

2014 APBA Summer School.

Around 75 students attended the summer school held at the Scots College, Sydney for 5 days during the 2nd week of January.

Pipers and side drummers were graded, and put into 4 groups of about 12 pipers each, and 4 groups of drummers. The tenor/bass drummers were tutored as a single group. There was one drum major pupil who got individual tutoring from Douglas McFarland.

One of the main attractions of the school was the high quality of the tutors. P/M Richard Parks MBE, L/D Keith Orr and mid section lead drummer, Andrew Elliot, all from World Champion Pipe Band, Field Marshal Montgomery, were the key note tutors. Additionally, there was Bob Worrall, international piping judge, and BBC commentator for the world pipe band competition. Ian Lyons, well known Australian piper and current FMM and Vic Police piper. Brett Tidswell, P/M City of Adelaide Pipe Band, Principal of Piping at the APBA College, and multiple winner of the R.U. Brown Piobaireachd Society Gold Medal. Greg Bassani OAM, PBA Principal of Drumming, among others. Each group were allocated a main tutor, but all the tutors also rotated around the groups, so that each group benefited from the different styles of each tutor.

Each day started with breakfast at 7:00am, and tutoring started with the individual groups at 8:45am going through to 5:30pm with meal breaks, which was followed in the evening with a seminar finishing around 9:30pm. Pipers were given about 15 tunes to work on, so any spare time, was used for practice.

Most of our time was spent being tutored in these new tunes, however other subjects that were covered were, composing, bag pressures, solo playing, ensemble, pipe maintenance, playing technique and two inspiring tutorials from Bob Worrall on Piobaireachd, where he had about 50 pipers playing Piobaireachd together on their practice chanters. One of the side drumming pupils, Steph Burns, is a leading expert on memory, and gave an impromptu and very informative lecture on learning and memorising tunes.

The week culminated in a recital at the end of the week, by each group together with their respective drumming group. Group 1 was very impressive, learning a full medley and MSR in 4 days, which they played on the final day.

The resident pupils stayed at the Scots College, Sydney, in the excellent boarding facilities and first class meals were provided. The whole week was spent entirely on the school campus, whether it was in a classroom, lecture theatre, concert hall or the oval. The spectacular view over Sydney harbour was an added bonus.

The expert tutors were highly knowledgeable, inspiring and world class, and in spite of their preeminent positions in the pipe band world, humble and very approachable. The week was 'full on' with no time for socialising, however, very rewarding in terms of knowledge gained.

Plans are being made for the next Summer school, and I recommend anyone of any playing ability, to enrol in the 2015 School.