

By **Iain Lundy**

HE may blow a fine, stirring tune on the pipes, but he most certainly does not have the legs for a kilt. For a start, he has one too many.

But then McBlare – a three-legged robot with no head – is no ordinary piper.

Essentially a traditional set of Highland bagpipes fixed to a wooden board, his makers claim he plays faster and louder than any human.

And yesterday he was greeted with a mixture of bewilderment and delight when he appeared at Piping Live, the Glasgow International Piping Festival.

It was the first time the robot, developed at Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Ohio, has been outside the U.S.

To play the pipes, he has a series of electromagnetically controlled 'fingers' which are placed over the holes on the instrument's chanter.

With the help of an air compressor to provide the puff, McBlare can play a full repertoire of 50 bagpipe tunes which are stored as computer files in his 'brain'.

Professor Roger Dannenberg, who travelled to Glasgow with his 'protégé', said he was absolutely delighted to have received an invitation to the festival.

He added: 'I'm sure that serious pipers will regard McBlare as something of an object of curiosity.'

'I look forward to finding out how interested people are to hear the robot.'

'We had McBlare mounted on a tripod and wrapped in a Carnegie-Mellon University tartan kilt.'

'It looks like a bit like a three-legged Martian – a creature from

# Meet McBlare, a young piper whose playing is truly electric

War of the Worlds crossed with a kilted piper.'

McBlare was built last year to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the university's robotics department.

The decision to create something with a Scottish theme was influenced by the fact that the university was founded by Scots philanthropist Andrew Carnegie.

Professor Dannenberg said: 'The reaction has been great. People are just astounded to see something so modern which plays such an ancient and traditional sound.'

'There's a real human connection to bagpipes and when people realise the sound is coming from an electro-mechanical instrument it throws them a little.'

'I am in awe of bagpipe players.

They are constantly blowing a lot of air at very, very high pressure and I find it amazing that people can put so much effort into their music.'

Roddy Macleod, the director of the festival, said he had invited Professor Dannenberg to bring McBlare to Glasgow after reading about its development.

He said: 'From our point of view in running the festival it is nice to have the fun aspect included.'

'People will be genuinely interested in the mechanics of it all.'

'I hope to have him playing in George Square and I hope we attract some children along to see what it is all about.'

Professor Dannenberg added: 'I am pretty sure McBlare is the only piper at the festival who doesn't need a dram after playing.'



Highland thing: Robotic piper McBlare with a human 'rival' in Glasgow