

## The Ohio Scottish Arts School: A Truly Unique Experience

By Barry Conway

Over this past summer, I had the opportunity to teach at the Ohio Scottish Arts School or OSAS. Being a life-long Ohio resident, piping enthusiast, and a member of OSAS Alumni, you'd have thought, that I would know a great deal about the school. The reality is that I didn't know what a unique and wonderful school OSAS has become. "Unique in what way," you may ask?

The first Ohio Scottish Arts School was held in 1978, after the successful debut of the Ohio Scottish Games (OSG) in 1977. The 1977 OSG were profitable and it seemed appropriate for the competition to support Scottish culture go beyond the one-day competition. This support continues today, with many scholarships offered to competitors at the OSG to attend the Ohio Scottish Arts School.

In the early years, the OSAS moved around, as did the OSG, due to growth. But since 1983, OSAS has made its home at historic Oberlin College, one of the country's premier music and fine arts institutions. The first OSAS offered classes in dancing, drumming, and piping. Fifty-eight students attended that year.

This year, 145 students from twenty-two states and Canada attended this summer in dancing, fiddling, harping, piping and drumming. The diversity in the disciplines of instruction creates an atmosphere based more on the celebration, preservation, and development of Scottish culture, music and lore much more than just a school of piping and drumming. This manifests itself with impromptu sessions held nightly.

The nightly session combines the talents of the school with both instructors and pupils participating. Scottish Small-pipes, harps, fiddles and bouzoukis combine to fill the campus with music. This will often create the urge for some highland dancers and their instructors to dance during the session as well. At periodic intervals, the session players will sing a tune.

The piping program is also set up in a way unique from other schools where students are grouped by skills and experience. Instead of rotating instructors through to work with each, an

instructor is assigned a group for the entire week for the morning session. "The Ohio School gives students a chance to truly work on refinement of skills over the week. Allocating a teacher to a group of students for the entire week truly allows for detailed attention to this group. I found that by the end of the week students were well on the way to "refinement" of new music." Says Bob Worrall, an experienced instructor.

In the afternoon, students sign up for classes in various topics from Tone & Tuning, Introduction to Piobaireachd (literal translation is "Piping" or "what pipers do"), Intermediate and

advanced young students are divided by skill level. The non-beginner adult students are put into the adult group, run by Steve MacNeil. This group pokes fun at itself by naming this group "The Advanced Adult Remedial Group" or "AARGH!" class.

The drumming classes are small and allow for a very low student to teacher ratio. This low



Advanced Piobaireachd, How to Set up a Pipe Band, Modern Trends in Pipe Bands, Maintenance, Competition Preparation, Technology and Piping, Playing for Dancers, Recital Tunes, What Judges Look For, and Working With Drone Reeds.

"The elective class format in the afternoon allows students to address general topics or points

of interest" says Drew Duncan, the schools Director of Piping and Drumming, and one of its instructors. "We have selected a faculty with diverse piping backgrounds which allows us to offer many topics students find interesting for both the band and solo piper."

Late afternoon sessions are offered to the most advanced students to work one on one with instructors. It is here solo competitors can refine their more difficult competition and concert pieces.



ratio gives students a lot of one-on-one time with instructors. "This was my first year instructing at OSAS, and the entire experience was a treat," says Brown. "There is a real strong community and family feel that you don't always experience at other schools. There's great communication and planning from the organizers. I'm already looking forward to being back next year, catching up with the students from this year, and hopefully meeting many more new ones."

Also unique to the school are the many scholarships available to school participants. The Ohio Scottish Arts School is a non-profit corporation organized under Sec 501(c)(3). There are many annual gifts as well as endowed gifts, which makes the scholarships possible in the areas of piping, drumming, dancing, harp and fiddle.

For more information about OSAS, go to <http://www.ohioscottishartsschool.com>.