



REVIEWS

A good Caning

By John Bottomley

Chris Apps, of Apps Reeds, has used his experience as a maker of smallpipe reeds to create a new version of an old standard; the cane practice chanter reed. It is designed to allow us to play for extended periods of time without having to take the reeds out and swab them down, as is necessary for plastic reeds.

In fact, the reeds require soaking before the first time you play them to get moisture into the cane and open them up to their optimal playing condition. Once they have been wetted, they will retain their moisture inside your chanter just from being played. I have left one in my practice chanter for more than a day without playing and the reed was still damp and ready to go.

On the other hand, when I play it for more than an hour, I find I can go without the annoying opening and drying rituals to which we have all become accustomed.

Once soaked according to instructions, the reed produced a full and resonant sound, even in my El Cheapo practice chanter. In a better chanter the results are even richer. As Chris points out, your practice chanter now sounds like a real musical instrument.

One improvement to the standard plastic reed is Chris's inclusion of a brass bridle at the base of the reed, which allows you to adjust strength, volume, and pitch. You can open and shut the blades to suit your taste by squeezing the bridle one direction or the other. I found that small differences in the mouth of the reed created substantial differences in tone and strength. I also found that the bridle was difficult to squeeze when I wanted to strengthen the reed (after initially making it too easy) so that I had to use pliers to make the adjustment. On the plus side here, the bridle, once adjusted, does not change or move so the reed stays constant.

The reed, being cane, can be subject to mold. If your reed is beginning to show any sign of this, you can always soak it in a dilute hydrogen peroxide solution to kill the mold, then you are ready to go again. I was able to test this by leaving one of my chanters



unplayed for about five days—consider this a feature; an extra incentive to play every day!

The reeds are available through Chris's website, www.appsreeds.com. ▽

