

## Marching – How to do it

**Extract from the Newsgroup:** rec.music.makers.bagpipe

**Subject:** Help with marching

**Date:** June 2001

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*Message 1 in thread*

Hi

Played 2 parades yesterday. Needless to say, my marching needs work. I can play the tunes we march to well but it just seems when I get on the street with everything that's involved my feet do something different. In the circle I can mark time but it's different on the street somehow.

Are there any previous marching sufferers out there that can lend a hand? Oh, BTW, I've heard the whole string of comments from fellow band members like "left, right.., just listen to the drummers, watch the piper in front,..." I know that this is a coordination thing but it's giving me grief!

Thanks for any constructive help.

Cameron

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*Message 2 in thread*

You know, this is the best laugh I've had since your last post about taking a year and a half to figure out what pipes to buy!

BTW Cameron!

What Holiday just occurred in Ontario to justify 2 parades?  
There isn't any that I can think of, none till July 1st.

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*Message 3 in thread*

Have you tried marching while humming the tune? Then work up to marching while playing the PC. Take it slowly and one piece at a time, and you'll get it.

- Kay (almost a piper)

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*Message 4 in thread*

Well John,

According to my dictionary, a parade is "a public procession, ceremonial formation, to promenade". The Webster's version I have doesn't mention anything about the necessity of a holiday in order to have such parade.

2nd. If you only had a limited amount of funds, doesn't it make sense to do a little research before purchasing something that will come in at \$ 3500.00? Maybe I research longer than average.

As I said, constructive help appreciated.

Cameron

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*Message 5 in thread*

Someone mentioned trying to march while humming or playing the tunes on the PC, which is a good idea. You should work up to practicing your marches on the pipe while you're marching rather than just standing still or tapping your foot.

Don't do this at first with your more complicated tunes, try it with some real simple marches at first. Some examples:

Coulter's Candy, Robin Adair, Auld Hoose,

Blue Bells of Scotland, Dawning of the Day,

Marine's Hymn, Roddie McCorley, Twenty

Men From Dublin Town, etc. The point is that these all have simple rhythm patterns with a lot of quarter notes, which makes marching to them easier if you're still having problems getting the hang of playing and marching at the same time. It doesn't matter if they're band tunes, the point is to get used to marching in time to the music. Concentrate on having your foot hit the ground at the same time as the quarter notes. Then work up to any harder tunes that your band uses for parades.

I promise you that once you get the hang of it, you'll probably find it hard not to march in time to the music -- it will just feel "wrong," even if your feet are out 180 degrees (right foot on the first downbeat of the tune rather than left foot on the first downbeat).

Best of luck,

--Bruce

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*Message 6 in thread*

Cameron -

Some of the guys in my band had a difficult time learning to march to the pipes, including a recently retired drill sergeant, so it does not come to everyone naturally.

The point about humming the tune or playing it on the PC, I think, is that you need to get music and confidence into your tunes. If the music is there, the marching will follow more easily. There are really no short-cuts, just some different ways to practice and build yourself up.

Practice with short, 2/4 tunes (Teribus, High Road, Brown Haired Maiden). The 4/4 tunes are easy to march to, but I've seen many pipers have a difficult time switching to march to a 6/8 or competition 2/4 after doing really well with 4/4 tunes.

Remember to keep good posture - chest forward, and marching on the balls of your feet, rather than flat-footed. It will help the march to "roll" along. Also, take small steps - pipe music is played

relatively slow (as far as marches are concerned), and many people make the mistake of taking large steps.

If at all possible, try to practice in front of a large mirror so you can correct yourself as you go - this is especially handy in helping with head position.

You'll find that with good posture you will be able to play longer, blow more steadily, and enjoy the parades a little more, as well as being in step. Good luck.

Edward Smith  
Burton, Michigan, USA

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*Message 7 in thread*

> Have you tried marching while humming the tune? Then work  
> up to marching while playing the PC. Take it slowly and one  
> piece at a time, and you'll get it.

That's the best advice I can think of, too. I had trouble learning to do this at first (and I was a D&C \*fanatic\* in the Army - that probably hurt me more than helped with my bagpipe marching)

Do what Kay says, here...also remember to take small steps at first – even half-step - until you're more comfortable. Another item is to have a bit of fun with it - get some swing in your kilt. ;) Don't march like all the fluid just ran out of your joints.

Each an every time you practise your march tunes (which is daily...right? ;) ) practise marching to them as well. It takes a while, but once there you can do it without thinking about it at all.

Jeff MacLeod Ramsden, FSA (Scot)  
Regional Vice President Clan MacLeod  
Siol Thorcùil - "I Birn Quhil I Se"  
<http://www.macleodpacific.org> - <http://www.kiltmusic.com>

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*Message 8 in thread*

Try marching with a metronome also (80-84 beats/min). It will help you start to feel the sense of timing of both note fingering and feet. If you are in a small space, march in place with small steps. You want your foot to hit the ground at the same instant that the metronome clicks. If you slow the metronome down to, say, 40 beats/min, you can simulate the snare drum's "left" beat, which is to say, on every click, you want your left foot to hit the ground.

Respectfully,  
Ben

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*Message 9 in thread*

Try marching on your own at home until you are confident there. When you are new to a band, you feel a sense of impending panic, and minor things like being in step, playing, being in the right

position, all seem to go horribly wrong. It'll come in time, but if you can get used to marching at home it will make things easier.

Cheers,  
Calum

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*Message 10 in thread*

Try marching with a walkman, loaded with your favourite marches, over and over until your brain and feet get in sync. Then when you play, your subconscious should take over your feet.

Let me know how well it works.  
Steve Cotsford

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