

UPEI Music Program to Include Bagpipes, Men in Skirts

by Stephan MacLEOD and Carrie MacLELLAN

"[The highland bagpipes are] quite a loud instrument," says Acting Chair of the Music Department, Dr. Greg Irvine understating the impact the instrument may have after being introduced as a Major in the UPEI's Music Department.

Pending formal approval by Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission, the University of Prince Edward Island Senate has approved a motion allowing students interested in studying highland bagpiping, within the context of a liberal education, the chance to earn a Bachelor of Arts with a Major in Highland Bagpiping at UPEI. This would make UPEI the first university in Canada and the third in the world to offer a degree program with the option to specialize in highland bagpiping.

"Discussions about possibilities for incorporating Highland Bagpipes into a degree program were initiated by the College of Piping and Celtic Performing Arts," says UPEI Dean of Arts Dr. Phillip Smith.

In a press release from the College of Piping's website, UPEI President Wade MacLaughlan says, "The College of Piping has enhanced PEI's rich heritage in Celtic culture by providing exceptional instruction in highland bagpipes. Combining this with UPEI's strength as a leader in liberal arts education makes sense."

To be admitted to the program, students must successfully audition at the level equivalent to the Institute of Piping's Senior Certificate. Smith explains that once admitted, bagpiping students will be involved with the rest of the Music Department. "Other than one course a semester in Highland



UPEI Dean of Arts Dr. Phillip Smith forgets casual day.

bagpipes, taught by someone from the College of Piping hired by the University as a sessional instructor, students will take existing Music courses [primarily in history and theory], and non-Music electives."

There are concerns however, among students and faculty in the Music Department with how the Celtic instrument will fit in with their field of studies.

Dr. Irvine points out that the mandate of the Music Department is the study of the tradition and development of Western music. "Bagpipes are a separate tradition not really fitting in as far as [music] history," says Irvine.

Irvine doesn't think the Music Department can accommodate highland bagpiping as far as their tradition. He suggests that the university needs to develop a Celtic studies program in the future that can better suit the bag-

pipes. "We'll see what happens," says Irvine.

Third Year Piano Major Erin Ling expresses concern over practising in the same building as highland bagpipers. "It's bad enough trying to practice some weird 20th century thing, trying to listen very carefully to all the bizarre, twisted harmonies," says Ling, "and have a first year voice major across the hall screeching out high notes in a warm-up exercise. Not like this happened to me a couple of hours ago or anything."

"Nowhere do the rules say that the applied lessons have to be conducted at the Music Department," says Ling, "If they played bagpipes before, they're probably very familiar with the drive to Summerside to go to the College of Piping, so why not hold lessons there? The place is virtually built for that kind of music (it's not the

College of Tromboning!), and that way, we don't have to give up rooms or suffer through practice sessions featuring droning, whining pipes."

To compensate for the volume of highland bagpipes, Smith says renovations will be made to "provide adequate soundproofing for one of the practice rooms" by this fall. Smith is not worried about initial costs of introducing the new Major to the Music Department like soundproofing.

"The program will pay for itself provided even a single student enrolls and graduates: we expect students taking this program are unlikely to otherwise have been UPEI students, and so the tuition fees of the student will be 'new' money which will cover the cost of soundproofing the practice room, and of the weekly individualized lesson in Highland bagpipes."

"I am confident that the number of students from around the world who come to PEI to obtain knowledge of the great highland bagpipe will continue to grow — especially now that the students can leave with a degree," says Scott MacAulay, Director of the College of Piping and Celtic Performing Arts of Canada from a press release on the college's website.

So far no students have enrolled in the programs, partly due to the late announcement of the degree program this summer.

"We expect enrollment in the program to be small, maybe one or two new students a year," says Smith. "I understand that the Registrar's Office has received several enquiries, and one completed application (from a prospective international student)."

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-Erin Ling