

CASE STUDY 6.

## MARCH FOR A BEGINNER.

SOURCES.Pipes.

Joseph MacDonald Ms. [JMcD] c. 1760 p. 82 (ed. 1994)

'March for a Begginer.'

Angus MacKay Ms. Vol. 2 [AMcK] c. 1826-1840: 128.

'from an mss. written in Bengall by Mr. John MacDonald about the year 1730.'

No title.

Other music sources.

Angus Fraser Mss. c1855 Vol. 3. no.14.

'An òinseach.'

Daniel Dow's Coll. [DD] 1776 / 83 ?

'Mairi nighean Deorsa: Mary the daughter of George'.

Song Text without music.

Bardachd Ghàidhlig. (Watson) 3rd ed. 1959. p.104.

BACKGROUND

There are two versions of this tune in the Angus Fraser Ms. One version is called 'An òinseach' (The idiot), a Gaelic term used by the poet Alexander MacDonald (Alasdair MacMhaighstir Alasdair) in his poem in praise of the pipes called 'Moladh air Pìob Mhór Mhic Cruimein.' (In praise of MacCrimmon's pipes) and is shown below.

nickname?

This first notated version in the Ms. is the one on which Matheson based his sung version, which is used here for comparison. This version has been identified as a variant of the pibroch March for a Beginner.

not mentioned in the above list

The provenance of different versions and titles of this air is given by AF in his notes to tunes. (no.87)<sup>1</sup> The information he gives shows that in the eighteenth century,

1. 'Grant of Sheugly in GlenUrquhart' composed a song on a supposed contest between the violin, pipe and harp.

2. The same air was used by MacDonald of Ardnabi in praise of his violin which he called Mairi nighean Dheorsa ('Mary George's daughter') This appears in AF's father's book, Simon Fraser (1816: 2) where the title Mairi nighean Dheorsa is given, alongside which is the original heading "Grant of Sheugly's contest between his Violin, Pipe and Harp." This explanation by Angus Fraser clarifies the existence of the two titles<sup>2</sup>

3. The same tune was thereafter adopted by Alasdair MacMhaighstir Alasdair for his poem 'Moladh air Pìob Mhór MhicCruimein' (In praise of MacCrimmon's pipes) probably as a poetical *tour de force* as a retort to MacDonald of Ardnabi's praise of the fiddle and the earlier song by Grant.

No information exists on how and when the pibroch version appeared but it is probable that Alasdair MacMhaighstir Alasdair set his poetry to what was an already known, and probably quite popular, pibroch. March for a Beginner is the only pibroch theme which was notated in full by JMcD in

<sup>1</sup> See also Cpt. Simon Fraser of Knockie's Collection of Highland Music Note 3 p.96 where it is stated that Alexander Grant of Knockie composed the tune to his violin. He died in prison in Tilbury in 1746 at the age of 70 after having taken part in the 1745 rising. *secur*

<sup>2</sup> In TGSi XLV (1969) Hugh Barron's 'Some Gaelic verse from North Inverness-shire' are some stanzas of a song 'Oran le Alasdair òg Mac fir Ardnabighe' which is 'air Fonn' or to the tune of Màiri Nighean Deòrsa. This begins 'O! ciad mìle fàilte do Mhàiri Nighean Deòrsa' which is slightly confusing as it would seem that the tune was already in existence and recognised by this title already. The form is also confusing with the existence of two couplets of vocable and the two lines referring to Màiri Nighean Deòrsa. They are as follows:

O! ciad mìle fàilte do Mhàiri Nighean Deòrsa

Fal-al-dir-al dìro,

Fal-al-diro, Dal, dal rìro.

Gum b'ait leam bhi làmh riut a' Mhàiri Nighean Deòrsa

Fal-al etc.

When these words are compared to Dow's setting of Màiri Nighean Deòrsa, they do not fit the music. However, they do fit the tune in Angus Fraser's Ms. which is being used here as a comparison with the pibroch. The only problem lies with the fourth line followed by the vocable repetitions. It appears in succeeding verses, in which case it is highly probable that it had a variant melody in a different form.



1760 and it would be unlikely that a tune would have this title if it were a little known tune.

### Description and Pibroch/Song Relationship.

IMcD used this tune as an example of a four-lined pibroch and demonstrated how the tune is organised according to sixteen fingers or bars and organised into four quarters consisting of eight phrases of music.

Although the song is set out in Watson (1959) as appearing to have a twelve lined stanza, each 'line' only has two stresses. As a song, there should be four stresses per line and therefore the song has been set out below as six lines of poetry. Each line of poetry is equivalent to a phrase of music which, in this example, is equal to two bars of pibroch.

Eighteen verses of this song appear in Watson (ed. 1959: 104)<sup>3</sup> The first verse is as follows:

'S iomadh baintighearn' bha spéiseil mu'n chéile 'bh'aig Móraig;  
 Gun àirmhear mi féin diubh, is gach té tha de'm sheòrsa:  
 Mhol e phìob anns gach grìd, am b'fheàrr a prìs cheòlmhor,  
 'Na buadhanna móra, 'na gaisge ri còmhraig;  
 O fhad bhios bìog no aon dìorr, no gnè chli am chòmhradh-s',  
 Is gun an fhorc a bhith am mheòiribh, gu mol mi ri m'bheò thu.

<sup>3</sup> This song is, to quote Watson (ed. 1959 lxii): 'A complicated metre. Each line has four stresses. In the first two lines the vowel sequence is the same, except in the first stressed syllable. The third and fifth lines are homogeneous, i.e., they have the same vowel sequence. The fourth and sixth lines have each a syllable rhyming with the final stressed syllable of the previous line. The final stressed syllables rhyme throughout the stanza. By arrangement of the stress in the third and fifth lines, the poet obtains a staccato effect resembling the phrasing of part of a pibroch. Scheme of the first stanza:-

- (1)---a-----é-----é-----ó
- (2)---à-----é-----é-----ò
- (3)---ì-----ì-----ì-----ò
- (4)---ua-----ó-----a-----ò
- (5)---ì-----ì-----ì-----ò
- (6)---o-----ò-----o-----ò

The extra syllables, giving a total of nine in: Is gun an fhorc a bhith am mheòiribh at the first half of the last line may have some bearing on the appearance of a long phrase which appears penultimately in some pibrochs. eg. Lament for Captain MacDougall.

? keep?

(Many ladies held Morag's partner in esteem/I myself am numbered amongst them, as were all of my kind/He praised the pipe in all its qualities/its melodic value was better for its great virtues, its heroism in battle/Oh, while there is a squeak, one spark of life or any degree of strength in my tongue/and no cramp in my fingers, I shall praise you forever. (Translation from Scottish Tradition 16 'Gaelic Bards and Minstrels'.)

The pibroch dwells mostly on the notes low A, B, C, E, F and high A.

The animated song version by comparison, dwells on notes lower down the scale and cannot be fully accommodated on the pipes, but has greater melodic intervals with leaps of an octave in some areas. Example 1 shows the pibroch version

Ex. 1

The musical notation for Example 1 consists of four staves of music. The key signature is one sharp (F#), indicating D major. The time signature is common time (C). The melody is written in a pibroch style, featuring a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The melody continues across four staves, with some phrases marked with accents (^) and breath marks (').

On first hearing and examining the scores, it is likely that the relationship between these two melodies seems a little tenuous. In order to make the connections clearer, some of the melodic and rhythmic motifs which link these two tunes have been set out below.

The writer identified the relationship aurally at first, before knowing the title of the song which linked it to MacCrimmon and piping and it was the presence of common specific melodic and rhythmic motifs in the pibroch and the song which allowed this identification to occur. For instance, if the sixth phrase of the pibroch is compared with the third phrase of the song, similar features can be observed:

Ex.2.





The other area which has remained sufficiently prominent for a listener to make a connection is in the last phrase of the pibroch and the penultimate, fifth, phrase of the song. This is as follows:

### EX.3.



It is important to realise that the features which allow one to recognise a variant tune do not relate solely to melody or rhythm but to elements of each of these two features. Although the melodic comparison alone may seem insufficient to make a connection between two tunes, when these are set in a particular rhythmic scheme the relationship becomes clearer than in the above examples.

The two tunes have a different rhythmic scansion in the first phrase and there is an obvious problem reconciling the music with the words. This is because at *Is iomadh baintighearn*, the first poetic stress does not appear until *baintighearna*. This would occur on the low A in the pibroch. The *Is iomadh* would have to be musically represented as an anacrusis. This can be represented in pibroch by a short introductory E or cadence run before the low A. The long E of present day performance would not suffice as it would be equivalent to a stress on the first two words.

Despite the areas of departure in the melody and to a lesser extent in the rhythm, the common features which exist between the song and pibroch are sufficient to achieve a useful reassessment of the pibroch ùrlar.

The implications of the song on the pibroch performance style are such that the JMcD version can be read as notated to a great extent, but only when interpreting the music in the context of Gaelic language rhythm. This entails representing the tune in a notation which more closely

resembles 6/8 time rather than the common time which JMcD notated it in. As has been shown in some of the other case studies, the choice of notation between common time, represented by C, or compound duple time in 6/8 seems to have been fairly arbitrary in Gaelic music notation because there are frequently elements of both rhythms in a single version. JMcD in the fourth bar has a rhythmical figure which suggests that he may have had problems deciding on how best to represent the rhythm of this tune.

In this particular case, I suggest that, given the nature of the rhythms of this song version and the nature of the rhythms which are suggested by the pibroch notation itself in the context of the Gaelic musical tradition, a notation which is closer to 6/8 time might be more appropriate.

A recommended setting of the first two phrases is therefore set out below. This rhythmic scheme can be continued throughout the rest of the tune.

### CONCLUSION.

This case study showed how, because of similar rhythmic and melodic motifs, a variant version of a song could be recognised in March for a Beginner. The performance style which is being recommended is much more rhythmical than the style one might hear at the present day. The notation of the pibroch version in JMcD gives a fairly clear indication of the rhythm, provided one is aware of the idiom of song in pibroch. A notation style which is closer to the Gaelic song idiom, from which this tune probably arose, is improved by notating it in an approximate 6/8 rhythm.