

# A&M student bagpipes his cares away

by CAROLYN TILLER

Battalion Reporter  
Sun-bathers on Keathley "beach" are getting a taste of a classy side of musical entertainment. Along with the usual quadruphonic sounds of Ronnie Milsap and Styx streaming out of nearby dorms, classical bagpipe music flows from behind the backstop of softball field No. 9. That's where Mike Bearrow, a sophomore mechanical engineering student at Texas A&M University, is frequently seen (and heard) being melodious.

"I've always really loved to perform," Bearrow said. "I am really a big ham. It probably has something to do with the bagpipes, because if someone appreciates it, I'll play all day long."

The northside intramural fields are trafficked by lots of people — a perfect opportunity for Bearrow to perform for an audience or, on a quieter day, to enjoy his music by himself.

During their Parents' Day picnic, Fowler residents had no trouble get-

ting Bearrow to do an impromptu act.

Bearrow has been playing the pipes since he was 11. He began when one of his father's business associates, who is from Scotland, decided to start a bagpipe band in Houston. Bearrow and three others were trained for the band.

Bearrow explained bagpipers do not begin learning on the complete instrument. They start with a chanter, which is somewhat similar to an instrument called a recorder.

He said it takes about six months before the piper actually learns a tune.

"It was very difficult because it was kind of boring at the first," Bearrow said.

"I guess it was actually two and a half years before I got my bagpipes," he said. "I sent for them and got them from Scotland because that's the only place that they make them."

Bearrow now plays marches, jigs, reels, horn-pipes, waltzes, dirges, slow marches and piobaireachd (classical bagpipe music).

He said he began competing on the chanter, but the first couple of years were disappointing.

"The first two or three years of competition, I didn't ever win anything," he said. "I really felt like crying after the competitions, sometimes because I really felt that I was as good as the winners and maybe better."

But Bearrow never became discouraged enough to quit. After about three years, he won his first prize.

"Since then, I've never gone to competition without winning something," he said.

Bagpipers compete under the categories chanter, novice, intermediate, amateur and open. Bearrow is now in the amateur and open categories.

He goes to about five or six competitions a year. On May 15, he will compete in the Houston Highland Games.

"I get on to myself if I'm doing anything just mediocre," he said. "Either I like to play my pipes a lot or I don't want to play them. I hate to go out and not play well."

Besides individual competition in bagpiping, Bearrow is a member of one of the three bagpipe bands in Houston. His band, the Houston Scottish Pipes and Drums, plays at yacht clubs, private parties, benefits and other engagements.

Bearrow has been to Canada, Holland, Germany, Sweden and all over the United States with the bagpipes. His band is the only bagpipe band hired for the Texas Renaissance Festival each year.

"I've gone to lots of neat places with the bagpipes that I would have never been able to go to if I hadn't been playing," he said.

The band members wear kilts, feather bonnets, tartan hose and wing-tip shoes with spats. "It does take a lot of getting used to, especially when you're younger, because everyone thinks you're a fruit," Bearrow said.



Scotland? Not quite, but Mike Bearrow, a sophomore mechanical engineering major from Houston, brings the sounds of Scotland to Texas A&M University when he plays his bagpipes on the field next to Keathley Hall. Bearrow took bagpipe lessons from a Scotsman in Houston and now plays for relaxation and competition.

Photo by Sharon Renfrow

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