

British Columbia's first bagpipe maker by Mike McDonald



McDonald Bagpipe Repairs opened its doors in 1990. It was a hobby business and never meant to be a full time job. The repair business grew beyond what I thought was possible, to the stage that it occupied what I had once considered my spare time – it became a second job.

I was amazed that there was such a need for bagpipe repairs. I have never advertized nor have a web site; everything was by word of mouth and recommendation. I have performed repairs for customers in Japan, France, Australia, United States, Argentina and Nova Scotia.

I manufactured my first set of bagpipes in 1993, but considered it an intrusion on my repair business, and did not make any more. This set of bagpipes is still being played in the Metro Vancouver area. Over the years, I have spent some time reviewing the benefits of machine plastic (Delrin) as it is my belief that this material is at least equal to if not better than the current African Blackwood.

I have been repairing bagpipes that have been sleeved with either brass or stainless steel; this lent credence to blackwood being not the only material to give great sound. Retirement from my fulltime job in 2010 provided me with the opportunity to revisit the making of bagpipes. I did not want to just copy another pipe maker; I wanted my own pipe with a distinct sound. Predominately, pipers were striving for higher pitch to the degree that the bass drone was almost becoming like a third tenor drone!

This meant revisiting bore sizes, tuning boxes, bells bushings and backpressure, finally arriving at what I considered a significant change. I chose Delrin as my material, based on its engineering and machining characteristics and so in 2012 was born my first set of McDonald Delrin Bagpipes. Success, they sounded great. However, it was now time to let others decide. This bagpipe was tried and tested by many pipers in the Metro Vancouver area for approximately one year and all reports indicated a good, steady, big bass, stable and efficient bagpipe. Many did not know they were plastic.

I have continued to work in Delrin although I have made bagpipes from African Blackwood and Coco-Bolo. I have custom made Delrin Bagpipes with owner requested bore sizes and with modifications to upper drone sections. The profile, combing and beading are McDonald Bagpipes, I pour my own resin to make projecting mounts and ferrules, and I prefer to use stainless steel for any of the metalwork as required.

Ed McIlwaine plays a set of McDonald Delrin Bagpipes and placed first in the BC Highland Games Open Piobaireachd competition in June 2015. He also achieved great success in Scotland playing this same Delrin Bagpipe, which speaks highly of its sound quality. There are other pipers playing McDonald Delrin Bagpipes with great success.

I enjoy custom making bagpipes and continue to work with Delrin as it offers a full, well balanced sound with very distinct bass, as well as being a very stable low maintenance material.

McDonald Bagpipes are custom manufactured in Langley, BC using only the highest quality materials.

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