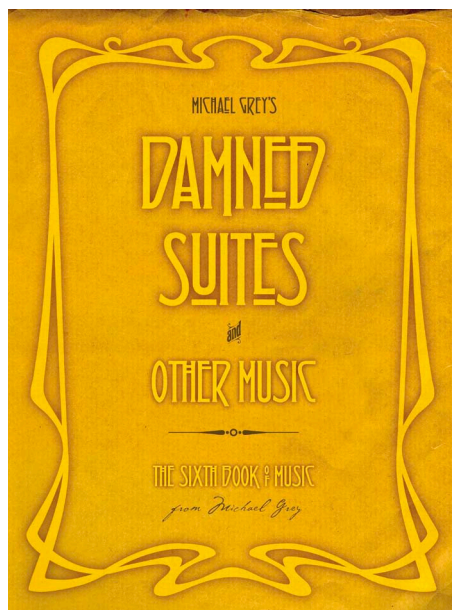


An important achievement in the evolution of pipe band music

DAMN suites! It all started back in 1987, the year the 78th Fraser Highlanders won the World Championships. That year, the Frasers performed the first pipe band suite during their concert in Ireland just days before winning the Worlds: *Journey to Skye*, written by Don Thompson. Their *Live in Ireland* CD went on to become a popular and groundbreaking album — in no small part due to *Journey to Skye*, but also for several other factors, one of them being the many and varied compositions by band members, significantly Michael Grey.

Since then Michael Grey has gone on to establish himself as one of the most important and prolific composers of modern bagpipe music. He's written every type of bagpipe tune conceivable, and many of his compositions have become modern classics, too numerous to mention. *Damned Suites and Other Music* is Michael Grey's sixth book and it is important to view this collection in the context of his long-term career as a composer. There is no denying that Michael had already proven his capabilities to write a good "wee" tune well before his more recent compositions for the Toronto Police Pipe Band.

When the Toronto Police first publicly performed Michael's piece *Variations on a Theme of Good Intentions* in competition at Georgetown Highland Games in 2008, it certainly had an impact on the pipe band community across the globe. Thanks to the wonders of the internet, those of us not present at that event were able to watch and listen to the videos. Opinions



and comments were hugely divided, some rejoiced, some called it sacrilegious. Although there was no riot at that performance, its effect was as close as the pipe band world has come to an equivalent of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* premiere.

Damned Suites and Other Music is a limited edition hard cover book, something rare these days, and each book is signed and numbered. Pieces include *Variations on a Theme of Good Intentions*, *Idiomata*, *Gallus No. 3*, *Huff* and *Cutting Bracken* (all written for Toronto Police), as well as a selection of small tunes and 'other music'. Prospective composers will find the pieces fascinating study, with all of Michael's well-considered music laid bare before them.

This book is a quality product; it's a pleasure to hold and read, well printed, nicely designed with numerous illustrations and photos. There are many detailed notes from Michael regarding musical interpretation of the pieces as well as interesting and entertaining background stories. In fact, this would have to be the most hilarious bagpipe music book I've ever had the good fortune to read! Michael's humour and wit pervade the pages, enticing you back for many a re-read.

Some people may assume that because this is a book of "suites" that it may not be as popular or as useful to those pipe bands who are content to build their medleys stringing together separate small tunes. But, in fact there are many great arrangements of traditional tunes within several of the "suites" and the "other music" that would sit very comfortably in even a conservative band's medley.

These pieces were seminal as far as pipe band medley competitions go. Whether you are a fan of these particular "suites" or not, they undoubtedly represent an important achievement in the evolution of pipe band music — that is if you consider pipe band music to be evolving!

Don Thompson's *Journey to Skye* that debuted on that 78th Frasers' CD in 1987 started a genre of pipe band music that Michael Grey has certainly developed to a sophisticated level, and he's made a significant contribution to the modern pipe band repertoire in doing so. The publication of these suites full scores is a record that is important for posterity alone, even if no band other than Toronto actually performs the pieces again. ●