

A Piobaireachd Sampler

■ by Jimmy McIntosh, MBE

MY LAST ARTICLE ON "GLENAR-ry's March" brought many positive comments, even from pipers who do not play the tune. This is very important to me, as I often wonder what subjects I can write about that will be both interesting and informative. For this issue, I had some questions and requests to which I want to respond.

THE BATTLE OF AULDEARN

The first question, concerning "The Battle of Auldearn #1" (Book 2, p. 45*), was whether all cadences are played the same in all tunes. My response is no! The inquisitor competed with this tune and was penalized for cutting the E in the cadences in the variations. In earlier articles, I stated that cadences are part of the rhythmic melody and should be blended in accordingly. In "Auldearn #1," the cadences should be played with the emphasis down from

the initial E to the B or C theme note; i.e., they should be played with the E shorter than would normally be played in a three note cadence. Note that they are not written as three note cadences in this tune. The competitor should not have been penalized.

MACLEOD'S CONTROVERSY

Another question dealt with "MacLeod's Controversy" (Book 10, p. 282). This is a Donald Mor MacCrimmon composition, and the movement known as the Donald Mor rundown is played throughout the ground. The questioner played this with an open D position (i.e., the little finger on and three fingers off, as in a light-music D) and was told that this was wrong — that the movement should be played with just the D finger off. While the rundown is commonly played with just the D finger off, this is not mandatory. Both the competitor and her teacher were equally correct in playing the full open D. The competitor should not have been penalized for playing it open.

"MacLeod's Controversy" has a strong 4/4 pulse throughout and should be played quite lively. I learned this tune from Angus MacKay's book (*A Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd or Highland Pipe Music*, Edinburgh, 1838) before it was published by the Piobaireachd Society. In MacKay's book, it is written with a slight difference from the Society setting in the Crunluath variation, where the B crunluaths are not closed to low G to correspond with the B taorluaths. While MacKay's is an acceptable setting, I have not seen it duplicated in any other book or manuscript, and I advise people to conform to the Society

setting and play the movement closed.

In the Piobaireachd Society editorial notes, the origin and nature of this so-called "controversy" is given as described by Angus MacKay: "Donald Gorm of Sleat married the sister of Sir Rory MacLeod of Harris, but first 'repudiated' and then divorced her, and married the sister of Kenneth MacKenzie, Lord of Kintail. MacLeod, taking this as an insult, invaded Donald Gorm's lands in Skye. Donald Gorm retaliated by invading Harris, and a series of raids and counter-raids ensued which ruined both countries and reduced the inhabitants to starvation. The culmination was a battle in 1601 in the Cuillin hills in which the MacDonalds were successful, but with great losses to both sides. After this, a reconciliation was effected by Angus MacDonald of Kintyre, the laird of Coll and others, and peace endured thereafter. Donald Mor MacCrimmon composed three tunes, this one, and a Salute to each of the combatants, both of which are recorded by Angus MacKay, Nos. 15 and 19 in his published book. The MacDonalds' Salute was played as a welcome to Donald Gorm when he arrived at Dunvegan for the celebration banquet."

EARL OF SEAFORTH'S SALUTE

Another tune in which there are acceptable alternative finger positions is "The Earl of Seaforth's Salute" (Book 5, p. 135), where the run-up from F to high G to high A occurs. I was taught to play this high G in the normal light-music manner in the run-up, but closed elsewhere in the tune, as in Figure 1. I was never penalized for doing this, and was assured by Bob Brown that this was the way he had been taught

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*All tune references, unless noted otherwise, are to the Piobaireachd Society (*Piobaireachd*, books 1-15, edited by The Piobaireachd Society, 1925-1990).

I GROUND



FIG 2



FIG 3

II VAR. 1.



FIG 4



FIG 5

and played it himself.

I teach students many of these alternatives in tunes, but they are reluctant to play them in competition, as they might be penalized for making "mistakes." This is probably the most negative aspect of competition. We are, through lack of knowledge, thinning our music down to one common setting of each tune. This is exactly what the first piping competitors predicted when they were confronted with judges who sat with a book in front of them, and who only knew the book setting.

THE VAUNTING

Moving on, I had a request for an explanation of "The Vaunting" (Book 7, p. 193). This tune is being offered more frequently by competitors and we should be conversant with it. "The Vaunting" is a "boasting" tune and must be played with boldness and confidence. There is a specific technique to playing the tune. In Figure 2, I have given you the Urlar as written by the Piobaireachd Society, and in Figure 3, I have written the Urlar as I would portray it. You will notice that the cadential E's are strong theme notes and the dotted B's are shortened.

In Variation I, there is an alternative to



FIG 6

Bar 1 which was most often played. In Figure 4, I have given the Society setting and in Figure 5, the alternative setting.

In Variation I doubling, the same change is made in Bar 1 as in the singling, and the tempo should be lifted a little. Variation I trebling is as written and again the tempo should be lifted. This variation moves along briskly.

In Figure 6, I have shown the Taorluath and Crunluath singling as it would be played. A Taorluath-a-mach and Crunluath-a-mach should also be played.

Angus MacKay's book and Donald MacDonald's manuscript (1812) are the records in which this tune is to be found. The Gaelic name is firmly established, but English translations of it differ. A favorite version in the lists of competitors at the old com-

petitions described in Angus MacKay's book was "The Rage of Drunkenness," although "The Vaunting" was also used. Angus MacKay, in his historical note, remarks that the occasion on which this "boasting" took place has never been ascertained satisfactorily. Donald MacDonald has a tale that the composer, Ronald MacDonald of Morar, made the tune as a lament for a sick friend "by request," and played it to the supposed dying youth, who was so delighted that he made a complete recovery. When asked later what was to be done about his lament, the youth replied, "We'll make a Boalich of it," which, MacDonald added, signified drollery. ■

If you have a particular topic or question you would like me to discuss in future columns, please drop a note to the Editor.