

# The pipes are calling:

Workshop spotlights challenging instrument with loads of charm

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A small crowd gathers outside Joe Piper to hear Nate Silva play the bagpipes following a recent workshop on the Celtic instrument.

Andrew T. Gallagher/Standard-Times special

What could be sweeter than the sound of one set of bagpipes resounding in the streets of New Bedford? Why, more than one, of course! If you were in the area of William Street one recent Sunday, you would have heard several pipers at play around a little shop called Joe Piper Celtic and World Musical Goods.

Owner Joseph Mone hosted the all-day bagpiping workshop, taught by veteran piper Nate Silva.

Mr. Silva, 26, has been piping since he was 11 years old and loves to share his experience with others.

"Doing something like this in New Bedford is a real treat," he said. Mr. Silva, who lives in the city and grew up in Taunton, plays with the Boston Kiltics, a Cape Breton-style group that includes a fiddler, guitarist and two stepdancers.

"Celtic cultures rarely seem to come out around here, and being able to take the knowledge I've gained over the years and spread it to others on such an intimate level is something profound, to say the least," he said.

Mr. Silva is a recent graduate of UMass Dartmouth where, he says, his musical ability was a well-kept secret. He earned his BFA in visual design and currently works for Hathaway Publishing as a designer.

The Aug. 26 workshop, open to all levels of players, drew 13-year-old Sam Harris of Newport, R.I., who has been piping with the AOH (Ancient Order of Hibernians) Pipes and Drums in Newport for almost a year. Sam was inspired to learn the bagpipes after a trip to Scotland, where he heard the pipes and liked their sound.

Novice players learn basics on a practice chanter, before moving on to the full instrument, which includes a more complex chanter, a bag and as many as three additional pipes called drones that produce a constant pitch. Sam had two years of experience with the practice chanter before moving on to a full set of bagpipes. He said he learned some new tunes and techniques at the workshop that will help him in performing with the AOH Pipes and Drums.

Workshop attendee and fellow AOH member Joe Nanartowich, also of Newport, said he picked up the bagpipes because, "I just always wanted to play an instrument."

That's no easy feat.

"It's a difficult instrument," Mr. Nanartowich said, "but it's been great."

Mr. Silva learned the pipes from the late Eric Armour of Pawtucket, R.I., earning scholarships and grants to attend summer programs at the Gaelic College in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, for seven years. The experience inspired a love of the Cape Breton style of piping, often referred to as the "kitchen style" for its informal and relaxed approach. Mr. Silva says the style derived from the old-time tradition of gathering in the kitchen with family and friends to play. The wooden floor of a kitchen was especially conducive to stepdancing, which allowed other performers to join in.

At his workshop, Mr. Silva introduced a learning tool passed on from piping master Brian Yates, formerly of Winchester and now living in Scotland, with whom he studied throughout his high school years. It's a test of pressure he dubs the "Yates-o-meter" and helps players maintain air pressure in the bag part of the pipes.

"The bag is inflated by blowing it full," Mr. Silva explained about the mechanics of piping. "Once the bag is full, the player tucks the bag under their arm to start the drones. This is done while still blowing."

It's a difficult thing to master for beginning players, but it's easy for listeners to pick up on — the sound that emerges from improperly maintained bag pressure is flat and out of tune.

Beginning player Macy Joseph of Fairhaven is still working with a chanter, but will be moving to the full bagpipes soon. "I've always liked bagpipe music and Celtic music in general," he said at the workshop. "Joe opened this place and it was like supply and demand."

Mr. Silva, who is planning additional workshops with Mr. Mone, has played with the R.I. Highlanders Pipe Band, the Tulach Ard Pipe Band, and with friend and percussionist Dan Morganelli on the streets of Cambridge during their college days. In addition to piping with the Boston Kiltics, he performs solo throughout New England.

Mr. Mone is a bagpipe player himself, performing with the AOH Pipes and Drums and the Brian Boru Band. His shop offers Celtic and world musical goods, as well as workshops and open sessions where musicians of all kinds can come jam together. Private lessons are also offered for bagpipes, accordion, violin, various types of drumming and Native American flute, beginning guitar and songwriting. Joe Piper offers instruments on consignment as well.

"My youngest student is 8 and my oldest is 70," Mr. Mone says of his bagpipe pupils.

The public is invited to stop by his shop at 106 William St. on AHA! nights — this Thursday and the second Thursdays of every month. "TGIF Sessions" are held at 5:30 p.m. every Friday and are open to the public. For more information, visit [www.joepiper.com](http://www.joepiper.com) or call (508) 984-1330.