

The Bagpipe, which does not turn you into a lonesome cowboy

A German reinvents the bagpipe

The sound of a bagpipe and its constant volume is really not for everybody. That is why bagpipers often run into troubles with their neighbours. In addition, the medieval setup of a bagpipe makes it incompatible to most of the other instruments. So, playing together with other musicians always means looking for other bagpipers.

To overcome these restrictions the passionate hobby musician and inventor Rolf Jost made up his mind to push the bagpipe from niche to mainstream.

The inventor and his environment

Rolf Jost and his wife Bigy are living in a small village nearby Stuttgart in an old mill. There, Rolf runs a little company, named emotionfilm. He creates and produces primarily documentary films for various German TV stations. Whenever he felt that a new approach could improve his film making he picked up the challenge and created something special. So, he attached a remote controlled camera to a hot air balloon or improved the handling of a steadycam to run film sequences as smooth as the big guys in Hollywood.

In his spare time Rolf is on music. He plays various instruments, but, last not least, he loves to design and build instruments like dulcimers. On his first trip to Scotland he bought an original Scottish bagpipe and started to practice immediately. Over time he experienced all the restrictions mentioned above. Consequently, he thought about creating something special, a bagpipe with an attractive look and feel, the ability to be played in various keys in a neighbour friendly mode over earphones.

A one of a kind instrument and what happened then

Rolf's idea was to build an electronic bagpipe just for himself. He met an electronic specialist, discussed his requirements with him and ordered the electronic board for his pipe. The most important design issues have been to create a sound, which is very close to the original instrument combined with the ability to play in every key. To achieve the sound issue two original bagpipes were sampled and the results stored on board. It turned out that this sampling is far ahead of all what synthesizers normally can provide.

The bag, off course, should have an attractive look. This was excellently achieved by a designer for leather works.

Inside the bag resides the electronic and a bladder, which is used to make the bag pressure sensitive. Chanter and drones are initiated one by one over respective pressure on the bag just like it is done on a traditional bagpipe.

Overall, the Redpipe provides the look and feel of a traditional bagpipe, except that there is no blowing.

Having finished his prototype with so much work and passion Rolf was pushed by his enthusiastic friends to make a bit more of it. One of his friends, the leader of a well known band of handicapped musicians, ordered four Redpipes at once.

But, to be ready for market, additional development work had to be done. Then Rolf was totally convinced of his baby and presented it to professionals. The excellent feedback led to the decision to go ahead with the Redpipe

Meeting the Scottish challenge

' „Whenever I was in a position to ask a Scottish piper to test the Redpipe I did this. I was really happy to observe, that these pipers picked up the Redpipe and started to play without any advice. I could realize too, that the players got more and more enthusiastic.' That is one of Rolf's proud comments on his Scottish challenge. The Red Hot Chilli Pipers, a well known Scottish rockband plan to integrate the Redpipe into their show to make it even bigger. In the meantime the band recorded a single, which is in the Scottish charts using the Redpipe.

That is a good story for the beginning. The feedback from the USA is promising too. So, what will happen if lots of musicians would like to get a Redpipe ? 'I just will have to speed up my production a bit'. But Rolf is well aware, that this will be another challenge for him.