

Bob Mason Memories of Santa Rosa

Bob Mason started with the Stockyards Kiltie Band in Chicago in 1960. He served as Pipe Major of the Isle of Mull/St. Andrew Pipes and Drums for a number of years, and also as the head of the WUSPBA Music Board.

I first went to Santa Rosa about 1990. I had only been competing with Isle of Mull for a few years when I first had the opportunity to go. I had never heard a Grade 1 band in person and this was going to be my first opportunity. The first thing that struck me when we finally arrived at Santa Rosa from San Francisco was that every band was staying at the same motel and I got to listen to a number of the higher grade bands tuning up that Friday evening. I thought "how cool is this!" After our contest on Saturday I finally got the opportunity to listen to the Grade 1 bands tuning up. As I remember there was the original Triumph Street with Hal Syneck as PM, City of Victoria with Jamie Troy, Toronto Police, Edmonton Caledonia, and a couple of other bands from eastern Canada, and Simon Fraser. Talk about a kid in a candy shop!! I simply could not believe what I was hearing. Very specifically I was listening to the Toronto Police pipe section when one of their pipers stepped away from the circle to tune his pipes. It sounded like there was a hole in the sound until he stepped back in and filled that hole. I was simply amazed. The Grade 1 contest, of course, was over the top with bands playing absolutely wonderful, exciting, and inspiring music.

That night at the ceildh we followed Triumph Street into the party and they were playing one of the best hornpipes I ever heard, just a rockin' tune. I asked someone what it was and that was my first listen to "Sandy's New Chanter", which became a standard for Mull a couple of years later. That whole experience changed the way I looked at pipe music. I started looking for and playing many of the great tunes these bands exposed me to. Also, for the first time I heard a standard of tuning that I didn't realize a pipe band could achieve, a standard I very much wanted to emulate as best a Grade 3 band could. I attended Santa Rosa until the games were switched to Pleasanton and while Pleasanton was probably a better venue it could never duplicate the wonderful closeness and camaraderie of that motel in Santa Rosa.