

Considerations when buying your own Uilleann Pipes

It is very exciting when you begin to consider purchasing your first set of Uilleann Pipes. There is a lot of homework you need to do before you buy. Be aware that there can be waiting list for new pipe sets well over a year(s) for many of the top makers- so begin planning early. Below is a list of things to consider to help you be more successful:

Practice Set- Chanter, Bellows, Bag.

Half Set- Chanter, Bellows, Bag, and 3 drones

¾ Set- Chanter, Bellows, Bag, Drones, Tenor and Baritone Regulator

Full Set- Chanter, Bellows, Bag, 3 Drones, Tenor-Baritone-Bass Regulator

Custom Sets- may have an additional drones/regulators/woods/platting etc...

Some General Ideas:

- Have a **“budget”** to guide how much you can afford to spend. Pipes can get expensive very fast.
- Don't buy from a maker just because your friend did. Do your own research. Discuss with your friend “why” they chose that maker.
- Call the Pipe Maker – or owner of the set you are considering. Discuss in detail what you are thinking of purchasing. With used sets- go through every component of the set and ask if there are any issues- wood cracks, broken/non-working/missing components, mis-matched components, and of course the reed(s).
- Get a sound file of the set being played so you can get an idea of the specific sound profile. All pipes do not sound the same.

New Sets

- Start with a Concert D pitched set. This will allow you to play in most all sessions.
- Consider purchasing a **Practice Set** first. This is the most cost-effective way to begin. This is all you need for the first 1-2 years. Make sure to discuss the process of expanding your set with the maker before purchasing.
- **Never** buy a set from E bay or online unless you know the maker and condition. Ask your instructor or an experienced piper for advice.
- **NEVER** purchase a budget set made in Pakistan or similar locations- especially when it seems like a really good deal. The sets are sub-par and will never work correctly.
- There are some **“budget sets”** being sold. Do your research here as well. It might not be possible to expand these to a **Full Set**. This might not be the direction you want to go.
- If purchasing a **Practice Set**- make sure the chanter has “blocks” where keys can be added in the future if you desire (you don't need keys in the beginning).
- Consider purchasing your first set from an American maker. It is much easier to get replacement reeds and service than abroad. Postage is also much cheaper.

- Be aware of the overall size and weight of the **“Full Set”**. Even though you are starting with a **Practice set**. Believe it or not, all pipes are not the same size and/or weight. This is especially important for smaller pipers.
- Some components of a set are selected/added ala cart. Each additional component is an additional charge. This can include things like: wood type, number of chanter keys, Chanter stop key, drone design, brass vs. nickel plating, extra drones/regulators, and other design changes. Talk with the pipe maker about all these options.
- Ask your **Pipe Instructor** for advice regarding your purchase. There are also websites that often have discussions about makers and their quality- <https://thesession.org> ; <http://forums.chiffandfipple.com> ; Facebook-Uilleann Pipes for Sale or Swap. Be aware that there is always someone upset about something, so one bad review is not enough. Look for a pattern, ask a fellow more experienced piper.

Used Sets

There are some very good **Used Sets** available. There are also **sub-par sets** being sold. There have been recent reports of scammers trying to sell sets they don't own - or not representing them accurately. It is even more important to research the purchase of a used set. Sets made by reputable makers will hold their value. Some pipe makers sell “recycled or used sets”- just ask. Consider the points listed above for **New Sets** as well as the ones below. As they say - **Buyer Beware**.

- **Again- Never** buy a set from E bay or online unless you know the maker and condition. Ask your instructor or an experienced piper for advice.
- There is always the possibility you will need a new Chanter reed and/or Drone reeds. New chanter reeds can cost over \$100.00. Find out if the original maker is still in business. You can usually get another Reed Maker to assist- but it is an additional hurdle and charge and it can take more time.
- If the set needs any repairs, again- make sure the original maker is still in business and will do the repairs, or another maker who has agreed to do the repairs.
- You may come upon a **“Classic Set”**, and while this type of purchase can be exciting, make sure the set seems right for you in terms of design, size, etc...
- Places to look to find a respectable used set:
 - https://www.uilleannobsession.com/links_other.html
 - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1432003387070305> - Uilleann Pipes for sale or swap
 - Piping Workshops and/or Piping Tionóls
 - Piper Friends who have bought a new set and are looking to sell the old

There is a list of most all pipe makers in the US and Canada on the **BRIMS** website.

This can give an idea of where to begin.

Good Luck!!

