



## Playin' the bagpipes

Published: 06/19/2009

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At the age of five, Winter Taylor of east Cobb heard the bagpipes played by a man in her West Virginia town. She was hooked and wanted to play the nine-note instrument.

The bagpipe is an outdoor instrument, once used to communicate for miles around, explained Taylor. "What parent's going to listen to something like that at an early age," she laughs. Taylor's mother, a talented pianist, wanted her to play something more conventional. Taylor tried the violin but her "heart wasn't in it." Then she took piano lessons for a year but her heart wasn't in that either. Taylor's piano teacher became her ally when she realized how passionately Taylor felt about the bagpipes. It was Taylor's piano teacher that convinced her parents to let her try the bagpipes.

One obstacle still remained. "Girls don't play the bagpipes," was the reaction of the only piper in her hometown that could teach her to play, the same man Taylor heard play at the age of five. Taylor, now in the fourth grade, was persistent in her desire to play this ancient instrument. "We kept pestering him and calling him back," she recalls, "until he finally gave in." Bagpipes are not an easy instrument to play, Taylor explains. Not only is the instrument extremely heavy, requiring the piper to be in good physical shape, there is nothing on the instrument to help the piper.

On other instruments, for example, there are keys and levers that help the instrumentalist make music, she explains. With bagpipes, hand positioning and how you move your hand up and down is critical to the sound and clarity of how you play the pipes. "You play it in spite of itself," Taylor says. "It's just you and your fingers." "It's like a living creature," Taylor elaborates. "It vibrates when you play it and you embrace it." Plus, you have to learn to play the bagpipes in tune, she says, you have to know what it should sound like and how to get it to play the right pitch on each note. "It's very subtle."

A full-time professional musician, Taylor teaches 30 students from the metro-Atlanta area and neighboring states either in person or via the Internet.

Only 3 of her students are female. "It's very disappointing to me," she admits. Her youngest student is 10.

Taylor, a member of the Atlanta Pipe Band, is one of the few full-time pipers in the area. She performs at weddings, funerals, ceremonies and other functions. She also teaches the Atlanta Pipe Band Grade 5 Competition Unit.

"It's either love or hate with bagpipes," states Taylor, "I like to think that the people who hate them haven't heard them played well."

"It's something that speaks to me," she says, "and I have to play it."

For more information, visit [www.bagpipesbywinter.com](http://www.bagpipesbywinter.com).



Bagpiper Winter Taylor performed at the Field of Flags ceremony in 2003 at Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park.  
**Photo by Think D. Nguyen**

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