

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clear that a number of pibrochs were at one time closely associated with the Gaelic song idiom. This relationship is evident to the extent that the same or similar melodic and rhythmic features are to be found in both pibroch and Gaelic song. In order to reach this conclusion, it was necessary to reinterpret the earliest pibroch sources by comparing some pibrochs with their song versions.

Those pibrochs with which song versions have been identified, are shown to have been more commonly based on the melodic and rhythmic features found in the first two to four phrases of a song. These phrases have then been 'reworked' to create, in most cases, eight pibroch phrases. In a small number of cases, such as Bodaich nam Briogais, Gabhaidh sinne Rathad Mór and possibly A Ghlas Mheur, the whole song is equivalent to the pibroch *ùrlar* or theme. *That is, the ùrlar consists of the chorus and refrain of the song.*

Although the research which is presented here concentrates on twelve case studies, the techniques which have been applied to the published sources in order to place the tunes back into the context of their traditional idiom can be applied to the whole pre-twentieth century pibroch repertoire. This research, therefore, provides an interpretative guide by which pibroch which has been transmitted into the twentieth century can be reassessed.

Gaelic scholarship of the twentieth century has drawn attention to a particular category of songs called 'pibroch songs' associated with the pibroch idiom. Many of these songs, frequently called 'orain beaga' or small songs, are found within the compass of the pipe scale and tend to be associated with the lullaby tradition. This thesis has shown, however, that pibrochs have been founded on a wide range of song types and rhythms such as the keening songs, heroic ballads or *dàn*, bardic verse and the more widespread *amhran* or song form. Pibroch has therefore drawn on all types of song sources in the Gaelic song tradition and vice versa and although not within the remit of this research, there is strong evidence to suggest that there was a similar interplay between the pipes and other

*What does this mean? Pibroch is song ref. to pipe music*



instrumental traditions. This is a line of research which should be pursued, especially with regard to the Irish musical tradition which ~~has appears to have~~ rhythmic and melodic motifs similar to the pibroch tradition.

The shared characteristics of song and pibroch are shown to have been severed, to the extent that present day pibroch performance style has little in common with Scottish Gaelic culture except in tune titles alone. The original melodic line and rhythm of pibroch has altered perceptively. The changes can probably be identified in two processes. The first stage, which occurred implicitly in the transfer of melody from voice to instrument was probably immediate and obvious. The second was clearly more gradual, occurring over the last two hundred and fifty years or more. } exp.

In the process of adaptation into the pibroch tradition, the songs have been subjected to the idiosyncratic features which represent modern pibroch conventions. The first, and probably the most obvious, feature which set pibroch apart from the Gaelic song idiom was the adoption and subsequent preponderance of cadences, in Angus MacArthur's and Donald MacDonald's settings. This latter dominance of cadence over the melodic line may not have been the case in earlier periods of the eighteenth century, as Joseph MacDonald's theory suggests. In contrast to this development, the present study suggests that the cadences were an important feature of pibroch as embellishments or decorative enhancements to the melodic line, but unlike in modern performances, did not take any melodic stress at any part of the *ùrlar*. It has been suggested in this study that the cadence in an unstressed position may have occasionally formed part of the melodic line. (in some melodies) This is because in an <sup>instrumental</sup> oral tradition the melodic line may be an ambiguous concept. Over time, because of the influence of pipe notation, the cadences became more indistinguishable from the melodic line and this was accompanied by a slowing down of tempo, both in a cause and effect manner. In addition to this, extra notes were occasionally added to the melody. The total effect of all these changes (resulted in) an alteration in the pibroch rhythm. In general, this rhythmic change occurred in tunes which had been notated in 6/8 time and these tunes were subsequently notated in common time. This study suggests that common time is a more suitable time signature for notating at a much slower pace, as in present day pibroch performance. phrases, be more specific. meaning. } Redo woolly



The use of standard European notation to attempt to describe both the Gaelic song and the pibroch idiom has been shown to be inappropriate. Although pipers today will generally accept that this is indeed the case, it is not borne out by present day performance style. Although this style is very slow, the underlying rhythm is discernible; it is very predictable and subject to little musical rubato. This performance style has emerged despite the common understanding in pibroch tradition that the notated scores are only *aides memoires*. The manner of notation has influenced the modern pibroch performance style in that it has exaggerated the cadence E conventions to the extent that the crotchet of modern notation is likely to be played as a minim.

The above point emphasises a major contradiction found in present day pibroch transmission and teaching. One commonly held view in teaching is that the written scores are unimportant. This statement is probably a remnant of the time when transmission was truly oral. The reality is that pipers rely on the notated scores for learning. The orally taught method has been partially substituted by the use of a tape recorder, which is also an effective way of imitating prize winning performances and narrowing the range of performance styles.

In contrast to the above scenario, the often held opinion among defenders of the present performance style is that the Angus MacArthur, Joseph, Patrick and Donald MacDonald notations, although notated in a particular style, (on which these collectors appear to agree for the most part) was not actually meant to be played that way. Even without using the present study's analysis of the relationship between pibroch and song, it is probable that the early notators could just as easily have chosen to insert quaver or semiquaver cadences as demisemiquaver ones, into the score. A range of different note values for embellishments exist in the early scores and as this study shows, they are easily interpreted into the existing rhythmic and melodic scheme. There is no evidence of the exaggerated and inappropriate E cadences which are so prevalent in modern pibroch.

In eighteenth century Gaelic society the community with its language and customs defined the melodic and rhythmic parameters of the musical tradition. This is no longer the case. Present day pibroch may be described as a sophisticated art form with an enigmatic and bewildering contrivance of rules as to its performance, one which is divorced from the natural



controls which might have allowed it to adapt to a changing society or even die. The sparsity of pibroch variants to emerge since the notators of the early nineteenth century began their work, contrasts with those evident in the notated scores themselves, which are, however, partially disguised under different titles. This sparsity of variant melodic settings makes a clearly visible and valuable distinction between the living tradition of pibroch, where melodies change and adapt and new ones are constantly being created and the 'preservation' of pibroch which adheres to chosen written scores with an unnatural and unmusical verve. One has to accept that because of the political and cultural ethnocide following Culloden, pibroch might have disappeared without its subsequent patronage and standardisation. The researchers, such as myself and others, have been fortunate in that the changes which took place occurred in a fairly systematical manner so that it is still possible to reveal the original music when set in its cultural context, in contrast with the 'improved' settings of today.

The main recommendation of this thesis is that pibroch should be placed back into the framework of the wider stylistic range of the oral tradition. The style has changed so much since the era of Joseph MacDonald, however, that one has to take a fresh look at the whole tradition in light of this research in order to reinterpret the music. A constantly changing interpretation of the, albeit faulty, pibroch scores has been shown to have been the main problem which has beset the piper/musician over the last two hundred years. The reality is that, no matter how much one may attempt to notate the score exactly, it will never be able to describe the rhythmic subtleties of pibroch set in its traditional idiom. A much greater freedom of style in pibroch performance is the most obvious implication of this thesis. The musical parameters will be much wider as a result, and will never be constant because the emphasis of future teaching of this idiom is on oral transmission.

This research has shown how, on account of the numerous interconnections of this oral tradition, the repertoire has many examples of variant melodies. Much of the pibroch was retained and performed, probably with little in the way of aides-memoires. This research bears this out, certainly in the *ùrlars*, because the performance style(s) recommended here have stronger melodic lines and rhythm so that the tunes can be learned in a much shorter time than before and retained more easily.



A range of different styles of playing pibroch is open to the piper as a result of this thesis. As a broad guide to the range of performance styles, consider what may lie between the following two opposite polarities of style.

The pibroch *ùrlar* may be played in the style of the song itself, without the cadences and extra notes, if the latter can be identified. Alternatively, it may be played in the rigid standardised style which has emerged in present day performance pibroch. The problem with the former is that, if, as this thesis concludes, the cutting edge between song and pibroch lies in the presence of cadences on the song's melodic line, then it could be argued that the *ùrlar*, in the matter of performance style, is an eight-phrase song. Therefore, for the person who is adept at playing Gaelic songs on the pipes in their traditional idiom, the subtle difference between this and playing a pibroch *ùrlar* is knowing how to effectively adapt cadences into the melody while preserving the melodic rhythm.

An understanding of the idiom allows one to know the parameters of the music and so the extent of freedom and individuality one has in performance. An understanding of this idiom does not necessarily require that one should be a Gaelic speaker, but it does demand an awareness of the rhythms which were implicit in the creation of that piece of music. As Bartók stated (ed. 1976: 346)

'For an artist it is not only right to have his roots in the art of some former times, it is a necessity,' -

a statement which is just as relevant to the piper musician.

The acceptability of pursuing a chosen style lies in whoever sets the musical parameters. Historically the parameters of modern pibroch performance have been set by the patrons of competition piping as much as by pipers themselves. The new parameters have to be set by the present and following generations of pipers who take on the responsibility of gaining an insight into the idioms which created pibroch.

One problem which has become apparent in this thesis is that the notation, which may initially have represented an attempt to describe pibroch performance, became prescriptive, mainly because of the competitive setting in which pibroch has been nurtured. The emphasis



on competition has ultimately resulted, whether deliberately or otherwise, in standardisation and the rigidity of pibroch performance.

Competition is a most artificial means for preserving pibroch, as it narrows the natural variability which would occur in an oral tradition, to a particular style which will win a competition. In such a climate pibroch cannot develop freely but only proceed in a fashion where all performance is predictable and imitative and where the most variable factors relate to technical features of performance.

The nature of pibroch survival cannot properly be described as the preservation or survival of a tradition. A true musical tradition, conveyed by musicians, can only proceed and develop where musical freedom exists. In evolution or development, in art as in other fields, change is often more valuable than the *status quo*, or extinction is likely to occur. When the traditional forms of music and song are in close association with the communities in which they arose, (and this implies a relatively unselfconscious performance style,) it provides a rich basis from which to develop in other stylistic directions. For example, which Gaelic, or even English speaker could feel at ease singing a Marjory Kennedy Fraser setting of a Gaelic song with the knowledge that it was created for an audience outside Gaelic Scotland and is not regarded as genuine in the society from which it sprang? If the original setting was known, however, the arranged setting might be more palatable with the knowledge that the original setting was extant as a reference to which to return to when required. In the same way, many of the pibrochs which are performed in what I call the modern or 'art style' may be beautiful pieces of music. But, because the original traditional styles were altered and in many cases disguised, the art style will never represent satisfying music for the Gaelic speaker with an insight into his or her musical idiom. The same may be true for many more pibroch players and listeners who have not had access to this idiom.

Some of the conclusions of earlier scholars have been vindicated by this study. There are a number of areas of research which this thesis only touches on but which are worth pursuing. There are upwards of fifty pibrochs which can probably be identified with Gaelic song(s). To quote a particular numerical figure for this amount is obviously deceptive because, as has been shown in this study, so many melodic variants exist in the pibroch tradition. Research is therefore required which will identify

common melodic and rhythmic motifs so as to provide more information on the extent and nature of the pibroch repertoire as well as of manners of pibroch composition. Another closely related area which requires research concerns the titles of pibrochs. In a rich oral tradition, a number of similar melodies can have more than one pibroch title and, as has been shown in this thesis, the titles may have been associated with different events. This suggests that one pibroch may have been transmitted over a long period of time having been adapted functionally and musically to different events over this period.