

Why Compete as a Soloist?

Competition. The word makes some pipers shake their heads knowingly. Been there, done that—or tried that. Others relish the thought. If you've never competed, you may wonder what drives a piper to compete and what drives a piper away from competition. I recommend all students compete as a soloist. Here are a few reasons:

Specific Goals. A competition gives you a specific goal with a drop-dead deadline to improve your skills. You'll have to push yourself, perhaps be more disciplined than you might be otherwise.

Objective Feedback. Rather than a subjective opinion of your skill level—some pipers have a too high an opinion of their own playing—you get an objective view and hopefully constructive specific feedback from the judge on where you can improve.

Overcome Pressure. By competing, you will learn to play under pressure in a new unknown environment in front of strangers. Though some may feel differently, aside from high-profile band competition, there aren't many venues with equal (or more) pressure.

Camaderie. Highland games are a great opportunity to meet other pipers doing the same thing as you. Granted that you don't have to compete to rub elbows with other pipers, but there's something to be said for being "under fire" together.

Inspiration from Great Piping. If you are at a competition, you usually have the opportunity to see exceptional pipers live. It's one thing to hear a recording, another to be there in person. Seeing how well they perform gives you a target to strive for. Again, you don't have to compete to see them, but you might not even be there otherwise.

Focus. Competition gives you a reason to learn a tune at a very focused level, usually with more attention to detail than you would otherwise or have drive to learn. No dropped grace notes allowed. Every nuance can be critical.

Encouragement. If you do well, you'll get a "pat on the back" from the judge and other pipers. Fellow competitors are pretty supportive usually. If your drones shut off in the middle of your competition piece, odds are it's happened to them too and they'll tell you so. I've never had an unkind remark come from another piper at a competition. Most pipers understand that it's not about beating other pipers, but the piper trying to do his or her personal best.

Legitimized. There are those that assume that non-competing pipers are less skilled (or at least an unknown quantity) and by competing you put those prejudices to rest. There is a certain respect given to pipers who overcome all the potential problems and compete regardless.

Bottom line, whatever you decide, it's to enjoy your bagpiping—*it's supposed to be fun!*