



Sgoil Lionacleit Pipe Band with KT Tunstall



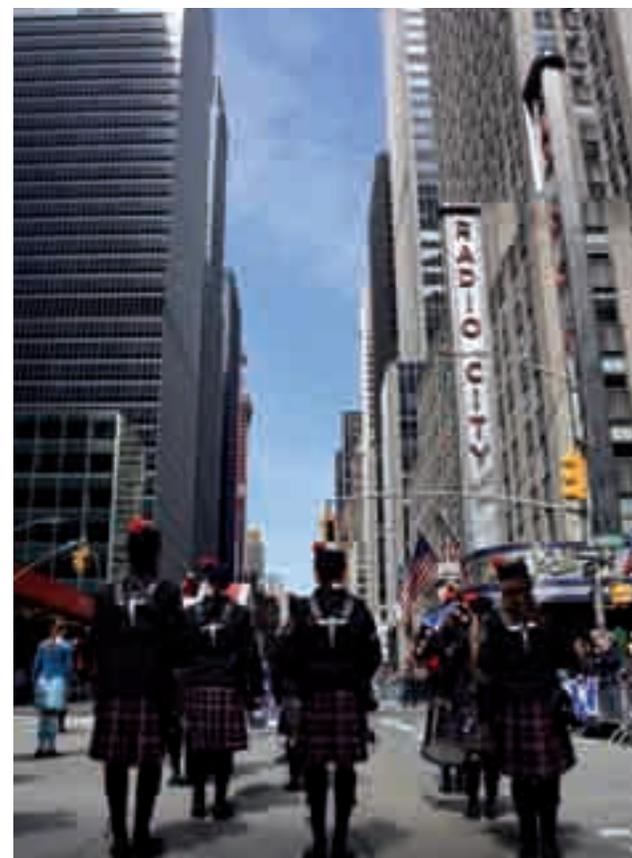
Getting ready to march in the Tartan Day Parade



Marching in the Tartan Day Parade



Sgoil Lionacleit Pipe Band and dancers performing on Ellis Island



Marching past Radio City Hall in Manhattan

Pipe band makes history at Tartan Week in Big Apple!

By **Katie Macleod**

New York City's annual Tartan Week celebrates the influence of Scots in America, with events ranging from theatre shows to poetry readings, culminating in a parade along Sixth Avenue in the heart of Manhattan. And this year, for the first time ever, a pipe band from the Outer Hebrides took to the stage – and the streets – as part of the celebrations.

The Sgoil Lionacleit Pipe Band made headlines in 2017 when they launched a crowdfunding campaign to support their dream of marching in the 20th anniversary Tartan Day Parade, and last month they made headlines again when their dream was realised with their arrival in New York City on April 4th.

From playing with the skyscrapers of Lower Manhattan behind them on Ellis Island, to appearing live on the morning New York news and performing at the legendary Explorers Club, the pipe band – made up of school pupils aged 12-17 from Uist and Barra – had a hectic schedule.

Their highlight was marching up Sixth Avenue during the Tartan Day Parade, as crowds waving Scottish flags and dressed in tartan cheered them on. "It felt so weird that a small band like us from 4000 miles away from New York, could come to such a big place, and march down one of the busiest streets in New York," says band member Calum Macmillan.

On the day of the parade, the pipe band met Scottish singer KT Tunstall and were presented with an award for the 'Furthest Travelled Band,' and even ended up taking part in an impromptu jamming session with a group of American pipers after the march. There was some sightseeing for the school pupils in between all the hard work,

too, with visits to a shopping mall, the top of the Rockefeller Centre, Central Park, and Ground Zero.

The dream of performing in New York during Tartan Week began last August as the band travelled on the ferry to the World Pipe Band Championships in Glasgow. After a difficult few months, with the loss of their friend and fellow piper, Eilidh Macleod, in the Manchester terror attack, the pipe band committee wanted to do something to lift the young people's spirits. Attending Tartan Week in New York began as a light-hearted suggestion, but soon became a realistic goal.

As the crowdfunding campaign got underway, the pipe band received £10,000 from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Education and Children's Services, and a further £1000 from the office of the Chief Executive. The Comhairle also voted for Sgoil Lionacleit Pipe Band to officially represent the islands as Outer Hebrides Cultural Youth Ambassadors, and representatives from e-Sgoil joined the band in the USA to promote the opportunities available through the digital learning service.

"To know that our council is standing behind us, it's brilliant. It gives you the confidence to go for it, and we did," says John Daniel Peteranna, the Sgoil Lionacleit Pipe Band Chairperson, of the support from the Comhairle. Further local funding came in from the likes of the Western Isles Lottery, Tighean Innse Gall, and Askernish Golf Club, among others. In Stornoway, Celtic Clothing designed and named a special Sgoil Lionacleit Pipe Band Tartan, and donated the outfits which the band sported on the streets of New York.

Other donations came in from even further afield. "We were delighted to immediately join the fundraising team to bring the band to NYC, and in addition to making a gift, invited the band to perform

on Ellis Island as part of their NYC trip," explains Robert Currie, Commander of the Names and Arms of Currie, who hosted the pipe band's concert on Ellis Island on April 5th. Located next to the Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island was once the entry point for generations of immigrants; last month, the halls of the immigration museum echoed with the sound of Sgoil Lionacleit pupils piping, performing solos, playing accordions, and singing Gaelic songs as a choir.

The final event of the week took place in Bryant Park on April 8th, just steps away from Times Square, as part of the 'Scotland on the Terrace' concerts hosted by the American Scottish Foundation. Sgoil Lionacleit Pipe Band rounded off the concert with their freestyle set in memory of Eilidh, a moving performance that saw them claim third place in the Scottish Schools Pipe Band Championships earlier this year.

The set features the songs Fair Maid of Barra, Dawning is the Day, Wee Man from Skye, Crossing the Minch, Clumsy Lover, and segues back into the Fair Maid of Barra for the finale, as three Highland dancers stand and each raise a salute in turn. Camilla G. Hellman, President of the American Scottish Foundation, told the pipe band in Bryant Park that they had "brought a wonderful dimension" to Tartan Week, and described their performances as "outstanding."

"We're just so proud of them," says John Daniel. "They couldn't be representing the Outer Hebrides any better, and we couldn't be doing any of it without the support of everybody at home – even from somebody who gave a pound in a bucket in bag-packing sessions at the Creagorry Co-op. To know the whole community's behind you, that's a buzz in itself, and I know the pipe band have made everybody proud at home."