***Learning to Play the Uilleann Pipes***

***(Adapted from article published by NPU-Dublin)***

***A checklist for students and parents:***

**Learning**

* While they present their own unique challenges, the uilleann pipes are no more difficult to play than any other instrument.
* Generally, students start to learn the uilleann pipes at around nine years of age. The key issue is that they can cover the span of the note holes on the chanter with their hands. .
* During your first lesson, students can expect to be able to sound their first notes and learn to play the scale.
* After three or four weekly lessons, and with regular practice, most students can expect to be able to play their first tune.
* After one year’s tuition, with dedicated daily practice, students can expect to be able to play approximately 12 tunes including airs, polkas, jigs, reels, hornpipes and marches.
* There are a series of short videos on the NPU website which assist beginners [**https://pipers.ie/source/section/?sectionId=2041**](https://pipers.ie/source/section/?sectionId=2041)**.**

**Your Lesson**

* Punctuality with regard to class times will facilitate progress for individual and group classes.
* As well as their pipes, it is recommended that students bring a notebook, pen or pencil, and a **recording device** to classes. Short **close-up videos** of fingering technique may be helpful.
* Students should record their tutor where directed, and ensure that they listen to these recordings and learn from them as part of dedicated daily practice.

**Recommended Practice Times**

* For the **first three months** of learning the pipes, **20mins daily practice** is usually sufficient.
* After three months of learning the pipes, daily practice times should be increased to **30mins.**
* After one year of learning the uilleann pipes, daily practice should increase to at least **45mins.**
* It is recommended that daily practice should be augmented by regular listening to recordings of solo uilleann piping and other traditional music.

**Other Considerations**

* Add a **metronome app** to you phone to help you with maintaining your tempo.
* Add the **“Amazing Slow Downer” App** to your phone. It will allow you to slow down digital tune files and maintain the correct pitch. You can also pitch adjust a tune that is recorded in another key.
* Use a **mirror or video tape** yourself playing very early to check your posture, alignment, bellows and bag technique
* NPU offers **scholarships to students aged up to 20 years** of age, details are published in February each year  on the NPU website [pipers.ie](http://www.pipers.ie)
* It is highly recommended that students undertake pipes maintenance workshop.

**The Instrument**

* The uilleann pipes are a uniquely Irish Instrument dating back to the 18th century having been developed from mouth blown bagpipes.
* A practice set or beginner set of pipes consists of a Bag, Bellows and Chanter. The chanter is the part of the pipes used to play the melody.
* When drones are added to a practice set the instrument is referred to as a half set of pipes.
* When regulators are added to a half set, the instrument is referred to as a full set of pipes.
* Drones refer to the part of the pipes that makes a constant buzzing sound in three different octaves and are tuned to the bottom note on the Chanter.
* Regulators refer to the part of the pipes that are used to make harmonic and rhythmical accompaniment to the melody played on the chanter. The regulators are played with the wrist/hand and occasionally with the fingers on the lower hand of the chanter.
* Uilleann pipes are most commonly made in D (concert pitch), C sharp, C, B, B flat and E flat.
* Students usually learn on a practice set of concert pitch pipes.
* There is a double reed (similar to an oboe reed) inside the head of the chanter, air pushed through from the bag causes the reed to vibrate and create the sound.
* The reeds are delicate and should only be adjusted by your teacher or a very experienced player.
* The uilleann pipes are most often used to play traditional Irish music, and a repertoire of tunes similar to that played on the tin whistle or flute.
* The uilleann pipes are no louder than other instruments commonly used for playing Irish Traditional music such as the fiddle, flute or concertina.
* The practice set can be used as the basis of a full set with the addition of drones and regulators.
* There may be no need to replace these components when upgrading over time from practice set, to half set, to full set.
* A practice set is usually adequate for the first 1-2yrs of learning the instrument. Many students will then upgrade to a half set (Some students are opting to begin with a half-set as a beginner- knowing they will not be ready for the drones for many months). After another year students may wish to add one, two or three rows of regulators in order to complete a full set of pipes.
* To learn about the uilleann pipes please go to the NPU website home page [pipers.ie](http://www.pipers.ie) and select the ABOUT button and then INSTRUMENT on the drop-down menu <http://pipers.ie/resources/instrument/>.
* Uilleann pipes are available to buy from specialist makers of the instrument a list of makers can be found at <https://pipers.ie/resources/pipemakers/>