for me and a wonderful way to start the new year. And while I have somewhat modified my teenage dreams of becoming a world champion Highland bagpiper by

age 16 (I've plateaued in the amateur grades at 31 and also am eager to learn the Irish uilleann pipes) the opportunity to learn from some of the best pipers in the world has brought my music to a new level. Perhaps that teenage dream was foreshadowing of a great tradition to come later in the heart of the Heartland, WinterStorm Weekend.



## CD Review

### Jillian LaDage's *The Ancestry*



Jillian LaDage's debut album on the *Tarith Cote* music label was released in December of 2008 to appreciative audiences and a growing fan-base throughout the Midwest. As a self-produced and self-managed artist on her own music label, LaDage has done extensive touring at festivals throughout the American Midwest. *The Ancestry* is a sophisticated recording containing nine tracks of original songs and musical arrangements. With this recording, she explores "the diverse influences and inspirations of folklore and threads of history crossing borders and centuries." In this sense, her music truly ties into the threads of the cultural identity connecting the ancient Celts. The album features such instruments as hurdy-gurdy, uilleann pipes, cello, violin and many others to accompany LaDage's precise and evocative vocals and harp-playing. The result is a truly rich polyphonic soundscape.

*The Ancestry* is available to preview and purchase at  
[http://www.tarithcote.com/the\\_ancestry.cfm](http://www.tarithcote.com/the_ancestry.cfm)

## A Postcard to the Editor

Beau, Just a quick note to say THANK YOU for all of your great work on the "Tartan Telegraph"! I particularly enjoy your music discussions and reviews.

Keep up the Good Work!  
 Peter Wollenberg  
 St. Louis