

THE TINKERS

Art Form: Music

Style: Traditional and Modern

Culture: Celtic

MEET THE ARTIST:

Pioneers of the growing Tribal Celtic (KEL-tick) movement, **The Tinkers** have been playing haunting, heart-pounding bagpipes and irresistible, tribal drums as a professional touring band since 1995. Founder *Aaron Shaw* has been playing the Scottish Bagpipes for over 25 years. He is a much loved and well-respected teacher, both in the LA area and at the California summer school put on by the College of Piping in Glasgow, Scotland where he is the only American on staff. His music can be heard on TV in "Friends," and other shows, as well as in several big-budget films including "The Fugitive." He is a member of the LA Police Pipe Band and has recorded with many artists including Bonnie Raitt. *Warren Casey* built his first instrument, a Tapan, at sixteen years old. He is also accomplished on the Irish rim drum called the Bodhran. Casey runs a drum company and builds most of the drums he plays. *Keith Jones* brings over three decades of experience and an incredibly diverse drumming language to the band. He has played every style imaginable performing with such greats as Dwight Yoakum and the Neville Brothers. He also makes some of the drums he plays. *CJ Henderson* is the newest member of the band and has a strong grounding in the Celtic and rock genres. CJ is the group's didgeridoo and bronze-age Irish horn specialist.

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

The show features Celtic music from Scotland and Ireland. This is not the *Piobaireachd* (pronounced pee-brock) classical music of Scotland, but the party music that invites one to grin and clap along to the pulsating rhythms. The show begins with "Caber Feidh" - ("stag's horn" in Gaelic) - a tune from the 1600s for bagpipes and drums. After introducing themselves and their instruments, the group plays "Hugh Ross," a modern tune. They explain the difference between a jig and a reel and teach the students an easy way to tell which is which. A student is invited to demonstrate how the 9 yards of heavy cloth in a 'great kilt' are worn. "Pumpkin Fancy" is an Irish horn pipe tune and "Fiollaigeann" is a Gaelic song that starts out slowly and changes into an upbeat version. A question and answer session is followed by "Scotland the Brave" and the program concludes with "Black Bear," another traditional melody.



PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

The first thing you will notice when you meet The Tinkers is that they are all wearing kilts. The kilt is not a skirt but the national costume of Scotland. The men also wear sporrans - the purses that hang in front. These can be made of many different materials. Can you spot the one that is made from Icelandic sheep's wool?

Historians believe that bagpipes originated in the Middle East and that the Roman infantry introduced them to Britain 2000 years ago where the Scots adopted them and made them their national instrument. Aaron will explain how bagpipes are played. They have no volume control and can be loud! Notice that when he plays, Aaron keeps his fingers straight - not curved like on most other wind instruments.

The band often play medleys of tunes - one tune following another, often with a change in tempo. Watch how they handle these breaks, moving smoothly into the next section.

The bass drum that Warren plays - the *tapan* - does not simply play a steady beat like you would hear in a marching band. His pattern varies as he improvises with the tune.

Keith plays a snare drum which has a more mellow sound than you find on drums in most marching bands. The unique element in the band is Jay's Celtic Bronze Age Horn. This is an exact copy of one that was discovered in an Irish bog. It's a heavy, curved pipe that is played like an Australian *didgeridoo* by blowing a continuous flow of air into it using a tricky technique known as 'circular breathing.'



The percussionists in the band sometimes use the *bodhran*. This drum is played by hand or by using a beater known as the 'tipper.' A lot of fast wrist action is needed. Watch how the other hand on the back side of the drum is changing the pitch.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- When the bagpipes began to play, which sounded first? The drones or the chanter? (Drones)
- How did the bagpipes make you feel on an emotional level?
- How did Jay keep the note sounding continuously on his Celtic Bronze Age Horn? ("Circular breathing" where the cheeks keep pushing air out while quickly breathing in through the nose)
- What was the player's hand doing on the back side of the *bodhran*? (Pushing it to raise the pitch)
- How many of the instruments you saw were wind instruments? (Two... the bagpipes and the Celtic horn.)
- How many melody instruments were there? (Just the bagpipes)

FRAMEWORK FOCUS -SOCIAL STUDIES:

The word "Celtic" refers to the culture that developed in Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Cornwall, Brittany, Galicia (northwest corner of Spain) and the Isle of Man. Much of the traditional music and dance that has evolved in the United States in the last 250 years developed from Celtic origins. Look on a map of Europe and identify these places.

Make your own Scottish *sporrán*. When you wear a kilt, there are no pockets. You need a *sporrán* - the pouch that is tied on the outside of your kilt, worn just below the navel.

A simple, classroom version can be made with a sheet of construction paper, 6" X 11".

Bend and crease the bottom 4" upwards and the top 3" downwards, making a pocket and a flap. With scissors, round off the corners on the top flap of your *sporrán*. Punch small holes in the sides (not the top flap) and, starting at the bottom, sew the front and the back together with string or raffia leaving enough length to tie your *sporrán* around your waist.

Decorate your *sporrán*. Create your own tartan with a plaid pattern of colors, or draw an animal's head on the flap. Celtic myths include such beasts as boars, birds, serpents, fish, horses and cattle.

Legend:

- Artistic perception
- Creative expression
- Historical & cultural context
- Aesthetic valuing
- Connections, Relations, Applications

ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

- Take a standard sheet of paper, 11" X 8.5", and roll it between your hands into a tube of approximately 1" diameter. Put your lips into the end of this roll and make a "raspberry" sound, vibrating your lips. This 'didgeridoo' will create it's own note. Roll the paper tighter and decrease the diameter of the 'mouthpiece' and you will produce a higher note. Enlarging the mouthpiece will produce lower notes. Tape it in place when you have all agreed on the note you want (a "Bb" to play with your home made reed instruments. The diameter will be about 1 1/4").
- Construct your own wind instrument using a vibrating reed to produce five notes of a scale. Use plastic drinking straws and scissors. Flatten the end of a plastic drinking straw and cut a V-shaped wedge 1/2" long out of both the top and the bottom. Slit the sides of the straw down 3/8". Sit down, put the reed in your mouth, close your lips and blow! Adjust the position in your mouth and apply pressure. You will get a "Bb".

On the top side, cut a small finger hole 1 1/4" from the other end. Slowly enlarge the hole until it sounds a "C". Cut the next hole 1 1/4" further up. "D". The 3rd hole should be 7/8" further up and be a "Eb". The "F" is 1" further up. Experiment with your instrument. Play a melody while others play single 'drone' notes ("Bb") on their didgeridoos.

- Can you mime playing the bagpipes? As you blow into the blow pipe, the bag inflates, pushing your left elbow outwards. Keep your fingers straight across the holes in the chanter, left hand above the right hand.
- Many great wind instrument players such as Miles Davis and Kenny G use "circular breathing." Australian Aboriginals have been doing this for 10,000 years. Research this technique that is used to obtain a continuous sound on a wind instrument even when breathing in. Look up this website: www.didgeridoostore.com/circularbreathing.html



SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

John Loesberg, *Traditional Folksongs & Ballads of Scotland*, Ossian, 94'
www.greenmanreview.com/scottishtrad.html
Favourite Celtic Melodies For Flute by Sarah Watts
www.encoremusic.com/flute/1040320.htm
Celtic Fairy Tales collected by folklorist Joseph Jacobs (1854-1916)
Check out the group's website at www.WickedTinkers.com or go to iTunes to hear free clips.

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