

## Skweez The Weezle – High Energy Celtic Sound

By David Lanigan

Edited by Harry Babad

The band Skweez The Weezle was formed by David Lanigan in 1999 to play Celtic instrumental music ranging from slow airs to driving jigs and reels in traditional to progressive arrangements. They are based in Tri-Cities, WA – where sagebrush is king. *This photo is of David's Original Band.* [L to R: Dawn Gordon, David Lanigan, Denver Greer, Troy Hanford.]



When he formed the band, David had been playing various types of bagpipes (Highland pipes, Scottish smallpipes, shuttle pipes, Lowland pipes, and electronic pipes) since 1984 and during that time had been influenced by the piping styles of Highland and Lowland Scotland, Ireland, Brittany, Galicia, and Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. He had also been performing solo and in bands, the Tri-Cities' Desert Thistle Pipe Band among them, throughout the Pacific Northwest at concerts, coffeehouses, festivals, Highland games, weddings and receptions, and other public and private events.

In the early to mid 1990's David took part in several Lowland piping workshops in Seattle, WA. Lowland piping was then considered by a few to be an "alternative" to the Highland piping that people were familiar with from seeing Scottish pipe bands at Highland Games or parades. Workshop instructors Hamish Moore and Gordon Mooney were acknowledged as being the pipers and pipe makers most responsible for the revival of the Scottish Lowland pipes and the music played on them. Lowland pipes use a bellows instead of breath to inflate the pipes (like the Irish uilleann pipes, of which the Scottish pipes are often confused). Hamish's "*Cauld Wind Pipes*" and Gordon's "*O'er The Border*" LPs (no CDs then) were a big influence on many pipers at that time. Cauld wind denotes the cold air of the bellows as opposed to the warm air of the lungs. The Borders (or Lowlands) of Scotland were where the bellows pipes and their musical repertoire were

developed. Other workshop instructors included Anna Murray from the Isle of Lewis and Iain MacDonald. All of these pipers had a great influence on David as they showed there was another way to enjoy piping without the structure and politics of traditional Scottish pipe bands, competitions, and “one way to play the music”.

In 1996, David traveled to the Scottish Hebrides island of South Uist and took part in the first annual Ceòlas school, a reintegration of the music (piping, fiddling, singing) and step dances of the Gaelic peoples of Scotland. Ceòlas also affirmed links between Scotland and Cape Breton. In fact, musicians from Cape Breton came to South Uist to teach “the old style” of Scottish music and dancing that has been preserved in Maritime Canada since the 1800’s, but almost, though not quite, “lost” in modern Scotland.



After listening to Celtic folk bands for years (Tannahill Weavers, Battlefield Band among others from Scotland, and Bothy Band, Moving Hearts among others from Ireland) and wishing he could be in a Celtic folk band, David decided to actually do something about it and in late March 1999 put an advertisement in the Giant Nickel magazine for musicians to form a Celtic band. After a few auditions that didn't pan out, David was contacted by Troy Hanford. Troy said he liked Celtic music and wanted to see what David had in mind for a band. Troy brought over 15 years experience playing country,

rock, and blues guitar. He also played mandolin, bass guitar, fiddle, and steel guitar. While he hadn't played much Celtic music, he was keen to learn as he had been learning to play the Highland pipes.

For the next several months, David and Troy worked on putting guitar rhythms to the pipe music that David had. In May 1999, Denver Greer joined the band on percussion, and Dawn Gordon joined on fiddle.

Denver had spent the previous few years as the bass drummer for the Desert Thistle Pipe Band and the bodhràn player in the Celtic folk band South Wind.

Dawn had been classically trained as a violinist after taking up the instrument at the age of four. But, she had also grown up listening to folk and Celtic music. She had been a member of the short-lived Celtic band Tir Na' Nog. Then in 1997, she and her sister, along with two brothers from Ireland, formed the Irish Heirs in Spokane, WA. Dawn played with the Irish Heirs for two years. She then joined Skweez The Weezle. Her blend of classical and Celtic fiddle styles brought an interesting dimension to the band's sound.

From 1999 to June 2006, the band's personnel consisted of David on Lowland (Scottish smallpipes and Border pipes) and Scottish Highland bagpipes, dulcitar (a hybrid of Irish bouzouki and mountain dulcimer), Irish bouzouki, and tin whistles (called tin whistles although most are now made of materials other than tin); Troy Hanford on guitar and vocals; Dawn Gordon-Schoepflin (she married soon after joining the band) on fiddle, guitar, and vocals; and Denver Greer on bodhràn (Irish frame drum) and backing vocals. Most of the band's repertoire consisted of pipe tunes arranged or written by David and then "Weezlized" by the band. Songs from the Celtic lands were added throughout the years.

Their first official gig was at the July 1999 Yakima Folklife Festival, where they played to a standing room only crowd at Bob's Keg and Cork on Friday and then to a good crowd in the Great Hall of the Yakima Valley Museum on Sunday. For the next seven years the band keep a busy schedule performing as a quartet, trio, and duet throughout Washington, Oregon, and Idaho at pubs, festivals, Highland games, concerts, pubs, coffeehouses, wineries, book stores, pubs, universities, weddings, benefits, pubs, and private parties.

The band has used the opportunity they've had playing regularly at the Towne Crier tavern in Richland, WA to introduce the local community to

Celtic music and to Irish dancing. Over the years, the band has enjoyed playing for dancers from the local Baile Glas, Comerford, and An Daire schools of Irish dance. The dancers have had a place to show their skills in a relaxed, friendly place. And the band sure likes playing the jigs and reels for them. The dancers have also "taken the stage" with the band at many other venues. Skweez The Weezle currently plays for "Celtic Night" at the Towne Crier on the last Thursday of every month. Other venues are scheduled throughout the year.

In January of 2005, while Denver was on a seven month walk-about in Texas, Mike Day started filling in on bodhrán and djembe. Mike came from a family where music was a big part of all get-togethers, and at a young age he was mesmerized by the sounds all the instruments made. He had started playing guitar at a very young age, but soon found his true passion was for banging on the drums, much to his parents chagrin. Mike brought to the band his experience playing many types of music, from country and rock to blues, all of which had influenced his musical abilities and allowed him to adapt to and play a wide variety of styles.

In June of 2005, Dawn and Denver left the band - Dawn to start a family with husband Dan, and Denver to move to his boyhood stomping grounds in Texas with wife Sandra.

In July 2005, Karly Bell joined the band as fiddler. Karly is another classically trained violinist (the guys are still trying to get her to call it a fiddle) with a keen ability to sight-read music. This has been very helpful in learning the large volume of tunes the band plays.



[Left to Right: Mike Day, Troy Hanford, David Lanigan, Karly Bell]

Although not from a Celtic music background, Karly's playing fits in very well with the other instruments. The band's current repertoire includes a mix of traditional, modern, and original tunes and songs from Highland and Lowland Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Cape Breton, and the USA. David is adding many new tunes to the band's repertoire, including an *An Dro* from Celtic Brittany, which David learned for playing with The Chieftains in one of their recent concerts on their North American tour. An *An Dro* is a dance tune, that although Celtic in nature, is very different from the jigs and reels one associates with the Celts of Ireland and Scotland.

Many of the tunes the band plays are arrangements of pipe tunes David has found in music books from the 1800's and early 1900's. Other tunes are ones that David has composed within the past fifteen years. As the saying goes "something old, something new" – or it would go if one were talking of a wedding. In January, 2001, several of David's compositions and arrangements were published in Cape Breton piper Barry Shears' book "The Gathering of the Clans Collection, Volume 2". More of David's tunes are to be in a new collection of pipe music to be published this year.



Border Pipes — Small Pipes — Shuttle Pipes

While still having the bulk of their sets comprised of instrumental tunes, the band has been building a large Celtic song repertoire. Troy has brought in songs both traditional and modern, and has even composed a few himself. For the songs, Troy handles the main vocals, while Mike helps out with backing vocals. Karly hasn't started singing yet, but may soon. David (thankfully!) just sticks to introducing the sets.

When asked what he likes about playing in the band, Troy says he "enjoys playing the fast pace, high energy music, the unique music structure of the tunes, supporting the **young Irish dancers**, and the smiles and foot tapping our music



generates.”

Mike adds, “I find it very fascinating how the complete change of style to Celtic music has challenged my playing abilities. It has stretched my creative imagination and taken my approach to the way I play percussive instruments to a different level. I also Like the stories that are involved with the Music from a historical and folk lore perspective. Playing with Skweez The Weezle has pricked the Irish and Scottish Side of me.”

After a painful birthing process, Skweez The Weezle's first CD "A Celtic Band" was released in May 2002. Recorded in various places, including the Jacob Room of Sector 7G Studios, the CD of 15 instrumental tracks has been well received by listeners throughout the world. A new CD is “in the works”. To satisfy many fan requests, and their own musical growth, the new CD will be a mix of songs and instrumental pieces.

After seven years, the band is going strong. Celtic music, after all, is “in our blood”.



You can find the band on the web at:

[www.skweeztheweezle.com](http://www.skweeztheweezle.com)

Subscribe to the band’s newsletter at:

[info@skweeztheweezle.com](mailto:info@skweeztheweezle.com)

Oh, by the way, David says “Skweez The Weezle refers to what one does with a pipe bag . . . nothing more . . . nope, that’s it . . .

honest.”

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Harry {doc} Babad