

The Single Reed

Here we give basic tips on maintenance of the single reed for Swedish bagpipes and other instruments with single reeds. For a deeper knowledge it is necessary to attend a pipers course.

General: All adjustments affecting the reed are taken in small steps. This is to avoid taking too much of the material (what gone is gone). Small adjustments can have a big effect. Once one has gained a little experience, bigger steps can be taken. Practice makes perfect !

The order in which to tune your Swedish Bagpipes

1. Tune the keynote A/G (3-fingernote) roughly (+/-20 cent).
2. Try to tune the bagpipes high fifth (the 5 highest notes) to the drone with even pressure on all notes (try different pressures). Do not tune the drone to the lowest note E/D (6-fingernote)!
3. Tune the keynote precisely.
4. When necessary one can make fine adjustments with wax. Well made instruments should not need major adjustment.
5. Lastly, tune the lowest note (6-fingernote) with help of the tuning-hole. Use wax.

Tuning

The reed sounds too high:

- a. You lower the tone by sharing the root of the tongue of the reed, this way the reed also becomes easier to play. This means that less pressure is necessary, but the reed is less stable and has more tendency to lock.
- b. ..or apply a little bee's wax to the vibrating end of the reeds tongue.

The reed is too low:

You raise the tone by removing wax from the tongue of the reed, or if there is no wax to remove you share the tiffs of the tongue.

NOTE: It is advantageous to have some weight on the tiffs of the tongue (wax or actual reed material), as this stabilizes the reed and thereby the tone. Your pipes are then less sensitive for pressure variation.

Incorrect mensur and intervals

Adjustment of the mensur is achieved by bending the tongue up or down (Mensur = distance between the tones notes) providing you have a constant and equal pressure on your pipes. The highest tone can be considered as a fairly reliable indicator. The mensur can also just as well be affected by different applied pressures. A hard rigid (open) reed demands more pressure than a softer, more supple reed. It is better eventually to become accustomed with the more rigid reed as their life expectancy is a lot longer.

NOTE: Caution is necessary when bending the tongue up, especially with heat (ex. Lighter) due to there being a limit on the number of times one can bend it up and down (fatigue).

1. The mensur is too large. The top register on your pipes are too high (especially the highest tone) and the lower register too low: the tongue must be bent up
2. The mensur is too small. This is more noticeable with the octave which is too low. The tongue must be bent down with heat.

NOTE: Remember that a new reed usually needs to be bent up several times before it will hold its form. A reed never opens itself, it can only close unaided. Due to dampness the tension in the reed is released and after a while must be bent up again.

I wish you good luck and very much enjoyment with your Swedish bagpipes!!

Alban Faust

www.albanfaust.se