

The following notes are from the piobaireachd judges' seminar held on 3 April 2013 to discuss the set tunes. They are published in the hope that they will be of some interest to competing pipers and others. They should, however, be regarded only as the output from an informal discussion and neither as a complete and authoritative analysis of the tunes nor as a set of directions on how they should be played. Likewise, the sources listed should not be taken to be comprehensive.

There are sound clips of some of the tunes, illustrating possible ways of playing them, in the members' section of the Piobaireachd Society's website at www.piobaireachd.co.uk

Alan Forbes

Music Committee Secretary

In Praise of Morag

PS 1 p22; K p63; Binneas p23

In the ground, there are various ways of presenting the cadence 'E's. Some pipers do not alter the lengths of these notes at all; others make liberal use of changing the durations, but mostly in a structured way. Additionally, some pipers play the first cadence E in line 2 long. This is noted by Archibald Campbell in 'Sidelights on the Kilberry Book of Ceol Mor', where the entire note on this tune is devoted to discussion of the cadence E's, although the tune will in all probability be affected at least as much by the musical presentation of the phrases as by the treatment of these notes.

There are several different ways of presenting the first variation and doubling, perhaps the two most common being to play the three-note combinations fairly evenly but with a slight emphasis on the first note, or to play a sustained first note followed by short second and third notes of equal duration.

A crunluath a mach would be expected in this tune.

A recording of John Burgess playing the tune can be heard on sound clips page

The Prince's Salute

PS 1 p36; K p95; Binneas p29

This tune was described by PM Donald MacLeod as '... one of the greatest tunes in the Gaelic idiom'.

In addition to PS, K and Binneas, there are settings in Donald MacDonald Volume 1, Donald MacPhee, David Glen and Angus Mackay's MS. All settings are similar to a greater or lesser extent so far as the main lines of the tune are concerned, but there are considerable diversities in the detailed notation. The three main differences are likely to occur are:

(1) the E grace notes on low G and low A in bars 2, 4 and elsewhere of the Urlar and Variation 1 and doubling in PS and K are shown as high G in other settings. This is really a matter of personal style and taste, the E having a softer effect and the high G a sharper effect, but both are acceptable.

(2) the 'high GF' cadences at the end of each line in the Urlar and singlings of the other variations in PS and K are played by most pipers. Other settings differ, however, Angus Mackay and Donald MacDonald showing a single high G grace note on E instead of the cadence. Other combinations with good authority include: 'high GF' in the Urlar but not in the variations; 'high GF' in the Urlar and Variation 1 but not in the taorluath and crunluath singlings. Competitors would be advised to state which combinations they intend playing if different from the PS and K settings.

When playing the 'high GF' cadences, the duration of the F can vary considerably between different players, according to their tastes.

(3) Variation 1 and doubling are usually played 'up', but might equally be played 'down' to good musical effect by reversing the 'cutting and dotting' in appropriate couplets. Within these alternatives many different subtleties of expression are possible.

The notes in PS 1 are comprehensive in detailing the minor differences between settings.

A crunluath a mach would be expected in this tune.

Isabel Mackay

PS 6 p182; K p13; Binneas p55

The main sources of the tune are Angus Mackay's published book and Donald MacDonald's MS (where it has the title 'Battle of Maolroy) and it appears in many other collections. It is unlikely to be heard significantly differently from the PS version, which is essentially that of Angus Mackay. In Mackay's book, there is a minor stylistic difference between the ground and thumb variations in the treatment of the Es which are shown as cadences in PS 6, but given note values in Mackay.

Some suggestions regarding the tempo of the variations and timing of some quavers are given in 'Further Sidelights on the Kilberry Book of Ceol Mor'.

There are different ways of timing the crunluath doubling, some preferring a smooth five pulse rhythm while others will give strong emphasis to the theme notes and shorten the intervening notes.

Donald MacDonald's version is a simpler affair with a ground and first variation, but no thumb variation, while the taorluath and crunluath doublings do not change from the singlings except in the last bar of each line. This version is unlikely to find favour with competitors.

Lady MacDonald's Lament

PS 8 p243; K p75; Binneas p34

A beautiful and fairly familiar tune, composed by Angus MacArthur , and appearing also in Angus Mackay's and David Glen's collections. The main difference is that MacArthur times the doubling of the ground in 6/8 as opposed to common time in PS 8. Whichever approach is taken it is important not to allow this variation to become too slow and monotonous.

Another difference is in bar 4 line 2 of that variation, where MacArthur and Glen have a long B followed by a very short low G, and Binneas has an E grace note on low G and no B at all.

A fairly long tune which requires concentration so as not to miss small potential traps, such as the appearance of a D in the last bar of lines 1 and 2 of the taorluath and crunluath singlings, whereas there is no D in the doublings.