



Basic Pipes Maintenance

Generally, avoid extended exposure to extreme temperatures and humidity. In the case of low humidity, it is helpful to have Johnson and Johnson waxed dental floss to add to the necessary joints. When humidity is high, it may be necessary to take some floss off of the joints to avoid cracking. Note that extreme altitudes will also have an effect on the pipes, specifically the reed.

When it comes to the reed, high humidity can cause the reed to open, making it flatter and require more air pressure to sound. In these instances, it may be helpful to squeeze the bridle with the thumb and forefinger to close the lips a bit. In desperate emergencies, one can take a needle nose pliers to the bridle. This runs a very high risk (depending on experience) of cracking and ruining the reed beyond repair. In low humidity, the reed may close down a bit, making it sharp and will require less pressure to sound. The thumb and forefinger can be used to squeeze the reed and bridle from the sides to open the lips. Extreme cases may require the pliers, with the same risks as noted. The serious and/or professional player will find that eventually being able to make reeds is a must, as the unpredictability of the instrument can leave you in a mighty pickle.

When playing the pipes after an idle period, it is helpful to notice the tuning with a tuner right away. This is so the reed is maintained and bad habits regarding intonation are not developed. It is well to remember that the pipes are tuned to the “Just Intonation” scale rather than the “Equal Temperament” scale. When using an electronic tuner (which are normally geared to the equal scale) the notes, when in tune for the key of D, will read as follows (in cents):

E = +3.9
F# = -13.7
G = -1.95
A = +1.95
B = -15.64
C = -3.89
C# = -11.73
D = 0

If the overall pitch of the chanter is sharp, floss may be wrapped around the bottom of the reed to allow the reed to sit higher in the reed seat and vice versa. When this is done, keep in mind that the upper notes (D C B A) are affected more than the bottom notes. Also keep in mind that some notes require different pressure to get in tune. For extreme cases, placing electrical tape over the upper part of a tone hole will flatten that note. It is typical to use blu tac, rolled paper, or other short rush to tune the bottom D. This allows for flexibility in different climates.

Enjoy!



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