



Michael Kerr Piper and Guitarist

Michael Kerr is a Highland piper with a style of piping that is undeniably his own.

He currently gives private lessons out of his home, via Skype, and on TradLife.com !

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[Visit my YouTube™ channel](#)

Born in the St. Lawrence Valley along the US-Canadian border, Michael is descended from Scotch pioneers who settled in the remote northwest corner of New York State's Adirondack Mountains. His father and grandfather were old-style, ear-taught, Scottish fiddlers. So was his great-grandfather, before them.



They played at dances and house parties, at work in the lumber camps – and in the home. The family's musical heritage goes back to Scotland, the north of Ireland, Gaelic Ontario, and Cape Breton Island. These deep traditions have given Michael a musical inheritance that is rarely found among pipers today.

His playing is said to capture much of the style of those older musicians with their drive, lift, and highly developed musicianship.

He has a lifetime of experience playing Scottish and Irish music. He started when he was six years old, when his father began teaching him tunes on the tenor banjo. He took up the pipes before he turned 14, and his repertoire is drawn heavily from

fiddle music and Gaelic song. He is also a writer of tunes in the traditional style.

Michael was sole instructor of Highland bagpipes at the renowned *Gaelic Roots 2000* summer school and festival, and has led a series of day workshops on piping. When teaching, Michael helps his students to learn how their music fits into a traditional cultural context that includes dance, fiddle music, and Gaelic language and song. With emphasis on these



elements and their interplay with piping in traditional communities, he helps students to become more musical in their own playing. Here is some of what Michael has to say about his teaching:

I've been teaching the pipes now for over two decades, and it's something I really enjoy doing. I work with beginning students through advanced, child or adult. As a teacher, I am absolutely committed to helping my students develop an ability to play music – not just show them how to play an instrument. Traditional music is about proper expression, in the style. It's about rhythm and pulse; it's deeply felt. A person becomes proficient as a traditional player through soulful execution that's supported as much as possible by very good technique. When you take lessons with me, you'll not only learn how to play the chanter and the pipes, but you'll also lay a solid foundation in musicianship itself. We'll work to cultivate an inner sense of the music, to be musical independent of our instruments.

So, together we'll listen to fiddlers, pipers, and Gaelic singers, and we'll strive to emulate various aspects of their sounds while remaining faithful to our pipes and to piping. We'll examine tempos and rhythms. We'll study timing and phrasings, and we'll look for patterns and forms that will help us to develop musical memory. Of course we'll underpin all of this with disciplined practice, but we'll also have a lot of fun!

Fundamentals such as these ground our pipe music in the broader tradition and, by including these basics as a regular part of our lessons, you'll have more fun, your interests will intensify, and you'll progress more quickly.

But – no surprise there! This is how traditional musicians have been learning for generations.

For my part, I'll take the time to get to know you, and I'll tailor my teaching approach to suit the mode of instruction that works best for you and that addresses your personal piping goals and your own musical interests. I'll do whatever I can to help you to learn, and I'll supply you with lots of resource materials as we go along – like audio and video clips, exercise sheets, and tunes.

Michael's piping instruction is helping me develop technical skills and musical style. This dual focus makes each lesson productive and fun. I really like that my lessons aren't based solely on drills but give me the opportunity to hear the techniques being taught come alive in a tune. Michael supports each class with reference videos, making solo practice between lessons even easier!

I love my piping lessons! :)

~~~Jennifer L. Hughes (2014)



Besides playing and teaching the pipes, Michael is also a talented guitarist and has been billed in many formal concerts – playing pipes and guitar on stage with, among others, Kinnon Beaton, Brenda Stubbert, John Campbell, Séamus Connolly, Liz Doherty, Áine Minogue, Tony Cuffe, J.P. Cormier, Aonghas Grant, Gordon Mooney, Frank Ferrel, and the Wrigley Sisters. He opened each *Gaelic Roots* “Masters Concert” from the festival’s inception through the year 2000. In addition to these, he has played at countless dances, ceilidhs, and sessions, and a wide variety of private and corporate events. Again, here’s Michael:

I play Scottish and Irish music on Highland pipes, Scottish smallpipes, and guitar. I’ve performed at almost every kind of event, function, and ceremony there is – whether private, public, or corporate.

I do in fact play the Highland pipes for weddings and funerals, but I also provide music for cocktail hours and ceremonies using just my smallpipes and guitar. As a guitarist, I play out fiddle tunes, pipe tunes, and Gaelic song airs, and because I use finger style for most of my guitar solos, I get a fullness of sound and softness of tone that is perfectly suited for smaller rooms and quieter occasions.

When a bigger musical presence is called for, I am joined by other traditional musicians to form small, hand-picked, ensembles. Fiddle, Irish flute, Celtic harp, piano, guitar, and other sounds are chosen appropriately, and the various melody instruments, pipes included, trade leads while the others provide backup. These small groups – usually trios, but sometimes more as needed – really bring a lot of life to a party!



Some of Michael’s concert performances have been broadcast on radio, and his guitar music was featured in a one-hour interview with live performance on WZBZ radio (Boston). He also appeared in Áine Minogue’s TV Special, “A Winter’s Journey” (2001), which earned a New England Emmy nomination (Best Producer).

Michael was a founding member and first president of the prestigious Grade II *Tulaob Árd* pipe band and, before that, was a member of the *Greater Boston Pipe Band* and *Worcester Kiltie Band*. He also played pipes and banjo in the popular Boston-based techno-Celtic band, *Green Zeek*.

He holds a degree in Physics and Astronomy from the University of Rochester and, for more than 11 years, was an Associate Technical Staff Member at MIT. During this period, he and his wife were raising three (musical) children and Michael did not play much outside of his home and small circle of friends – but he is now re-emerging on to the traditional music scene.

Michael Kerr’s love and understanding of traditional Scottish and Irish music is a part of his very makeup. It permeates almost everything he does and he is committed to communicating that passion and knowledge to others through performance and teaching.

Please visit Michael Kerr’s teaching page at FivePondsMusic.com/Teaching .



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