

A column devoted to true and very funny music education stories of life in the classroom and beyond!

2022 Special Graduation Edition Funny Codas

“When the Best Laid Plans for Pomp and Circumstance Go Awry”

by Tom Gellert

Over the decades that I have led bands in performing at commencement ceremonies, one ceremony sticks out in my mind like no other: the year our band shared processional responsibilities with a bagpiper! It was one I wish I and the band, as well as the graduating class and audience, had forgotten 25 years later but that was not to be. Just when you thought that you had seen and heard it all! Wow, just wow!

I have known my fair share of well-intentioned high school principals over the years but sometimes their best laid plans can become bad ideas. Case in point: after years of believing that the procedure we had in place for the annual commencement ceremony was a done deal, my principal at the time made a decision (on his own) to bring in a bagpiper to play *Pomp and Circumstance* with the band in what used to be (in my own experience) a classic, well-received processional.

Unfortunately, this last-minute piper soloist joining the band was not shared with me until right before the ceremony, and the end result was one of the worst, sour experiences ever (that's being kind). There's something about being separated by a tritone that just doesn't sound right. There were audible gasps from the students in the band and in the graduating class, not to mention fellow faculty members and parents in the audience. Even my principal (who apparently thought this was a good idea) was surprised at the awfulness of the moment. I wanted to stop the band and just allow the piper to play but our valiant piper kept playing with the band despite the key differences and intonation deficiencies. It was worse than bad!

The end of the processional finally arrived to the relief of everyone. The rest of the commencement ceremony went well up until the last moment prior to the band's recessional when another new surprise "tradition" was added to the ceremony: a release of doves instead of a balloon launch.

A large number of "trained" doves were supposed to be released right at the end of the ceremony. Apparently, they were to fly out of their cages, make 2-3 circles around the audience and graduating class and, then return to their cages. Well, guess what? The doves took off (for good)! No one quite knew why this happened but we all surmised that it was a fitting comment to the attempt to bring together different musical forces at the start of the ceremony. The doves had had enough!

P.S. The following year, gone was the piper and instead of doves, graduates just launched their caps into the air. To this day, whenever I hear *Pomp and Circumstance* I can't help but cringe (just a little). Apologies to Sir Edward Elgar.

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