

Chair Peter McCalister

My job today ladies and gentlemen is to introduce Murray Henderson who is going to talk on preparation for competition. This is a man who John Wilson would say “He needs no introduction”. Luckily there are a large number of photographs of Murray on the web, mainly in the company of his very talented wife and daughters.

Murray has told me that he wants this talk to be interactive. It is not really a talk. So the first question to you all is – guess what age Murray Henderson is in that photograph? But obviously he started young.



Murray comes from Timaru in New Zealand. I’ve been to New Zealand, and I often wonder why anyone would want to leave such a lovely country. Presumably the reason Murray left was this. Anybody know whose Clasps these might be? Auctioned in 2010 in North America. Take a guess.

John MacDonald? Yes John MacDonald of Inverness. Anybody like to hazard a guess auction price? - \$3000. So Murray, if you are ever short of cash...

If you google Murray Henderson you get a lot of funny photographs. This is one of Murray fending off Rab Wallace to win the clasp in 1983. You also get this one which is a bit weird. I really never knew that Murray was a card carrying member of the Conservative party.

He did say when I was speaking to him earlier - no heckling. This is Murray fending off the last heckler. Anyway that is enough introduction. Please give a very warm welcome to champion pipier, bagpipe maker, all round top guy, Murray Henderson.

Murray Henderson

Thank you Peter. And good morning everyone.

Competition preparation. It is a topic which is very dear to me heart. It is probably so dear to me that I ended up competing for most of my life, and I had a lot of fun doing so.

So, let me take you back to my beginning. I learnt pipes at a young age. My father was my first tutor, and I was about 5 years of age. And my father was just such a patient man. He had to be. He taught me the principles of playing slowly and correctly. They really were the foundations which would stand me in such good stead over my piping career. I didn’t realise how important they were at the time, but on reflection it was absolutely wonderful to be taught correctly, right from day one.

After a couple of years, Dad asked Donald Bain if he would take me on from here. Donald is a name which came up this morning in a previous talk. To me, this was a master stroke, because Donald really shaped my piping career. He continued strengthening the foundations which my father had built. For those of you here who remember Donald, who came here in ‘67/68, then back in the 70’s

and early 80's to complete, I think you will recall the perfectionist, always striving. He kept a really good bagpipe, and he had musical flair. And these again were principles that he instilled in me at an early age. As a tutor, he was very strict. To be honest I wasn't aware of any other approach. If something is worth doing, well then, it was worth doing properly. It was about a four hour round trip to Donald's from where we lived, and we are talking late 50's period when travel was much more difficult. At that time, it was quite a major excursion.

So lessons were monthly. The lesson would last between two and two and a half hours. Remember I was quite young at that stage. The first section would always be on the practice chanter, light music. Embellishments – how to treat them, how to treasure them, because they are going to be with you for your life. Second half of the lesson, on to the pipes, cover the light music, then go on to piobaireachd. In terms of repertoire Donald didn't force me. I was left to run at my own pace. Initially it would be a new tune – when I talk about a tune I'm talking about a piobaireachd. A new tune once in while, to make sure you had a firm grasp of the subject. Latterly we would maybe get two tunes. But the deal was, with Donald, always make sure you are prepared. No point in coming along half-baked. You were there for a serious lesson. It was a serious subject. And the more seriously you took it, the more fun you had. Because it is quite easy to get hung up in the competitive thing. But what are we trying to do? We are trying to make music, we are trying to have fun.

So everything goes hand in hand. Donald had sailed from New Zealand to Scotland, with his wife and two very young children. So from rural New Zealand, to Glasgow, we are talking about a pretty big contrast here. Donald had lived in a purpose built new house at the farm he worked on. He came to a tenement in Glasgow. We are talking big contrasts here, big sacrifice. All in the quest of trying to better his musical appreciation.

I too sailed to Scotland. I arrived in 1973 as a lot of you know. I was twenty years of age, intending to stay for two years. The longest two years of my life. I became immersed in the piping culture. I got the bug. We probably have all got it, something we have all got in common here today. We are just so interested and passionate about the subject.

In 1973 there were no graded competitions. Yes there were the former winner events at Oban and Inverness. You had the Silver Chanter, the Bratach. But at that time, when you turned 18 you went into the Open. And that meant playing against all the great pipers, and there were a lot. It was hard going. I remember being inspired, I remember being in awe, of the quality of playing I was hearing, and I had been fortunate to hear Donald on a regular basis, an other New Zealand pipers who had acquitted themselves well in Scotland. You had Alan Dodds for instance, who was over here in the 50's. He played very well. Lewis Turrell, the first non Scot to win the Gold Medal. So I was accustomed to hearing good playing. But when I got to Scotland there were just so many great players. It didn't take me very long to realise that I would have to work my socks off if I wanted to make my way in Open competition, in Scotland.

I think all pipers are trying to improve their standard. It doesn't matter whether you are a social piper, or perhaps playing in the amateur league, for the CLASP, in the CPA graded events, or even playing in the clasp at the Northern Meeting. One thing we all have in common is that we are all trying to improve our standard. And there is no doubt in my mind that the serious practiced playing will enable every piper to improve their standard.

I don't think that we should get too hung up on competing. I think more accurately we should be thinking about the art of performing to capacity in public when under pressure. Because that is what we are doing. Yes it may be a competition, but the challenge is the challenge to yourself. The ability to play to your capacity when the going gets pretty hot. It is only thing that we have to trouble over. Yes if it is a competition there will be a prize list. The competitor has no say in that. That's up to the judges. And we should remember that what appeals to one judge might not necessarily appeal to another judge. Sometimes as a performer we know why, sometimes we don't know why. It is the nature of the beast.

So rather than think about preparing for a competition, I think we should be looking for personal bests. And if you get into a routine to try to play to the best of your ability every time you play, gradually your standard will improve.

Now as Peter said, I'm very happy for this to be interactive, and if anybody has questions at any time, please feel free to ask.

Question - When you are practicing you are usually in a small room and you listen to your own playing. And when you come into a room this size you can hear it, but you can't hear what you are doing, so you don't know if you have gone off or not.

Murray Henderson

That's true. As public performers we have to deal with small rooms, large auditoriums. It is about training your ear to listen closely. Just because it is different, you sometimes get a shock. So, if you play in a large auditorium expect it to be different, so you won't say, oh, it doesn't sound as loud as it does in my lounge at home. We will come on to this a little bit later in terms of visualisation.

When I first came over, and really worked myself hard, I find myself, after 40 years and at the end of my career, I have to work harder still to try and maintain that standard. And that type of dedication isn't for everyone, there is a lot of time you spend in that practice room, always trying to be that little bit better every time that we take the pipes out.

So I see 5 main elements here. Technique, musicality, sound, tutor and self assessment and mental preparation.

This is only my take on it. I am only here to talk about a presentation of the ideas which work for me. Find out what works for you, but I see these as key elements. Do we think that we want to look at prioritising? Are we all quite happy to run with it or do we think that there is anything that should get a priority?

Peter McCallister. If you can't get the sound good, you are in trouble right from the start.

MH. That is a very good observation Peter.

Question from audience. Do you feel that proper technique itself has an effect on the musicality?

MH. Proper technique, again we will come to this later, but the brief answer is that the embellishments are there to enhance the musical line. If the embellishments aren't delivered

musically they will detract from the musical line. They might make the presentation quite jerky. The movements would be what I would call “spitty” rather than smooth fire.

So Peter is thinking sound, somebody else wonders about technique.

John Frater – you have to be comfortable with the sound that you have.

MH. Exactly. This is a sub-category. These are the categories that we can work through individually so some of the ideas that are coming up will be considered. At the minute I am looking to see if we want to prioritise an order.

So, let's go to this. I see the five categories as links in a chain. So my reasoning is, if we focus on one link, and not five links, we are going to have a weakness. If we are looking to improve our performance every time we have got to be taking all these links, and we have to be moving them up the ladder equally. Remember I talked about the foundations which my father built. I talked about Donald's instrument, I talked about his musical interpretation. So it will come as no surprise to you to see his picture here in my five links.

Technique at a high level has got to be flawless. But why shouldn't it be flawless at any level? When we teach a young player, we show them how to move their fingers correctly, we show them how to change cleanly from note to note, so in other words we are teaching them to be flawless pipers. OK, not everyone has the ability, or perhaps the time, or perhaps the tuition, to take that forward all the way through their career, but I love to see pipers making the most of their ability, wherever that sits on the ladder.

So how to make flawless technique? No short cuts this time. Practice chanter work. I tried a s a routine to do 30 minutes of every practice session on the practice chanter, practicing embellishments. Not playing tunes, practicing embellishments. Learning them slowly, then building in pace. Take them back, build them up, take them back, build them up, so that you always have total control of your movements.

Sometimes you might be teaching at a workshop and you might come to a student, and they are obviously having difficulty with their taorluath. So you say to them “Could you just play that slowly please?” And sometimes the reply is “No, I can't play it slowly, I can only play it fast”. So if you can't play it slowly, you can't play it correctly. So building day on day. So if you are, for instance, a social piper, if you spend 10 minutes a day working on basic technique your standard will improve.

I always like to be organised in my practice routines, and I like to think of my practice like a stepladder. I would rank my embellishments from best at the top to the weakest at the bottom. So that I know instantly what I had to work on hardest to raise my overall standard. Because remember, the very good players, let's say their level is here when they are having a good day, if they are having an off day their level might be up there – very close. You seldom ever hear a good player playing poorly. It is not a coincidence. They practice a lot.

Then you might come to the category of the player who, I'm going to say, blows hot and cold. When they are good, they are pretty up there. Not as high as the good player, but they are getting right up there, but they often have days when they are down here. They seldom have days when they are up here. So there is a huge spread in their actual performance.

So by having a stepladder you can see instantly where you are. You take your bottom rung and you work at it and you work at it. And all of a sudden, it has improved, but something else has replaced it, so you work on that. Ultimately you are looking to get your weakest movement on to your top rung. When that happens, you are going only one way. But imagine if we do an extension ladder, and then another one, so the challenge is always to try and be improving.

I always found it fun, a game, and the challenge was always “Can I be better tomorrow than I was today?” Or if I am playing 6 tunes, piobaireachd, in a practice session, can I make each one better than the previous one. So you are always setting yourself a challenge. What is the worst that might happen? You might fail. What’s the big deal? But on the other hand, you might succeed.

So we have got the step ladder. Consistency. Consistency happens because a set pattern has been followed. There has been hard work and a lot of fun doing it.

Choosing appropriate material. Now if for instance your darado is on the weak side there is very little point in competing with “The Bells of Perth”, because before you play the first line of the ground you have already disqualified yourself. If it is an edre, maybe lets not do the Blind Piper, you will be found out. Good pipers don’t get found out. They know that the material they are playing they can deliver. Most of these are good tunes to rehearse at home. We don’t want to shy away from them. We want to confront them, because the only way to improve them is to play them. So we trial them at home. Don’t go to a competition to try out material.

Record and assess. Recording devices are your friend and tell no lies. Many times I’ve had a session, and recorded it, thought it was sounding reasonably well, ok areas I might have improved on, but generally speaking it might have been going ok. You listen to your recording and, it could be depressing. But that is what it is. That is what it is like. Certainly when you are assessing your own performance you are probably more critical than the listener, because you know the areas that perhaps aren’t your strengths. But to record and assess is a fantastic thing to do, because it really keeps you on your toes all the time. It will also help put you under pressure, which will help you perform when you are actually competing or playing in public. Because with a recorder it is not just “having a practice”.

So these are the principles technique-wise that I think helped me. Always remember it is not how long you practice, it is the quality of the practice that you do. It is what I call smart practice. You’ve got half an hour – make sure you have total concentration all the time.

So as we were saying earlier, the embellishments are there to enhance the musical line. We come to the Taorluath variation. The delivery of the movement should be smooth and it should fit the rhythm of the tune. (Sings TS of Donald of Laggan). So the melody should be singing out and the movement is taking you to the next note, as opposed to (Sings same with crushed T movement). If the movements are not delivered well, the presentation won’t be smooth. It doesn’t matter if it is light music, piobaireachd or whatever. I would always sing my pieces when I am playing them. So the rhythm you are singing the embellishments should be the rhythm that you are performing.

Do we have any issues on technique?

Roderick Cannon. Murray, I find your comments very very encouraging, and I am not a competing piper at all. If I play in public, I am playing usually for an audience of not even pipers. But they may

be very good musicians in their own way. They know what they are listening to, and sometimes, even if they don't know what they are listening to, on a good day, they can sense if they are hearing some music which is good, so they might want to hear it again, so I find it encouraging to hear that, at all levels, you can in fact sometimes deliver.

MH Absolutely, and you have a smoothness of delivery.

RC I've discovered, relatively late on, that playing piobaireachd in public can be a much greater success than you might imagine it to be. Even to us, piobaireachd is a slightly esoteric art, which you learn to appreciate, but if it is delivered smoothly and well in tune people may not know what is coming next but will often sense what is going on there is not quite the normal thing.

MH Piobaireachd is the way forward.

Allan Hamilton. How do you deliver the execution of taorluaths and crunluaths?

MH Generally speaking they are delivered in different manners, because often the hands that a player has determine how they are going to be delivered. I'm going to take a couple of examples here out of the air. Iain Morrison. Small man, little fingers. Pipe Major Angus MacDonald. Big man, big fingers. They delivered their movements in a different manner. Angus's movements tended to be more spread, and Iain's were neater and tighter I would say. Was one wrong and one right? Absolutely not. Iain's movements suited him, and he delivered them smoothly. Angus's movements suited him, and he delivered them smoothly.

I like to hear the movements breathe, but there is a fine line between too open and being deemed to being "amateurish". Again I think that it depends where you sit as a piper. I'm all for friendly movements. It doesn't matter if you are a youngster, or a mature learner, I like to give them time with their movements, so that they can get friendly with them, so that the movements will always be secure. If that means playing them slightly more open, that is fantastic. As they progress, the movements will come in a little bit, but the rhythm remains.

You might deliver movements differently in different types of tunes. In a lament, you might make sure that the movements aren't too snappy. 3rd variation of "the Children" (sings start) – so again it is in the delivery. Make sure that they sit nicely with what is around them.

Audience member. How do you deal with a situation where one hand goes through a movement at a different pace to the other hand?

MH – I'd put it on the bottom rung of my stepladder and I'd work at it. I would try and establish which hand was correct, and I'd work on the other hand. If it is a crunluath movement and the first section is tighter than the second part, or more likely vice versa, then I would work at practicing edre movements, and gracenotes nice and slowly. I'd take them back to the drawing board, and rebuild. It is going to take a while.

Tom Graham – If you are having difficulty with a movement and it is spoiling the tune, is it OK to drop that movement?

MH You want to do away with the bottom rung of the ladder don't you? One must persevere. You shouldn't be frightened of any movement. That's the fear factor I think. You are frightened that you

won't deliver it. So it needs to be taken back to a basic exercise and built so that you can take it gently. And not be apprehensive. Often we are apprehensive when we go to a certain movement. You have got to befriend that movement.

When I learned the taorluath scale, it was the only thing that I think that Donald Bain perhaps didn't handle as well as he might have. I think that many of us are probably in the same boat with this one. Taorluath on D – he said, now “this is the hard one”. Because you have to use the B finger. It is unusual to lift the B this high. And it stayed with me for ever. It was never on my bottom rung because Donald made sure it was never down there. And I recall when we had Faye learning the Taorluath scale, she was pretty small, we came to the D and I said to her, “Now Faye this is a bit different because we get to use our B finger.” (laughter)

So we can play mental games with ourselves. So don't be apprehensive. Say “here comes my friend, here it comes”.

Musicality

Sometimes you will hear the expression “clear round”. I'm not too comfortable with this one actually. What does it mean? Got from A to Z. What is that all about? There is a lot that should be going on. A clear round to me is no mistakes, technically good, and an instrument that stays in tune. That's a start, but in terms of musical interpretation it is sort of a poor start, isn't it, because there is so much more to it than that. Music will always have punctuation. We are very limited with the bagpipe. Constant sound, nine notes. The odds really are stacked against us. Good music, no matter what form it is, will always have punctuation. It was referred to earlier this morning as “scansion”.

I think about the value of notes, and colours. A clear round to me would be very black and white, lacking in character. I'm trying to think not “how long is this note”, or “how short is that note?” I'm trying to see colours. People ask “how long is this note in relation to that note?” and I answer “I'm not sure”. That's not how I think about it. I'll think about a conductor. I'll be singing it, and I'll be physically conducting it to myself. So when I come to a note that I want to talk to, I'll stretch it. When you stretch it, you have got to be careful about the release, because if you release it too quickly, like a piece of elastic, it will jump back, so all of a sudden you have a black note instead of a white note. I want to think about how I can join notes.

Probably what got me thinking about this more than ever before was having our daughter Fiona playing the fiddle in the house. And fiddlers is so fantastic at extracting music from pieces. They can do so much. They can play louder, they can play softer, they can play vibrato, but the thing they have got is that they can have got is their bowing arm, and the way that they can just gently slide from one note to another. It must be so nice to play pipe music on the fiddle, because you have got so many options open to you. I'm so envious of fiddlers. But, as with the piping, there are fiddlers and fiddlers. Some take a more regimented approach, and others who will milk it until it is dead.

So, again, colours. The lengthening of notes – sings fragment - I think conducting yourself helps notes to become part of the piece. I think as pipers we are often guilty of just looking at the piece from the outside. Check out the inside.

A performer who is at ease with the music will always have a good package. You can forget about styles. It is a package. It doesn't matter to me what style people play. Yes I was taught a very

special style which is precious to me, but when I'm listening to a performer, I want to be entertained. If someone is coming on and I know that they are going to play from a different score, I'm excited. Make music.

Musicality. Another link in the chain.

Question from audience. To what extent do you use singing to be at ease with the music?

MH Totally. I'm singing all the time, whether I am playing light music or piobaireachd. I'm always singing. I would never play piobaireachd on the practice chanter, it is not something that I have ever done, never been encouraged to do. The practice chanter was for practice of the embellishments. The pipe was used to perform the pieces. The thing about when you are singing is that you will always sing a tune better than you will play it, more consistently, because all you are doing is singing. When you are playing you are thinking "watch the C, it is just a wee bit sharp", or "come on outside drone, just hang on in there". You are doing that thing that females are so good at – multitasking. So singing to me, Barnaby, is the be all and the end all. I only wish I could sing.

Sound. The two obvious components of sound are steadiness and trueness. If you are playing piobaireachd and you don't have a steady instrument, you are not going to be settled. We have all been there, you are half way through a tune, we think "aww, if there was a hole I'd jump in it right now". But that is not the instrument's fault, that is the operator's fault. I say that because sometimes the conditions might be very testing. It might be quite a cool tuning area, and you come into a hot performing area, it is obviously going to affect tuning. As soon as the chanter reed starts to move around, the drones are going to be out of tune. So, it is preparation at home to try and deal with unsteadiness, and to never be satisfied with the instrument, always searching to improve it. It is so much easier these days with all the modern gismos. Forty years ago it was cane or it was cane. And if you were stuck, there was always cane. And it was fantastic. But as players we spent days, weeks, searching for that steadiness, then, bingo, it would be there.

And it would be fantastic. They just wouldn't go out of tune. Days on end, weeks on end, months, then all of a sudden.....

Trueness. Well this is something that we need to learn as we go. Educating the ear. The biggest aid to that in terms of trueness – your drones will tell you. If you have a low A and a high A that are in balance and you have your drones tuned to them if you have a note which is not in tune – your drones will tell you. You don't need to be listening to the chanter sound necessarily. Yes when you get better you are right on it. But, as you are learning your trade, listen to the drones. They will be your biggest clue.

Strength of instrument. I always like to go and practice for two or three hours. And I wanted to be as fresh at the end as I was at the start. So I never went chasing a big strong instrument. You must be at ease with your instrument. And most of that is down to the strength. Having never played with a pipe band in my life, I don't know what it is like to play a strong instrument. I have never been given a reed and told "blow that in". My father always scraped the chanter reed for me and then Donald used his expertise. If I am looking for a new chanter reed I want one that is the same as the one as the guy I am putting out the pipes to. I don't mind if it is just ever so slightly strong. But I couldn't be bothered with this "I am going to blow this in and it will last longer". I once remember

having a reed from Bob Nicol and I retired it after its fourth season. And that was a reed that was just comfortable right from the word go. It happened that there was not much cane on it. They weren't big bulky reeds.

Remember the type of sound that you are looking for. If you are a soloist you are looking for a solo sound. There is a huge difference. The pipe bands are looking for something that will really hit you. The solo piper is looking for what I am going to describe as a warm sound. How much sound? Enough is enough. So long as it is projecting in a reasonably sized room. It doesn't have to be huge. Sometimes sound is like the question I answered in terms of the movements. Iain Morrison had a completely different sound to big Angus MacDonald. Angus's sound wouldn't have suited Iain and Iain's sound wouldn't have suited Angus. So it is a very personal thing. What I would say just briefly on sound. A lot of people now are wearing ear protection. Fantastic, really good. Can we think of any down sides to it?

Audience member. Can't tune your pipes?

MH. I've actually got the proper ones. The down side here - they obviously reduce the volume of sound that you are getting – so, are you actually aware of the sound that you are creating? You're not. That is my main concern. You've got to be very careful that you still can appreciate the loudness, or quietness, of your instrument.

And when we talked about the steadiness – never be afraid to change reeds. You know sometimes you will hear "I hope this reed lasts for today, a bit of a wing and a prayer." What happens usually? You get trouble. So, always have confidence to change any reed at any time. Doesn't matter if you are in the final tuning room. If you are going to be let down by a reed, you change it. Far better to be let down by a new reed that maybe is going to do the job, than an old one that probably isn't going to.

Play your instrument, record it, and assess it.

So that covers my big ones there. Any one? That's all good.

Tutor plus self assessment. The importance of a good tutor. It can't be stressed enough. I was fortunate to learn correctly right from the get go. Sometimes that is not the case. You will build a rapport with a good tutor. They will talk you through the years of service. They are invaluable. Regular tuition. Absolutely. Weekly if possible. In person if possible. There is so much available to us now. Skype. Dropbox. There are so many options. If you are having a live lesson, record it. If your lesson lasts 2 hours then that is obviously time that you've got to spend listening to it. If time is an issue, try and get the bullet points. Make notes after the lesson. If there is something that is coming up on a regular basis, you know that you are not spending enough time on that particular aspect.

The Music Committee is going to love this. Learn the set tunes early. No substitute for learning the tunes. It takes months to get friendly with a tune. Sometimes you really only understand a tune when you have learnt it thoroughly, put it to rest for a month even, and come back to it. You can often see the pictures that you couldn't see previously. I quite like that tune. It has happened to me many many times. I always like to have the set tunes learnt round about the Christmas period, or January at the latest. Because you always had other tunes that you wanted to learn as well. So you

tuck the set tunes away nice and early. And if you are playing at this level, always learn more than the requirement so that you can jettison at least one.

Sometimes you go to a competition and you will hear the player saying I hope I don't get such and such today. The judges are good at picking those tunes. There must be a network. So if you have learnt, say, six tunes rather than the requirement of four, hold two back, think "these are my friends, I love these tunes". So again it is a plan. It is a serious practice plan to help you perform in public to your optimum.

Do we have anything on this? Question.

Audience member. When you are learning your set tunes do you learn them in parallel or one at a time?

MH. I have always learnt them one at a time. It's all I could deal with. I wanted to get that foundation, I wanted to get the pillar in. I want to get him set in stone. I maybe want to try and get him memorised in a night, or a couple of nights at most, and build him for maybe a week. So that set tune two. He is my next pillar. I'm going to put number one down, but I'm going to keep him going as well though. Then three, four, so that you are always adding on to a secure base. Learning tunes is a discipline. If you say, ah I must learn that tune, yes you will learn it sometime. If you say I'm really going to try and learn that tune tonight, you probably will. Or if you don't you will tuck it away the next night. Targets, having a plan.

Mental preparation.

So, if you are mentally strong, you are confident. If your previous four steps are secure, if you are confident, you will go on to your performance knowing rather than hoping that you are going to perform to your capacity. You will have visualised the event. You will have taken yourself through it, day in day out, and, love the moment, have no fear. Good players have no fear. They love it. Let me cross that white line. Because it is an outlet point. We've spent days, weeks, months preparing. All of a sudden, here it is. It's the Archie Kenneth Quaich! I'm on! Let me on! I'm really going to enjoy this. Because I know my links are secure. Embrace the nerves. Don't think "I'm feeling nervous". Good, I'm feeling nervous. That's great. I knew I would. This is what I've been building for. I love it.

Audience member. What about problems with stage fright?

MH. Yes we've all had it. It is not a good feeling. The little gremlins take over. Mental note to self. Not well enough prepared. I must remember this for next time. What was it that caused me to go into panic mode? What element of what I'm going to do made me apprehensive?

Audience member. You're not in stage fright until you are about to play sometimes.

MH. Well you simply have to try and learn from experience because we have all suffered from it to varying degrees. Maybe it was the instrument. Maybe something else. But, if you have visualised the event, if you've told yourself "I know I'm going to feel nervous", when that starts to happen for you you can say "OK, I knew that was going to happen. That's good". And embrace them. It's like the weak embellishment. "Here it comes. I'm on next." I genuinely always felt more nervous in the

run-up to competitions than I did at competitions. I actually didn't feel less nervous at the competition. It was just that my mind was filled with all the things I needed to think about, and that kind of blocked the nerves off. You know, when you go to the dentist and get a filling, you don't feel a thing do you. They've blocked it off. So, when I'm driving to the competition I feel nervous, arriving at the competition, I feel nervous, final tuning room, a little less nervous, then you get out there and you blow your pipe up, don't feel so nervous now. You actually are, but you are thinking, OK, five minutes tuning today, that's fine, touch the drones, so your mind is being filled with all the other important things, and that will help you deal with stage fright.

Audience member. Do you shut your mind off from the listeners, from the audience? Last night, both players, their eyes were distant.

MH I reckon there is a great place to look when you're competing or playing in public. And that's right along there. So that you are embracing the audience, but you are not physically looking at them. And when you are competing, sometimes judges will like to make notes. That's cool. Some performers will be apprehensive about that. I remember listening to a junior competition and I saw the judge writing and writing, huge screed, turned the page over, wrote again, I'm thinking "didn't think it was as bad as that" and when I say the sheet afterwards it was full of the most magnificent comments.

Audience member. You didn't let that put you off?

MH You visualise that at home. You know, the tune *I am Proud to Play the Pipe*. I often say to my students, remember that. Remember when you are playing you should be proud. You should be up there, you should stand tall. So generally speaking I would never engage with anyone in the audience if I am competing or performing. But I am there for them. I want them to know that I am acknowledging that they are there. So I am never far away from them, but not making contact. As soon as you make contact what happens? Concentration goes.

Ann Lore. Mental preparation. There is a book about the Alexander technique. I've taken a lot from that book because there are a lot of exercises help with mental preparation for competition.

MH Again it is part of preparation. So poorly prepared, you are sunk. May as well stay at home. Properly prepared, you feel secure, and with the key you've locked it.

So, just to summarise. Smart preparation does give you a consistent performance. Consistent performance helps to build your confidence. Confidence will lead to relaxed playing. Relaxed playing is about enjoyment. Enjoyment, having fun, and making good music. Maybe you won't win a prize, you'll enjoy your music.

PM Are there any other questions on anything Murray has said.

Malcolm Whyte. In relation to what the speaker has said, I don't know whether he realises that throughout most of what you have said you could hear a pin drop. People were not fidgeting. Particularly when you started. There was absolute and utter silence for over fifty minutes in respect of the eminence you hold in the craft that you have perfected. But if you can perhaps take that away with you because there are people here who have reached similar positions in piping who have listened to you and paid attention.

MH. I've just had so much fun out of playing and performing in public. The bottom line is – there are different categories – we can all be better than we are, everyone who is in this room. You can instantly play to a higher standard just by taking on board one of the things that were covered. And it doesn't matter whether you are a non competitive piper or a competitive piper, the idea is to have fun. Some of the most rewarding teaching I've done has been with adult learners, because they are doing it because they desperately want to. They are never going to reach the highest rung, they are never going to play in the clasp at the Northern Meeting, but that doesn't mean to say that they can't be better day on day, week on week. I've just had so much fun in my lifetime trying to be a better performer. And these things to me are key. And like I said, enjoy your music, have fun. But if you miss a gracenote, it's the end of the world! (Laughter)

PM Any other comments for Murray? Thank you very much Murray.