

Hi everyone!

### **10/12/23 CI Music Hour**

Last Thursday, we were joined by bagpiper Thomas Harkins. Thomas began learning the pipes in his thirties, but set them down as life and work left less and less time for practicing. He resumed his musical journey with the bagpipes ten years ago, and joined the Pasadena Scottish Pipes and Drums eight years ago. He currently competes at the Scottish Games in California and Arizona as a soloist and with the Pasadena band, and was excited to perform for us as a warmup for his competition this past Saturday.

Thomas shared that the bagpipes, or just pipes, are an ancient instrument that originated somewhere in the Middle East. There are hieroglyphics in Egypt of humans with a bagpipe-looking instrument that reinforce the age. As time went on, bagpipes traveled and were modified; most Middle Eastern and European cultures have some version of the instrument. For example, in Spain, they have the gaita; in Greece, they have the tsampouna. The iconic version of bagpipes across the UK and US are the Great Highland bagpipes from Scotland, which Thomas plays. Bagpipes of any variety have no volume control. The Great Highland bagpipes have a bag, a chanter, a blowpipe, two tenor drones, and one bass drone. The instrument is tuned to A 481 and each drone is adjusted individually. The chanter can be adjusted slightly for tuning by adjusting the double reed inside it and by slightly covering the tone holes with tape. Thomas demonstrated how maintaining the instrument sound is a delicate balance of blowing air into the bag and applying pressure with his arm to expel it. After blowing into the bag, he gets about 5-10 seconds of sound from when he stops adding air. The articulation of melody comes only from the finger combinations on the chanter, which is a unique feature to these instruments.

Thomas performed "Scotland the Brave," which is one of the most common bagpipe tunes and often heard in parades. He also played "The Marine's Hymn," "Amazing Grace," "Auld Lang Syne," a strathspey & reel, "Captain Norman Orr Ewing," and "Happy Birthday" for himself and Lisa, who both shared a recent birthday!

Chrysa