

Composition of Piobaireachd

John Dew

Chair Peter McCalister

Ladies and Gentlemen. This session is on the composition of Piobaireachd. I am very delighted to welcome my young colleagues John Dew and Dan Nevans who is now going to play his own composition "The Ness of Brodger".

Dan Nevans plays "The Ness of Brodger".

Thank you Dan. Dan introduces himself as a member of the Competing Pipers Association, performer, teacher and author.

This first thing is to say why we are having this talk, very briefly.

You may be aware that there is a page on our website for members to post their own compositions. So we are talking about compositions now, in the 21st century. Put your own compositions here on the website. There is no filter, no assessment, the Piobaireachd Society has an open canvass and will allow people to put their tunes up.

There was a brief discussion saying well what do we do with those tunes? Should we take a look at them? Publish them? Maybe set some of them for competition?

I won't steal John Dew's thunder here, but there was a general feeling having had a look at the tunes that some of them weren't very good. I won't go into detail, but I want to pick up one tiny bit. Some of these tunes are missing "*The Blas*", the taste or flavour of Piobaireachd. They are nice pieces of music, they may fit into the Piobaireachd mode, but they are missing "*The Blas*". So what is that? That is part of what I am going to ask John Dew.

John introduces himself as a member of the Competing Pipers, a composer of 10 years experience, I don't think composing purely pipe music, and when I introduce him as a young person don't forget John that Mozart composed his first symphony aged 8.

Please welcome John Dew.

John Dew's presentation can be seen on the accompanying video including sound clips

John Dew

Hello. Thank you for having me here today. I am really excited to be talking about Piobaireachd composition and what I have learned over the years.

Slide 1

So we will look at the origin of Piobaireachd composition, then the development, then where we are at today.

Slide 2

We will have a look at the evolution of the music harmony, tension and release, then we will look at a modern day composition.

Slide 3

A little bit about me. I am a professional musician for 10 years now. I am a graduate of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in traditional music. I am a composer as well. I wrote three film scores, and won three RCS awards for best drama and I later won a prize for advanced compositional techniques. I have also had a few prizes in the Silver Medal.

Slide 4

So, the evolution of music harmony. I am going to start with Plain Chant, move through two to five part counterpoint, then I will look at where piobaireachd lies within the whole spectrum.

Slide 5

The earliest form of western music came from Plain Chant. This was developed in the earliest centuries of the Roman Catholic church by the monks themselves. It was simply a single line of melody that the monks would chant.

Plays example.

That is what they would have sung originally, as a form of worship. Then they got bored so they said why don't we add something more interesting.

Slide 6

So they added a drone.

Plays example.

This is called Organum. It is the first time something was added to make it more interesting. It also shows tension and release which I shall cover a little later on.

Then they said, well why don't we make this more interesting. So they moved the drone, and we have what is called second species counterpoint. So the tune goes against a moving drone.

Plays example.

So they then said why don't we make this more interesting.

Slide 7

So they created third species counterpoint where there are four notes against one note.

Plays example.

So, four against one note. As you can see, in the first measure we have a unison first. So we have a D and a D. The next beat is a C, against the D. This causes a form of tension. Then a B against a D, a form of consonance again. So we have tension and release.

Then we have the fourth species, which is a delayed resolution.

Plays example.

As you can see from all the examples I have given, each starts and ends on the same note. So starting on consonance and ending on consonance, and having consonance and dissonance throughout.

Slide 8

So if we put it all together we have this thing called polyphony. This is the fifth species. The most prolific composer of fifth species counterpoint was a man called Giovanni Palestrina who was the composer to the Pope. This is his most famous piece.

Plays example.

So that is fifth species, where all these techniques come together to form one.

Then we have more complex forms of polyphony such as Preludes and Fugues by J S Bach. Moving forward we then have the primary chord structure developed by Mozart and Haydn. Then 19th century harmony with

chromaticism, bitonality – all those different techniques, all helping towards consonance and dissonance, tension and release.

Slide 9

So why is this important? They all demonstrate different ways of showing tension and release, consonance and dissonance, which is essentially what Piobaireachd is.

Slide 10

Where does Piobairachd come within all this? It sticks to the form of chant and drone. Why? My guess, and this is an educated guess, is that the Highlands and Islands of Scotland were sparsely populated, and agrarian. So they probably just stuck with this as the easiest way. I am no expert, correct me if I am wrong. That is just my kind of guess.

So what? This is important because the drone of the bagpipe is forming a bass layer which is how we get our consonance and dissonance.

Slide 11

On the bagpipe scale A, C sharp, E and high A are more consonant with the drone. And dissonance with low G, B, D, F sharp and high G. Technically you could argue that A phrases are consonant, and B phrases are dissonant. And that is where Piobaireachd lies in the whole wider evolution of harmony from what I can gather from my studies.

Slide 12

We then have the Ecclesiastical modes, the church modes. These are the modes which we use. You could probably name a piobaireachd in each one of those.

Slide 13

And we all know the various Piobaireachd structures and forms.

What might be of use to some of us, especially the younger generation of Piobaireachd players, they may not necessarily understand the harmonic symmetry within tunes. So from my studies we were told that we have four structures.

Slide 14

The rounded form which is A1 A2 repeated, B1 B2 B1 A2 Examples are Princes Salute, Lament for Mary MacLeod.

The interlaced structure such as Lament for the Dead, Lachlan MacNeill Kintarbert's Fancy. ABA B flavour cadence, BAB A flavour cadence (4 hiharins)

Then the inverwoven structure which many people know as AAB ABB AB. If you structure it differently into two lines, you can see that there is harmonic symmetry within that. An example is Mary's Praise. The A phrase always is around A Csharp E, and the B phrase is constructed round B and Fsharp. MacCrimmon's Sweetheart is another exsmple.

Then we have the well woven structure which is AB AB BA BA and again it is a haromonic symmetry rather than a line of 6, another line of 6 and a line of 4. Examples are Battle of Strome and Big Spree.

Slides 15 and 16

For me I have always seen tunes as harmonic, or melodic, tunes. Take lyrical tunes for example. A lot of those tunes have many passing notes and they do not use the pulses in tunes as strong harmonic structures.

Whereas, if you look at harmonic based tunes, a lot of those tunes have two of four pulses in a bar and they mark out harmony, such as Tulloch Ard or Battle of Strome.

So you will now hear a new tune, and we will pull it about a bit. So this is A Pipers Farewell to his Pipe by Steven Knox.

Dan Nevans plays the ground of A Pipers Farewell to his Pipe.

Slide 17

JD Thank you Dan. In the footnotes to this tune "This tune seeks to express the feeling of a piper who is no longer able to play as he puts his pipes back in the box for the last time."

If I can deconstruct this a little bit. The musical score is constructed in phases. And, take my word for it, the theme notes of the ground are followed very nicely in the variations.

Slide 18

Now, the part that might end my career, the things that maybe don't make this tune very good. There are quite a few uninventive variations, and I feel like this tune could be explored more. It kind of goes ground, dithis, taorluath, crunluath which has already been done. It only takes the simplest of structures, the rounded, which is arguably the easiest. It is actually quasi-rounded because the last bar of line 2 is different from the last bar in lines 1 and 3. Because of that you don't actually get a sense of unison from the piece.

If you look at the Princes Salute, the lines end with FE cadence to low A. That is what gives it its unity.

A Pipers Farewell to his Pipe feel a bit hybridy. It feels a bit like Lament for Mary MacLeod, MacSwan of Roag and MacDougall's Gathering all in one tune, kind of put together. It is full of the usual suspects of Piobaireachd movements which you can find in other tunes already. There doesn't seem to be an identifiable hook in the same way that you have in MacCrimmon's Sweetheart. And that is something that we need to look for in new tunes, or even in the Field of Gold, which we were discussing earlier – it had kind of got an an identifiable hook.

And also there are a couple of extra pulses which appear at random.

Slides 19, 20, 21

So let us look in some more depth. How could it be improved? Let's work backwards, from the slide before. We'll start with the ground. The final phrase feels as if it has an extra pulse. So this is the final phrase – sings – that low A feels as if it is an extra pulse there, as if it has been extended a bit.

Perhaps it would be better not to resolve it, but to stay on low G. And that low G is dissonant to the drone. And that could further exemplify the feeling of the piper no longer able to play. So you could finish the line line this – sings last bar without the final low A – so the four pulse structure would be maintained, and also the end of the line would be dissonant to the drone, which could magnify that melancholy feeling.

Alternatively you could do this. Sings last phrase ending on roidin. But that is a bit too like Isabel MacKay. But it is worth exploring. Even as a composer you should be thinking what if I went down this route? Oh, that has already been explored.

And, as I said before, the final phrase is different in line 2. Sings final phrase of line 2. That is completely different from the end phrase of lines 1 and 3. From that you lose the sense of unison of the piece. Imagine you were watching Star Wars and Darth Vader comes on. You hear the Imperial March. And then he comes on in another scene, and you don't hear the Imperial March, you just hear an organ, it just wouldn't make sense.

So you lose the sense of harmonic unison, and the harmonic symmetry. It gives a different type of harmony from the rest of it, but not only that. Something is lost lyrically too.

So if we look at the Variations. It follows the simple dithis, taorluath, crunluath singling and doubling, which has all been done to death – Colin Roy MacKenzie, Kiss of the King's Hand. Don't get me wrong, they sound great and they are wonderful. But it has already been done.

So what I would maybe suggest doing is taking a little bit more of a journey through the variations, following the theme notes. So we could maybe do this – sings – which has a lot more scope for interpretation of the short notes. Then you could develop it. Sings. That kind of thing.

Similarly why not go a bit more wild. Take us on a journey through it. Sings. And when it is written like that, again there is more scope for interpretation. We know that tunes like Rory MacLeod have additional notes – passing notes – why not do that – sings.

Or another idea. Sings. What that is doing is still honouring the theme notes in there, but I just feel that the composer could have been that little bit more creative.

Slides 22, 23

So, why are new compositions poor? In a nutshell they sound too similar to other tunes, they are hybrids of other tunes, they are a little bit too slow air like. So although Cabar Feidh Gu Brath has a good reputation it does feel a bit slow air like, because it resolves too easily. You are losing that harmonic symmetry, *the blas*.

A lot of the time we follow the theme notes too rigidly, so losing the sense of lyricism. Take Lament for Patrick Og as an example. If it followed the ground really closely with the taorluath and crunluath it would kind of lose the natural arc of the piece.

Many of the newer tunes are big memory tests. As a performer, when you have got to learn four new tunes for the medals, so when I decided to learn Lament for the Children for Skye, I also decided to learn The Groat, because it is way easier.

The newer tunes also often only follow the simplest of structures. I have not come across any new tunes which take the specific well-woven structure such as The Big Spree or the Bells of Perth. There can be lack of originality in variations, lack of a hook – take the Earl of Seaforth, which is totally unique. Rarely do we have satisfactory tension and release patterns. And, the great thing for me, harmonic symmetry – *the blas* - is not being explored properly in new tunes.

We are too used to composing parrot fashion – two beats in a bar, four phrases in a part. What I learned in RCS was not to read music so much, but to listen to it a lot more. So if we write a piece we should be recording it, listening back to it. What we tend to do, and especially in Piobaireachd because it is slower, is get an idea in our head, so we anticipate that the music is going down the way. So we sort of know where the piece is going by reading it, so we go OK, that kind of works. But if we listen back, it is clear that it would be better going up rather than down. If you are trying to aim for harmonic symmetry you are better off trusting your ear rather than your eye.

Slide 24

Many of the newer piobaireachd are poorly scored. A tune I looked at was Rudh na Dunain. This is the penultimate two bar phrase in the second line. Sings. It just feels like a series of notes. I feel like it might have been better scored like this. Sings. And it becomes easier to interpret. Same notes, same embellishments, but it is scored in a way which is easier to interpret.

I will maybe go on to why later.

Slide 25

The main problems experienced today are, with the exception of Andrew Wright's "General Principles of Piobaireachd", there is not a lot of Piobaireachd theory being taught. What happens is that many tunes are taught as single entities, rather than transferable templates.

I will never forget being at the Uist and Barra. Someone played MacLeod of Raasay. I turned to my mate and said well that was great, what do you think?

He goes well I don't really know the tune so I couldn't tell you if it was good or bad. I said, but surely you could feel the 4/4 pulses? You could feel the end of the phrases? You could hear that the pipe was in tune and that there was good technique. Why don't you think you can assess the tune from a performance of it because you haven't been taught that particular tune.

So I feel that we are often being taught tunes as single entities rather than having a transferrable template. Teachers can sometimes I have found be closed-minded about interpretation and that can result in a lack of ideas being explored across the genre. This will lead to poor composition. The classic example of that is the first phrase of Beloved Scotland. Jimmy MacIntosh – if you played the first two notes in a way he doesn't like you are off the prize list immediately – from what I heard.

A N Other – his wife is in the audience.

The point is that there are a lot of closed minded approaches. Because of that it is forming a barrier about what can actually be achieved.

Slide 26

What I would suggest to anyone considering composition is to start by composing musical phrases and making sketches. The MacCrimmons maybe did that with pebbles. This pebble is this phrase, this pebble is this other phrase. They wouldn't have to write it down, they would just remember the phrase. They wouldn't say a tune was complete until they were happy with the complete tune.

Also, why start with the ground? Start with the taorluath doubling and make a lyrical variation with that. Or, start with a lyrical alternative variation. So, for me, I would suggest that in Lament for Donald Ban MacCrimmon the variations were composed before the ground. Or Lament for the Earl of Antrim, because they are naturally flowing variations.

Try and think of the essence of the composition and encapsulate that as an intention. So Bells of Perth – it is about the ringing of Bells. And that essence is captured in the variations. Or to take something different – the Edinburgh tramways might inspire a sense of rhythm. Or the piece that we heard earlier – the Piper's Farewell to his Pipe. But that idea of sorrowful melancholy has already been explored in various tunes.

A good example is Lament for Alan my Son. It was inspired by the ventilator.

The next thing is to make the score really clear so that we know how to interpret the music. And also demonstrate that you know the basics while writing simple tunes. So if you take someone like Gordon Duncan who wrote some really elaborate reels, he also wrote a tune called The Gathering which is the simplest jig in the world.

So we can all try and come with the next Lament for Colin Roy MacKenzie which is all kind of moving and state-like, but can we honestly say that we can come up with something as simple and as beautiful as MacCrimmon's Sweetheart. You should try and do that one first.

Slide 27

And that leads me on to my next thing which is study, study, study. So, Understand Piobaireachd structures. Understand the 4 6 line structure of the woven structure such as in the Earl of Ross's March. Understand the harmonic symmetry, for exmple in the Big Spree. Understand how that wee-woven structure works. And understand the church music. The number of people who say to me – that C sharp in the Bicker sounds weird. Well actually it is E Dorian, where the C sharp makes absolute sense.

In Frances Collinson's book in how the church modes are constructed – if you need more information, that is where to go.

Slide 28, 29.

The last thing I want to touch on is "The musical expression can't be touched on in the musical score". For me that is absolutely ludicrous, and by saying that you are creating a barrier between the teacher, the performer whatever.

Here is an example in classical music. Have a listen to it.

Plays Prelude to Tristan and Isolde by Richard Wagner.

Would anybody like to hazard a guess as to what the time signature of that was? That was in 9/8. I have read the score, and studied it. When you read it without expression it makes perfect sense because all the notes are in relativity. And then the conductor has come along and said right express this note, why, because it is the end of a phrase, or we are having a pause here. There might be a fermata marked.

For me a score should show relativity, and expression as detemined by the composer. Because we are in this mindset that a musical score cannot possibly

show the length of the notes that is kind of forming a barrier between what we are able to achieve and how we are actually understanding the music.

The expression is shown by the performer. Even though you might be taught how to express The Earl of Seaforth's Salute or whatever you can still understand roughly the duration of each note because of the way it is scored. For me that is quite an important point.

Slide 30

So, moving forward. Understand basic structures and try and create a simple piece first before you write your Kings Taxes. Mozart wrote some of the simplest melodies we know, but he also wrote The Magic Flute, a full-blown opera.

Slide 31

So how can members of the Piobairachd Society become involved in composition? For me I would use the three main principals which are

- How the music works orally which is that harmonic symmetry that we are looking for
- How it is portrayed in the musical score
- How to interpret scores and how to transfer these skills.

Slide 32

This is my bibliography and there will be no questions.

PM Thank you John. Can we teach composition is the main question we should ask. The straight answer is yes. Mozart and Beethoven were taught. They may not have wished to have been taught, they may not have liked what they were taught, but they learned it and then they went their own way. The Rimsky Korsakov came along, and he went his own way.

The new Piobaireachd writers springing out of the ground without any teaching whatsoever, you have to think that doesn't really fit with the history of composition.

Should the Piobaireachd Society get involved? Should we do anything about it?

So are there any questions?

Q&A

Name not known. This is more a request than a question. Is there any possibility of getting access to your notes?

RW I think we will be gathering them together in the Proceedings of the Conference which will appear on the website.

John Forbes In your introduction you mentioned The Blas. So what for you defines The Blas?

JD For me it would be that harmonic sympathy and structure, because that is what many of the new tunes are missing. It is just the general consinane and dissonance. They are all trying to be the next Lament for the Children. For me the Blas is that consinane and dissonance.

Dan Nevans

In my job at the National Piping Centre I teach all the time. I teach composition. One of the things I talk about with my students is that good is good, clever is not good. I think that is part of what John is talking about. Most pipers are not as musically educated as John certainly, but most can have good ideas, good motifs that come out. It is about exporing those motifs, and saying to ourselves, possibly, no defintely, culturally, that there are many ways which a Piobaireachd can be a Piobaireachd. The system of ground, variation, taorluath, crunluath – it is not that it is done to death, it is just often not done well, if that is reasonable.

There are tunes out there – the Piobaireachd Society’s 20th century collection has some phenomenal tunes in it that I think never will be played because they are “the same”. You can play Mary MacLeod, so why would you play Ceol na Mara?

I do think that when you are starting out as a composer you do want to write the next Lament for Donald Duaghal MacKay. Better to generate a handful of good ideas. It is much less intimidating.

Barnaby Brown

Just to say congratulations. That was so satisfying to hear. There being a session on composition at this conference is wonderful and I thought such a good idea. I remember when, very tentatively, I was brought into the Conservatoire to teach composing as a result of a course review in 2001. They

asked be if I could please create this module. So some of what I did would test students in the Conservatoire, and what you did shows that it has evolved. It is a delight to see how it has taken shape.

There is a distinction you made which I would like to emphasise. You draw a distinction between harmonic and lyrical tunes and you identified at the end as being the fundamental part of *blas*. I couldn't agree more. You get that in fiddle composition as well. What it is is a harmonic understanding which is so visible in Piobaireachd, but which is not against the drone. It is that harmonic understanding which I think is the secret behind *blas*.

If the Society is doing any teaching of composition, helping people who trained in the melodic repository of material to understand the harmonic underpinnings is the way forward.

JD I have to say that it was Professor Josh Dickson who introduced me to those musical forms. As a Piobaireachd enthusiast I only knew it as line 1 6 bars, line 2 6 bars, line 3 4 bars. As soon as the demonstration of symmetry was explained all of us were amazed. It just makes so much sense.

It also makes memorising tunes a lot easier. I am learning the Silver Medal tunes. I don't think I have learnt tunes so quickly because of this understanding.

Margaret But it is not easy for the uneducated ear – and I am speaking as a listener – the relationship of the sounds we hear from Wagner, for instance, are highly chromatic, for any western integrated scale of music. I found it very difficult then to transfer to the simple scale of the chanter. It is very interesting that you talk about the relationship of the drones to the chanter.

And you mention “the hook” which is missing from some of the modern pieces. I think that, for the listener, from the outside, which is where I am, the identifiable hook is to do with the difficulty in hearing the scale. You mention modes. Could you talk a little bit about modes?

JD Can do. Or would you like me to address “the hook.”?

Margaret As you wish.

JD I will talk about modes first. So, the pentatonic scale we know as 1,2,3 5 and 6 notes on the scale. So that is how that works.

The first mode is the Aeolian Mode. This is known as the simple C major scale.

To go to the Dorian Mode, what we do is we take that scale and we start on the next note. So if we start in A major, so A is the Aeolian scale. The Dorian mode it is the exact same intervals, but you start on the note B. With exactly the same intervals. The next is C sharp to C sharp, with the same intervals again. So on and so forth. So we have seven in all. Those are the Ecclesiastical, or church, modes. The intervals between each note does not change. The starting note of that scale changes.

When it comes to “the hook”, correct me if I’m wrong – it’s quite hard to hear the hook? – is that what you are saying?

Margaret – It may be clear within a composition, but it is often difficult to hear “the tune” anyway for somebody from outside the playing fraternity.

JD I see what you mean. I was kind of the same when I first got into Piobaireachd. It all kind of sounded similar. But when you hear enough of it you start to understand the difference between The Groat, which is all around the note G, which is I want to say G frigin, and MacCrimmon’s Sweetheart. If you hear enough of these tunes you will start to identify each one, and their hook is their main characteristic.

If I were to give an analogy. If we were to talk about buildings for example. Take different skyscrapers in New York City, you might think they are all just skyscrapers. But if you were to say that the Chrysler Building is different from the Rockefeller Centre, you understand the difference by exploring their different characteristics.

“The Hook” is a little bit easier to explain with light music, because there is something in the tune which brings you in, and because it is a little bit faster. The understanding of “the hook” comes from hearing more and more different tunes and being able to differentiate between tune A, tune B and tune C. Why, because they do different things.

And the point is that, in many of the new tunes, they sound like other tunes. They don’t have the hook that gives them their uniqueness.

Name not known. Without going to the Conservatoire to learn composition, as an amateur, is there anything online? And does it have to be related to Piobaireachd, or do the same principals apply, and could you still benefit from it?

JD Yes. I have a bibliography at the end of my presentation, and all the reading resources are there. The Francis Collinson book was really good, but I think – we are both pipers – the way I learned was just by playing more and more tunes and trying to write simple stuff, and understanding why some stuff doesn't work, and some stuff doesn't work. I think that it is simple music at the end of the day. It is all done in simple phrases – four bars, four bars.

So my advice for anybody who is wanting to learn more about it is to keep playing, get as many different tunes as you can, play as much of it as you can, try writing some stuff, then do a little bit of reading.

If you learn about Bach Chorales – have you come across them before? - that's about three part harmony for piano and voices.

So these are all the books I have bought. And the websites are accessible. The music theory one is good – understandable if you have done about grade 4. I got a lot of my harmony knowledge from A Study of Counterpoint. There are loads of resources there – even if you just go on Amazon you will find loads of music composition textbooks. They can often be quite wordy, but worth it.

Name unknown I just want to make the point about melody. I think the genius of any memorable composition depends ultimately on the quality of the melody. I see that in many fields of music. The pipe chanter has a limited scale, but that is what I see in the most memorable Piobaireachd tunes, such as I got a Kiss of the King's Hand. It is an instantly recognisable melody.

JD That is a problem we face – the limited scale, but that is the evolution of the instrument. Maybe we have run out of good ideas.

RW You have strong views on some of the pieces that you mentioned. Why not go the whole hog. Tell us what you think of John MacLellan's tunes, and Donald MacLeod's Piobaireachd.

DN During the pandemic I wrote a book about Piobaireachd, about social culture and the history of Piobaireachd. The conclusion I came to about the mid twentieth century composers – I refuse to use the term modern about composers who died before I was in primary school, but in their own way John MacLellan and Donald MacLeod started a revolution. They had won all the prizes available, easily two of the greatest players with a great wealth of knowledge. Wee Donald was famous for encouraging pupils to have a go at composition.

When it comes to the music, Captain John's tunes are very cerebral. I have never met a piper who has gravitated to playing the tunes. They are phenomenal, but need a bit of thought. Wee Donald's tunes are at the opposite end of the spectrum. The way I describe a lot of Wee Donald's tunes to my own pupils is that Donald MacLeod must have been a great diddler. Every dish that was washed, every dog that was walked, must have been accompanied by a diddlydum, diddlydoo. The tunes are very organic, easy to pick up. Does this mean that this puts one of these composers higher than the other. Absolutely not. The quality of the melody is such that some are retainable. Are some marmite? Of course they are. Can we say that every tune they wrote was the best tune ever? No.

The piece I composed which I played at the beginning of this talk I was very nervous about. It was not meant to be played in that manner. It was composed to be played along with other instruments. The variations that come after it are quite bare, because I had other ideas I'd like to incorporate. Some mockery, some mimicry perhaps at times of Piobaireachd.

But I think that if you look back at the compositions of those two phenomenal composers you will see the same ideas. If you look at the Edinburgh Piobaireachd for example, in the later variations, I feel reading it I think that John MacLellan has went listen I can play that. He can play it, but how many people could give it a go and got the music out.

Something that has been suggested is that the spirit of the composer comes out in their work. A point that John has been making today is that many composers are just trying to replicate what is already there. And to quote the great Andrew Wright, the great ideas in Piobaireachd are over. I think that what he meant by that was, let's do our own things. I can only assume that the idea was to say we've done a bunch of this stuff. Let's learn some new stuff and try some new things. And even looking round the room just now it is our job to go out and say to our friends, our pupils why not give that a go. Here are some resources. Sorry, that is pretty tangential.

JD For me both of those composers again have written great pieces of music, but I feel that they don't always hit the nail on the head when it comes to the harmonic symmetry, tension and release against the drone. I feel that a lot of the time they are almost trying to write the tune regardless of the drone. I feel that in many of John MacLellan's tunes it is impressive a lot of the stuff that came out, but a) they are big memory tests, which isn't always appealing,

and b) they are not simple. It is almost like he has stuck on one way of writing a piobaireachd, and for me that doesn't necessarily show a versatile composer. Because he has written about 20 piobairachd, and they are all very similar in stature. Where was the simple primary form tune that was so simple and beautiful, and easy listening.

So, take the best composers – Beethoven, 9th symphony, Ode to Joy, it is catchy as anything, we could all sing it now. But also the scherzo of movement three of his third symphony take quite a bit of doing. So for me, they were not as versatile composers of Piobaireachd as they were for their light music.

PM We will have one more question because we have a cup of tea coming.

John Frater I wanted to make a comment about why you compose. So I have written about half a dozen piobaireachd. All of them bar one have been a response to a particular event or something that matters to me. The one that I composed as an exercise in composing was the poorest tune, and that is the one I would have to go back to and really work on to make it worth playing. I don't know if that means anything, but that has certainly been my experience.

JD Yes, it is the same with anything. You learn from your mistakes, and if you aren't learning from it it is not hard work and it is not worth doing. So it is great that you said I have written one and it's poor. I'll tell you now that I've written hundreds of tunes, and about 5% of them are actually any good. But they are good, because I've written really poor ones. But you make loads of mistakes, you learn from them, and that is how you improve. I am pretty sure that whoever wrote Lament for Donald Duaghal MacKay, one of my favourite tunes, didn't write that as their very first tune.

PM Ladies and Gentlemen. I think that the quality and number of questions has shown that this has been an interesting topic, and a very highly prepared and beautifully presented topic by John, and playing by Dan. Thank you both very much indeed.