

In Maine where a bagpipe band seems as likely as a winter without snow, the Argyle Highlanders has been rapidly taking a place among the state's traditions. The enthusiastic response this group has received in concerts and parades testifies to its popular appeal, both to those acquainted with Scottish music and dance and those for whom it is a new experience. This appeal has prompted widely varying invitations to play, ranging from highly polished presentations at the Bath Performing Arts Center and the Maine Festival of the Arts to free-wheeling gambols on the rolling decks of the schooner, Victory Chimes, in Boothbay Harbor.

The group is a potpourri of individuals, united by one mutual passion — the performance and perpetuation of traditional Scottish music and dance in New England. Indeed, devoting the time necessary to maintain the performing excellence characteristic of the Highlanders while pursuing individual careers demands a dedication and love of Scottish culture approaching obsession. This zeal is quickly obvious and quickly shared by audiences, whether the band is passing in parade on a teeming Fourth of July street or working a wild, complicated dance in a hushed concert hall.

The Argyle Highlanders began as a bagpipe band in the Fall of 1976, around a nucleus of eight founders; however, their enthusiasm required further expression, and soon, Highland and Scottish country dancing were added to the repertoire, followed closely by Gaelic singing.

The membership has since burgeoned to over twenty, combining many professions, talents, and interests, ranging widely from Music to Genetics, the permutations of which impart a vitality and versatility, consistently yielding performances rich in creativity, yet unyielding in adherence to the traditional disciplines of Scottish music and dance.

Over half of the performers are professional educators in public school or university settings and are, thus, well-suited to concoct upon request a performance which mixes learning with entertainment. Reflecting this is the fact that the Argyle Highlanders has been selected by the Maine State Commission on the Arts and Humanities to perform throughout the state as part of the Commission's educational outreach program.

The Argyle Highlanders embodies four separate genres, which are performed together or independently in accord with the occasion.

## THE BAGPIPE BAND

The seminal unit of the Highlanders is the pipe band. The quality exhibited by the band is belied by its age, for although it is young, a number of the pipers have been playing for many years. Half of the pipers have studied at the Gaelic College in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia and received their instruction from Seamus MacNeill, many-time world-champion piper and Principal of the College of Piping, Edinburgh, Scotland.

Ned Smith, the Argyle Highlanders' music director and pipe major, was the first student from the U.S. ever to be named a Pipe Major of the Gaelic College Band. Pipe Sergeant Jane Rabeni's long piping career, likewise, is invested with numerous medals and honors won at the College. In addition Pipe Sergeant Emeritus John Lynn has played with the Gordon pipers of Indianapolis, while Drum Sergeant Anthea Goodfellow trained with the Clan Douglas Pipe Band of Pittsburgh.



The band offers a varied program exhibiting a thorough knowledge of pipe music in its many forms. An audience may be unexpectedly swept from a slow, plaintive air into a vigorous jig or reel, a transition guaranteed to start the blood flowing, or else enveloped in a lament as delicate as mist on a desolate Highland moor. The drum section can also be trusted to seize spectators with its driving cadences, written specifically for each pipe tune and every bit as intricate. Usually at some point the drummers are asked to play the drummers' salute, a maze of stickwork and compelling rhythms.

Whether the bagpipe band is represented by a solo piper, a quartet, or the brisance of the full company of pipers and drummers, the audience is guaranteed an experience filled with thrilling music, interesting and informed demonstration and discussion, and all the color and drama of an art form so vital and irrepressible, it defied the might of eighteenth century England, which tried to silence it forever, fearing its power to ignite the spirit and stir men's hearts to action.



## SCOTTISH COUNTRY DANCING

Country dancing suggests an earthy dance of the people, but the origins of Scottish country dancing rest among the nobility of France. Imported to Scotland by the aristocracy, it was quickly imbued with the energy common to that nation.

For the Argyle Highlanders, Scottish country dancing began as a social occasion for band members; however, when slipped into an occasional performance, it proved so popular with audiences, it grew to be a regular feature.

The dancers possess good depth under the leadership of John Lynn, who with his wife, Andrea, studied with the Royal Scottish Country Dancing Society of Los Angeles. Also guiding the dancers is Anthea Goodfellow, who was reared in Scotland and learned Scottish country dancing in school, where children were allowed to dance between lessons to keep warm. Others of the dancers have trained at the Gaelic College.

The Scottish country dancing varies in mood from the graceful, courtly strathspeys to wildly twirling reels and jigs, which set kilts flying and minds spinning as the four couples execute complicated steps and tortuous patterns, always with an eye to precision of form and traditional style. The audience is often left as breathless as the dancers and wishing it had been dancing with them.

## HIGHLAND DANCING

Many of the Highland dances such as the well-known Sword Dance are dances of war, and, traditionally, were performed by men. Nowadays, it's the lassies who usually dominate the field, adding a subtle change to the dance. In the Argyle Highlanders both men and women perform the dances, thus conveying two unique approaches to these ancient steps.

The Highland dancers are led by Barbara Briggs. Three of the four dancers have studied at the Gaelic College, two of them under the tutelage of world-champion dancer, James L. MacKenzie, a member of the Official Board of Highland Dancing.



## GAElic SINGING

Lynn Lowell, who studied at the Gaelic College, leads the singers, a fledgling group of the Highlanders. The singers, depending on the occasion, may feature Lynn alone or may involve the entire band.

Perhaps the most novel music in the singers' repertoire is the mouth music or *Puirt-a-beul*. (Warning: Trying to pronounce this can be dangerous to your tongue.) Mouth music mimics the pipes vocally and is a tribute to the efforts the Scots made to keep the spark of their culture alive during oppressive times. It evolved when the bagpipe was banned in Scotland during the Highland Clearances of the late 1700's.

Mouth music is sung solo and *a cappella*, but many of the Scottish songs are Jacobite and clan rallying songs, and to these, which rely more on enthusiasm than refinement, the whole band gives voice.



In winter, the Argyle Highlanders find time to add to their repertoire, and as a result are able to offer a new program of pipe tunes, dances, and songs to their audiences each spring; an important fact, since they have been invited back to perform for many of the same audiences time and again.

Since the group can present any combination of pipe music, song, and dance, they can produce anything from a two hour concert with the whole company to a short program involving only a few pipers, dancers, or singers. The group has performed at parades, concerts, mall openings and promotions, fairs, art festivals, schools and universities, on public television and at private parties, to name a few. The possibilities are limited only by the imagination.

Your inquiries are most welcome. Please direct correspondence to:

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