







### Robert U. Brown

Bob Brown was born in 1906 in Aberdeenshire, of a family which had long shown a keen interest in all the music of Scotland. He received his first instruction on the bagpipe from William Fraser, a pupil of G. S. MacLennan, who although suffering from a physical handicap acquired during the first world war, was still considered a fine player. Next the young Brown passed on to Jonathan Ewen, an Inverness Medallist, who began for him his life-long study of ceol mor. Ewen was a pupil of Sandy Cameron, so it was not surprising that his young pupil began to win a number of competitions in his local county. This brought him to the attention of G. S. Allan, who took him under his wing, and in particular accompanied him to the Argyllshire Gathering in 1925, where he won the junior piobaireachd. The following year he was unplaced but highly commended in the gold medal event.

Although he was a keen competitor and loved the excitement of the boards, Bob Brown did not always find it easy to get time off from his work—which is surprising in view of the fact that his employers have always been enthusiasts for piping. It was in fact 1931 before he was able to return to Oban, and this time he won the medal. By then, however, he was the holder of the Inverness medal, which he gained in 1928.

This was also the year when, according to Bob, there occurred the most important event in his piping life—he began to take lessons from John MacDonald. "I owe my knowledge," said Bob Brown once, "to John MacDonald who made me the piobaireachd enthusiast that I am." Certainly it is partly through his long and close association with John MacDonald that he came to be looked on as a great authority, but this was also due to his own clear and reasoned expositions on his subject, and his unflinching ability to produce great music whenever he played.

His fame and his standing increased as time went on. In the last decade\* he became better known than ever before, partly because pipers began beating a path to the door of his cottage at Balmoral and partly because he began taking his knowledge to different parts of the world. For several years he was the instructor at Invermark summer school in New York state, he visited South Africa, and it was while he was in Australia that the first signs came of the ailment which was to prove so quickly fatal. His one thought was to get back to his beloved forests and mountains, but within a few hours of reaching home he was dead.

\*Before his death in 1972.

## DEDICATION

Robert U. Brown and Robert B. Nicol ("The Bobs of Balmoral") shared a deep and abiding enthusiasm for piobaireachd from boyhood days. Out of their affiliation with John MacDonald, Inverness, grew a life-long commitment to the teaching and perpetuation of *ceol mor*.

As musicians and world citizens, their lives remain an inspiration to pipers everywhere.

We are pleased to dedicate the Williams College Amateur Invitational Piobaireachd to their memory.



### Robert B. Nicol

Bob was born in 1905 at Durriss, Aberdeenshire, and was first taught by a piper MacKellar, a pupil of MacDougall Gillies, who was later killed in the 1914-18 war. He was then taught by one of the Ewen brothers. The other brother, Jonathan, at that time was teaching the then young Bob Brown who was later to become Bob Nicol's life-long friend. He had a successful junior career and his first piping appointment was as piper to Lord Cowdray at Dunecht. It was from here that he moved to Balmoral as King George V's piper in 1924.

In 1926 when only 20 years old he had a shooting accident that resulted in the loss of his right eye, a shot from a fellow gamekeeper ricocheted off a frozen tree and hit him in the eye.

Later in 1926 King George V was anxious to have Bob given the best tuition and he consulted the factor at Balmoral, Sir Douglas Ramsay, and Sheriff Grant, Rothiemurchus, themselves both John MacDonald pupils. As a result Bob Nicol was sent to Inverness to John MacDonald for a month that same year, and a nerve-racking time it was, as Bob relates. "When John MacDonald came into the room he gave me a good dressing-down for a start. He said, 'You're no use to me.' In fact he was quite nasty to me for the whole month." But on the completion of his course a very good report was sent to Balmoral.

The following year he was accompanied by Bob Brown, and the visits continued every year until 1939. During this period Bob became one of the outstanding players, winning all the top honours including the Gold Medal at Inverness and Oban in 1930 and the Clasp in 1932. His medal tune at Inverness was "Lament for Donald Ban MacCrimmon," a tune he was later to play at the graveside of both John MacDonald and Bob Brown.

Throughout the 1939-45 war he served as pipe-major in the 2nd Gordons and ran a piobaireachd class for the 15th Scottish Division. He also taught at schools in America and Brittany.

He was a very good and firm teacher, a very likeable man with a sharp wit and pawky sense of humour. Dedicated to keeping the traditional piobaireachd alive he was undoubtedly one of the greatest and most knowledgeable men of our time.

Bob Nicol died in 1978.

(These are excerpts from Vol. 24, No. 10 and Vol. 30, No. 9 of *Piping Times*.)

## PIOBAIREACHD

"Piobaireachd" is a Gaelic word which literally means the playing of pipe music (Piob means Pipe. Piobaire means Piper). The music for the Great Highland Bagpipe falls into three general categories:

1. Ceol Mor meaning Big Music
2. Ceol Meadhonach meaning Middle Music (Slow Airs, Jigs)
3. Ceol Beag meaning Little Music (Marches, Strathspeys, Reels)

Ceol Mor is the classical music of this instrument and is most often referred to today as Piobaireachd. This is the music which requires the highest degree of musicianship to perform well, and thus it taxes the player to the limit of his/her abilities in expression, finger technique, interpretation, etc. with each performance.

A Piobaireachd starts with a slow theme or groundwork called the Urlar and then proceeds on to variations of the theme. Whilst the number and types of variations differ from one tune to another, as a general rule they become increasingly more difficult and complex in finger technique (execution). Almost without exception, every tune finishes with the varia-

tion which requires a most intricate finger movement called the Crunluath ("Crun"—Crown) and, having gradually built the tune to arrive at this exciting variation, it takes the ultimate in finger technique and stamina to execute this movement continually throughout the variation without a fault. It should be noted that whilst the average March or Strathspey and Reel takes but approximately two and 2½ minutes respectively to play, the average Piobaireachd takes about 10-12 minutes. Thus, having played continually for perhaps eight or nine minutes, the performer is then faced with the formidable task presented by the Crunluath Variation.

Piobaireachd is probably not the original form of music for the Highland Bagpipe, but it is certainly the most highly developed. No definite date can be affixed for the birth of Ceol Mor, but it is known that this was the main type of music which was played by the best pipers in Scotland from the latter part of the 16th century to the early 1900s.

(An excerpt from the Ottawa Piping Club's program for their Eighth Open Piobaireachd Competition at Carleton University.)



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# The contestants, in order of play, are:

## Tune

1. John Wassman (New Jersey) . . . . . \_\_\_\_\_
2. Leonard Appleman (New Jersey) . . . . . \_\_\_\_\_
3. John France (Ontario) . . . . . \_\_\_\_\_
4. Joyce MacFarlane (Pennsylvania) . . . . . \_\_\_\_\_
5. Bobby Minnear (Georgia) . . . . . \_\_\_\_\_
6. Calum MacDonald (Delaware) . . . . . \_\_\_\_\_
7. Andrew Hoag (Minnesota) . . . . . \_\_\_\_\_
8. Ian Beatty (Massachusetts) . . . . . \_\_\_\_\_
9. Rob Yonkers (Michigan) . . . . . \_\_\_\_\_
10. Nancy Crutcher (New York) . . . . . \_\_\_\_\_

## The Alternates are:

1. Colin Hill (Ontario) . . . . . \_\_\_\_\_
2. Harold Kirkpatrick (New York) . . . . . \_\_\_\_\_
3. Stuart Lowe (Ontario) . . . . . \_\_\_\_\_
4. Scott Lowe (Ontario) . . . . . \_\_\_\_\_
5. B. John Sullivan (Rhode Island) . . . . . \_\_\_\_\_
6. Chip Reardon . . . . . \_\_\_\_\_

## Results

- 1st \_\_\_\_\_
- 2nd \_\_\_\_\_
- 3rd \_\_\_\_\_
- 4th \_\_\_\_\_
- 5th \_\_\_\_\_
- 6th \_\_\_\_\_

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**BRIAN YATES** has designed and continues to work on the Brown-Nicol Chalice. He is a twenty-six-year-old piper, metal worker and student of Celtic art residing in Ossining, New York. Brian has studied the language of Celtic art under Mark Van Stone of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, the most knowledgeable person on the subject today. His education as a craftsman has primarily come from Betsy Rogers, a silversmith and jewelry maker. Brian looks forward to a full-time career in the arts, supporting himself with the sale of prints, etchings, metal works, and jewelry.

**THE BROWN-NICOL CHALICE**, inspired by the Ardagh Chalice, stands as a symbol of the pursuit of excellence in Celtic art and piobaireachd. "It is incongruous not to have pipe music and Celtic art together," says Brian Yates. "The music is worthy of its own genre of art. Brown's

and Nicol's playing was lucid in the highly structured framework of piobaireachd. I've attempted to pursue the same course within the strict traditions of Celtic art."

**ED NEIGH** received his principal tuition in piping from John MacFadyen and Donald MacLeod. His numerous awards for piping include the Ottawa and Dunvegan gold medals (1973). From his early days as Pipe Major, Ed has guided the Guelph Pipe Band to numerous successes, including the Grade I Pipe Band Championship (Maxville, Ontario, 1976).

Over the years he has become a familiar figure at piping schools and workshops, having taught courses at Mt. Allison University, the Seaway School, and the 1981 Delco Workshop.

*The Williamstown Gathering Committee thanks the Founding Patrons of the Amateur Invitational Piobaireachd for making this evening possible.*

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