
**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PIBROCH AND GAELIC SONG: ITS
IMPLICATIONS ON THE PERFORMANCE STYLE OF THE PIBROCH
URLAR.**

SUBMISSION FOR THE DEGREE OF MLitt. EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY
1995

INDEX.

INTRODUCTION.

| | |
|-------------------|--------|
| Abbreviations | Page 4 |
| Acknowledgements | Page 5 |
| Abstract | Page 6 |
| Analytical Method | Page 7 |
| Thesis | Page 8 |

CHAPTER 1 HISTORICAL

| | |
|---|---------|
| 1. 1 Historical: Use and Style. | Page 13 |
| 1. 2 Scholarship and Research. | Page 25 |
| 1. 3. The Pibroch and Song Relationship | Page 30 |

CHAPTER 2 SONG AND PIBROCH

| | |
|--|---------|
| 2. 1 Gaelic song and Pibroch: | |
| From oral to written. | Page 41 |
| 2. 2 Gaelic song and Pibroch notation: | |
| Common problems. | Page 53 |
| 2. 3 Later song collectors. | Page 78 |

CHAPTER 3. PIPE MUSIC: PROBLEMS OF NOTATION.

| | |
|---|----------|
| 3. 1. 1 Sources. | Page 88 |
| 3. 1. 2 Salient features. | Page 89 |
| 3. 2 Campbell syllabic notation. | Page 92 |
| 3. 3 Joseph MacDonald. | Page 95 |
| 3. 4. 1 Cadences. | Page 97 |
| 3. 4. 2 Cadences: Chronological change. | Page 103 |
| 3. 5 Na Crahinin | Page 112 |

CHAPTER 4. FIDDLE AND OTHER SOURCES Page 117

CASE STUDIES.

| | |
|---|----------|
| 6 x. Cumha Mhic an Tòisich MacIntosh's Lament. | Page 122 |
| 4 z. Bodaich nam Briogais Carles with the Breeks. | Page 163 |
| 5 z. Alba Bheadarrach Battle of Sheriffmuir. | Page 180 |
| 1 A. A'Ghlas Mheur The Fingerlock. | Page 197 |

| | | | |
|--------|---|----------------------------------|----------|
| 25. | Cholla mo Rùn | Piper's Warning to his Master. | Page 215 |
| 109/6. | March for a Beginner. | | Page 223 |
| 87. | Cumha Choire an Easa | Corrienessan's Lament. | Page 229 |
| 38. | Iseabail NicAoidh | Isabel MacKay | Page 235 |
| 79. | Moladh Moraig | In Praise of Morag. | Page 243 |
| 98/10 | Cumha Tighearna Bhràghaid Albann! Lord Breadalbane's Lament. | | Page 249 |
| 11 | Gabhaidh Sinne Rathad Mór We will take the High Road. | | Page 258 |
| 12. | Cumha nam Bràithrean | Brothers' Lament. | Page 262 |
| | Chapter 5. | Conclusions and Recommendations. | Page 268 |
| | BIBLIOGRAPHY | | Page 275 |
| | APPENDIX A | | Page 287 |

1. Glas
2. Cholla
3. Iseabail
4. Bodaich
5. Alba
6. MacInnes
7. Morag
8. Coire
9. Breadal
10. March
11. Rathad
12. Bràithrean.

A deannadh na a tha simplidh
 comharrach - tha sin cumanta
 A deannadh na comharrach
 Simplidh - ar sin eolach.

ABBREVIATIONS USED

Other abbreviations are specified within each case study.

| | |
|-----------|--|
| AnG. | An Gàidheal, periodical. |
| CC | Campbell Canntaireachd. {Nether Lorn Canntaireachd} |
| CG. | Carmina Gadelica Vols 1-6 Alexander Carmichael. |
| Ch. | Chapter. |
| CMg. | Celtic Magazine October 1875-1888. |
| CMo. | Celtic Monthly. October 1892-1917. |
| CS. | Case Study. |
| CW.Ms. | Carmichael Watson Ms collection |
| Ed. | Edited. |
| EUL. | Edinburgh University Library. |
| FFSU. | Folksongs and Folklore of South Uist |
| GnaB. | Guth na Bliadhna. |
| GUL. | Glasgow University Library. |
| HebFS. HF | Hebridean Folksongs. |
| Mclg. | The Maclagan collection. |
| NLS | National Library of Scotland. |
| PS. | Piobaireachd Society. |
| PT. | Piping Times, periodical. (1948-) |
| SSS. | School of Scottish Studies. |
| SGTS. | Scottish Gaelic Texts Society. |
| SH. | Scottish Highlander, newspaper. |
| SO. | Sàr Obair nam Bàrd Gaelach see <u>MacKenzie, John.</u> |
| TGSI. | Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness. 1872- |
| Unpub. | Unpublished. |
| n. p. | No place. |
| n. d. | No date. |

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

Thanks to the John MacFadyen Trust for funding and making this research possible. Thanks also to The Scottish Arts Council, The Highland Fund, Skye and Lochalsh District Council for additional funding. To my supervisors, Peter Cooke and Morag MacLeod; to Frans Buisman for reading drafts and for comments and criticism; to Roderick Cannon for information and to Annette Kempf for checking final draft.

Finally, to Angela and Kate MacEachen for help and patience.

'I cannot caricature the warlike music of my country by publishing this specimen. If bagpipe music is reduced to this, let it die, and leave us to cherish its memory as an unmatched warlike national instrument.'

Lieut. Campbell (1862) on contemporary performance of 'Cill-a-Chrìosd.'

ABSTRACT

The pibroch tradition evolved in Gaelic society in close association with the Gaelic song tradition and because of this, the ideal performance style of pibroch should be based on a knowledge of traditional Gaelic song and the language rhythms therein. A number of pibrochs exist which have Gaelic song poetry associated with them and on the basis of this, the salient features which link the two idioms are identified, discussed and analysed.

The study is broadly broken down into four sections. The first three chapters form the Introduction and consist of, firstly, a discussion of historical context and previous scholarship. The second chapter looks at the pibroch-song relationship. The third chapter concentrates on the music sources and specific features of their notation. Finally, twelve case studies compare specific pibrochs with their song versions. Each case study has its own conclusion the whole of which is followed by an overall conclusion at the end of the thesis. An audio tape accompanies the case studies and is referred to at specific points in the course of the text.

The style which is recommended in this study is representative of a style of playing which is more identifiable with mid eighteenth century Gaelic Society and culture than the present day, predominantly English speaking, one. The audio-recordings which accompany the texts are based both on the evidence from the song rhythms and the earliest notated pibroch sources. This thesis vindicates previous research which suggests that playing styles have changed over the last two hundred or so years but goes much further and shows that, in many instances, the performance style has changed dramatically.

ANALYTICAL METHOD:

The method which has been adopted is as follows. Notated setting(s) of pibrochs are compared with transcriptions made from audio recordings of their Gaelic song version(s).

The relationships which exist between the two idioms are easier to observe by setting out the pibroch version, as originally notated, above the transcribed version of the song performance. Where the pibroch version is also available in the Campbell Canntaireachd, this is also displayed underneath the pipe version for comparison. Where more than one pibroch or song version assists in explaining particular features, these are all included.

In some cases, the pibroch has been notated for other instruments like ^{such as} fiddle and piano and where these versions have particular characteristics which are relevant to the pibroch-song relationship, they are also used.

An outline transcription made by the author is used to exemplify the salient features of the style of playing. An audio tape will accompany the thesis for each case study. These recordings will appear as follows:

Present day performance of the pibroch.

Related song version(s),

Author's own performance.

Where a recording of the present day pibroch style is not available, then a recording is made in what is perceived, by the author, to be the accepted style of today.

The case studies vary in length from the longer case studies 1-4 to relatively shorter studies. These later studies identify the essential features without having to reiterate features which are discussed in the introduction and are found to be common to many of the tunes. Each case study has its own conclusion which is followed by an overall conclusion at the end of the thesis.

THESIS

→ Introductory chapter.

The Scottish pibroch tradition has been dependent on the competition system for its preservation, ever since the first competition held by the Highland Society of London in 1781¹.

The effects of the continued patronage of the Highland Societies of London and Scotland, with their attempts to standardise pibroch by awarding cash prizes to those who could notate the music 'scientifically' (Cooke 1987, MacInnes 1989), as well as the influences of other competition patrons has, over time, resulted in a standardised style of pibroch playing with little variation in melodic or rhythmic style. Such variation is the hallmark of a healthy musical tradition.

This study attempts to show that present day pibroch style, which is generally believed to represent the culmination of an authoritative and dependable aural transmission through specific 'schools' of piping has changed quite dramatically.² Each generation of pupils is said to have identified with a particular 'master' from whom, it is assumed, the genuine style has been retained. When attempts are made to define the styles, they frequently depend on pedantic assumptions or beliefs which have been created within the competitive environment and which, in the view of the writer, have no major musical relevance.³

The argument that the style has changed is not a new one. Cooke, (1972) in his seminal article on Maol Donn, quotes from a variety of writers who,

1 The first was held in Falkirk in 1781, but in 1783 and thereafter, it was held in Edinburgh where it was patronised by the Highland Society of Scotland. This continued annually until 1826 and then triennially until 1844. (Campbell 1948, MacInnes 1989) The Highland Society of London may have been formed in response to the setting up of the Gaelic Society of London in 1777. (CMg. 1877 vol 2 p. 362.) But see MacInnes (1989) for further detailed information.

2 See Cannon 1988: 81

3 For instance one or two features which separate the 'Cameron school' from the 'John MacDonald school' concern the introductory Es of pibrochs. It is said that the Camerons had a particular rule that, when the E goes on to a themal low A it is played long, but when played onto a low G it is played short. (Information from Mr. Andrew MacNeill, Isle of Colonsay) There are many other examples of one particular school holding a particular note in a phrase where the other cut but the overall effect on the musical performance style is small.

in the early years of this century, were complaining about contemporary playing style. In the same article, he suggests that the modern ways of playing pibroch differ from an earlier style of playing which was rhythmically and melodically closely associated with Gaelic song. This thesis will demonstrate that this is indeed the case. It will also vindicate the statement that

'pibroch as it was played then presented fewer problems of rhythm and phrasing than it does today and was more easily understood'. (Cooke 1972: 41)

This was because the method of oral/aural transmission of this idiom was set in the context of the pipers' own language and culture and free from the patronage of an unfamiliar, non Gaelic, English speaking culture. This method of transmission was subsequently undermined by pibroch publications notated in a standard European format. ^{These publications were} This was a useful mnemonic for the piper who was now able to refer to one or more melodic settings, provided one ignored the deceptive notated rhythm. The difficulties of interpretation, which the present day musicologist might perceive in the manuscript and published sources, are derived as much from his or her separation from the socio-cultural setting in which the music developed as from the shortcomings of transcription techniques. This separation can be closely associated with the cultural upheaval which occurred in the Gaelic speaking Highlands in the post-Culloden years. Pibroch was transplanted from Gaelic culture where it had a more functional role rather than the more contrived Lowland setting of stage performance in competition. The evidence is amplified by the existence of a range of variant styles and versions implied in the different pibroch collections. But, despite this evidence of a rich and complex web of melodies and variants, pibroch notation and, by implication, pibroch style, has become exceedingly standardised. Cannon (1980: 49) states:

'Thus we can now see in the variant readings the kind of latitude which the great pipers of the past were prepared to allow themselves in forming their own personal styles. At present all players are agreed as to settings, and every last grace note is held sacred.'

Buisman, in a series of detailed analyses, (see bibliography), has also implied that the styles of playing have altered.

The evidence of scholarly research shows that pibroch performance style has changed quite dramatically over the last two hundred years. However, analysis and comparison of historical transcriptions alone are not enough to inform us of the nature of pibroch performance unless the notation is set in the context of song and language rhythms. (This observation is made with the understanding that however exactly one attempts to notate music, it can never be more than an approximation. (Brailoiu 1984: xv))

This thesis rests on the assumption that if one is to find the genuine style for a piece of instrumental music in a nation's traditional musical idiom, it is necessary to consult and compare the song sources where they exist. For example, Petrie (1855: x) in his introduction makes an interesting comment on the versions of airs played by harpers and instrumentalists:

'Except in the case of tunes of a purely instrumental character, I have found such authorities usually the least to be trusted, and that it was only from the chanting of vocalists, who combined words with the airs, that settings could be made which would have any stamp of authenticity.'

Other musicians and writers stress the importance of the links between song and language in music which have the same implications as the above statement. (See Ch.1.3). In a society such as Gaelic Scotland instrumental music was probably quite isolated from European musical influences.⁴ In this respect, one would expect that the rhythms of instrumental music would be closely associated with the language. It was probably not until the Scottish regiments began to use the pipes in a professional sense, which led to the development of regularly timed marches and other categories, that the repertoire, for the most part, became a purely instrumental one. A study of the earlier 'light music' collections such as Angus MacKay's Piper's Assistant shows that a great number of tunes had Gaelic words to them which are still known at the present day, and it is also likely that just as many words to tunes have been lost in transmission. It would be wrong to state that all pibroch melodies or

⁴ Joan Rimmer in her Cramb Lecture, Glasgow University, 3.05.90 showed how such tunes as The King's Taxes and Lament from the Earl of Antrim are metrically similar to some of Arbeau's dance tunes of 1588 (Langres, Dijon, France) which were there called 'Branles d'Escoffe'. The implication is that the pibrochs were performed much more rapidly than the present day style and may have represented some form of dance tune in the Scottish Highlands.

From her evidence, she suggested that.....

tunes in 'light music' were based on particular Gaelic songs. For example I consider that tunes such as The Unjust Incarceration and Flame of Wrath for Squinting Patrick were probably purely instrumental in origin. What is important to realise, however, is that the rhythms which would be used in purely instrumental compositions would, for the most part, be ones with which the composers were familiar. These familiar rhythms would exist in the Gaelic language and as will be seen in this study, the basic conventions and embellishments which, in many cases, later became more technically complex, are also to be found in the rhythms of the language.

complex
of pibroch
+ music

and not so easily identifiable with language rhythm & song

There are, therefore, some pertinent questions to be considered with regard to the present style of pibroch performance. Why is it that, although pibroch emerged and developed in a Gaelic speaking society in Scotland, where the majority of pibrochs are recognisable by their Gaelic folk titles, this music, today, has little rhythmic affinity with the Gaelic song tradition? The rich rhythmic textures which are to be found throughout Gaelic song are not to be found in present day pibroch performance.⁵ Why is it that a great many of the pibroch tunes which have been notated and are published at present, are rarely heard except when they are chosen as set, test pieces for competition? Could it be that the functional music of a previous culture is no longer appealing to twentieth century society, or could it be that the written scores are too detailed and prescriptive or just too open to misinterpretation? (This is a fundamental problem throughout music.)

A recent article by a prominent prize winner which gave advice on learning pibrochs stated:

'Memorisation at this stage takes days or weeks. But within a year or two the technique becomes more automatic and the tunes start to make a bit of sense'.⁶

I suggest that something has gone wrong with the pibroch tradition when it takes a year or two for a piece of music to appear to make sense? Is it

⁵ For example, Cooke (1972: 54) writes of the 'delicate interrelationship of language, rhythm and melody in Gaelic song' while describing the singing style of Kate MacDonald of South Uist.

⁶ See the Canadian Journal 'Piper and Drummer' May 1994 Vol 11 issue 3, 'Piobaireachd: What's in it for You?' by Jim McGillivray, Clasp winner.

possible that a highly selective oral tradition would retain and transmit music which is now so difficult to learn and perform in this century? It is a truism to state that tunes must have been memorable for them to have survived. One might ^S^Csuspect that the modern pibroch player has lost the ability to learn and retain this music as we assume many of our forebears were able to do. ^{expand with evidence?} This thesis, however, will help to demonstrate how one can learn a pibroch *ùrlar* in a relatively much shorter time than at the present day because of the identification of and greater empathy between rhythm, melody and tempo. It is argued here that present day performance, at least as it is heard in competition, is memorable more for its lack of rhythm and melody than for inspirational musical qualities.

So what has gone wrong with the tradition?

I suggest that pibroch's divorce from the rhythms of the Gaelic language and its adaptation to a predominantly English speaking rhythm, with a subsequent greater dependence on the written scores (see also Cooke 1987) has left the modern pibroch player unable to interpret pibroch in the way in which it was originally intended to be performed. Its patronage and 'preservation' through a competitive system has meant that many alternative settings and styles have been 'ironed out' in order to set a standard for judging.

Standardisation has resulted in a predictable performance style which can be summed up by referring to one anonymous correspondent to the Oban Times who stated:

'The majority of the musicians are, I am afraid, conventional and convention in art is the end of all things is it not?' ('Early Celtic Music' 14/9/1895)