

Set Tunes for the Senior Competitions in 2014

The following notes are from the piobaireachd judges' seminar held on 17 November 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
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Donald Gruamach's March

PS 2 p71; K p76

There are various ways of timing the ground. Examples of recordings include Andrew Wright (PS website), Donald MacPherson (CD: 'A Living Legend'), Kenneth MacDonald (CD: 'The Sound of Kintail'). All play the Alexander Cameron version of the ground i.e. without the crunluaths, as in Kilberry; all time it slightly differently.

The Angus Mackay setting with the crunluaths in the ground, as in the main score in PS2, is also popular. Brown and Nicol taught the tune with the crunluaths, but they had other slight differences from that shown in PS2, namely: in line 3 bar 5 of the ground they had a three- note cadence instead of a G grace note, and the final two bars were played the same as the final two in line 2.

The Thumb variation might be effective played fairly openly, i.e. not cutting the 'cut' notes too aggressively. Brown and Nicol taught that the opening 4 bars were the same as the following 4 bars but ending with a B, not C, cadence. The siubhal may be played 'up' or 'down'. A crunluath a mach would normally be expected, even although the tune is a long one.

The Red Speckled Bull

PS 4 p105; K p30

Angus Mackay's is the main setting. Donald MacDonald has C grip C instead of B grip C in the ground. The tune needs to be kept moving along with lots of contrast between variations and care should be taken not to allow it to fall into strict one-bar phrases. A good bagpipe is essential as the tune is really a demonstration of instrument and technique rather than a melodic piece. There are recordings on the PS website by Angus MacColl and Malcolm MacRae.

Lament for the Union

PS 6 p190; K p53

Sensitive expression of the ground will be critical in this tune, for example the bar with the three- note groupings in the last line.

R U Brown explains the method of approaching the variations on the 'Masters of Piobaireachd' CD, volume 4. They are timed in 2/4 ('firm in 2s'), 3/4 (strong, medium, strong) and common time (strong, medium, medium, strong). Slight increases in tempo in progressing through each of these might be desirable.

Donald MacPherson recorded the tune on his CD 'A Living Legend'.

Nameless 'Cherede Darievea'

PS 8 p227; K p69

A long testing piece, again requiring an excellent bagpipe with a good high G. The ground is beautiful, but the variations could become tedious if not treated with care.

The first two bars of line 3 of the ground are at the end of line 2 in the canntaireachd, and musically they seem to make more sense treated like that than the way they are represented in PS 8.

The first variation is shown played 'down' but could equally be played 'up'.