



Memorising the Big Music

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What I am going to say ...

- ▶ How musicians memorise music (a relatively new habit)
- ▶ How human beings memorise anything!
- ▶ How pipers memorise music, specifically piobaireachd. Why do pipers “go off the tune”?
- ▶ Then we will hear a tune, The Lament for Ronald MacDonald of Morar. I’ll point out why this might be hard for pipers to memorise.
- ▶ Finally, some conclusions - and suggestions about how to memorise piobaireachd, for you to take away



4

Giga

D min A maj A maj D min

D min scale Same, one note down Ditto Ditto

A maj D min C maj F maj

Tricky Ditto Ditto Ditto F maj

9



Starts
in G
min,
then
... er,
... !!!

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How memory works

- ▶ Short-term and Long-term memory
- ▶ Memory techniques
 1. Put information into short-term memory
 2. Repeat the information in your short-term memory multiple times
 3. Sleep
 4. Repeat steps 1 through 3
 5. Do the whole process again after some time has passed
- ▶ Memorise with associations – e.g. a pattern
- ▶ (“Photographic memory”)



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Kim's Game :
look at this, and memorise what is there



“Muscle memory” – it’s **NOT** memory ...

- ▶ Most young pipers memorize pieces with what some people call “muscle memory” ... meaning you turn your brain off, and your fingers just find the right notes.
- ▶ “Muscle memory” is not even memory, it’s purely habit. Habits are not technically memories. When musicians depend on “muscle memory”, what they really are doing is repeating patterns mindlessly.
- ▶ This type of “memory” is also very prone to memory slips, because the music is actually not in the musician’s memory at all, and any small distraction can cause the habit to break down.

Lament for Ronald MacDonald of Morar

- ▶ How to approach a new tune (memory-wise):
 - ▶ Look at the shape or structure of the tune – Primary/Secondary/Irregular
 - ▶ Start at the later variations – T Singling for example
 - ▶ Then work back to the Ground
 - ▶ See where bars or phrases are repeated
 - ▶ See where they are repeated, but with small differences – make a note of those differences
 - ▶ Sing the tune
 - ▶ Practice away from the instrument, **mindfully** repeating the bits you know
 - ▶ Practice on the instrument
 - ▶ Repeat!

Lament for Ronald MacDonald of Morar

THERE ARE ONLY 7 BARS TO LEARN:

PATTERN OF BARS IS MOST EXACT (UN-ALTERED) IN THE LATER VARIATIONS

LINE 1 : BAR 1 **BAR 2** **BAR 3** **BAR 4**

LINE 2 : BAR 5 BAR 5 BAR 2 BAR 6

LINE 3: **BAR 2** **BAR 3** **BAR 4** BAR 7

Lament for Ronald MacDonald of Morar

- ▶ Differences become the problem
- ▶ So, learn the pattern, then see where the tune differs from the pattern, and fit them into your memorising
- ▶ For some people, a visual record helps to see these differences ... see the yellow highlights on the handout
- ▶ For others, it's an auditory memory – you can recall the phrase as it sounds.
- ▶ Be careful to **mindfully** memorise the differences, NOT just repeat them (= habit = “muscle memory” = rubbish!)

IV. TAORLUATH (T) VI. CRUNLUATH (C).

Handwritten musical notation for IV. TAORLUATH (T) and VI. CRUNLUATH (C). The notation is written on three staves. Red numbers 1 through 7 are written above the notes. The notes are marked with 'T' and 'C' below them. The first staff contains measures 1-4, the second staff contains measures 5-6, and the third staff contains measures 7-8. The notes are: 1 (T), 2 (C), 3 (T), 4 (C), 5 (T), 6 (C), 7 (T), 8 (C). The first staff also contains a measure with a 'T' and a 'C' below it. The second staff contains a measure with a 'T' and a 'C' below it. The third staff contains a measure with a 'T' and a 'C' below it.

V. TAORLUATH DOUBLING (T) VII. CRUNLUATH DOUBLING (C).

Handwritten musical notation for V. TAORLUATH DOUBLING (T) and VII. CRUNLUATH DOUBLING (C). The notation is written on three staves. Red numbers 1 through 7 are written above the notes. The notes are marked with 'T' and 'C' below them. The first staff contains measures 1-4, the second staff contains measures 5-6, and the third staff contains measures 7-8. The notes are: 1 (T), 2 (C), 3 (T), 4 (C), 5 (T), 6 (C), 7 (T), 8 (C). The first staff also contains a measure with a 'T' and a 'C' below it. The second staff contains a measure with a 'T' and a 'C' below it. The third staff contains a measure with a 'T' and a 'C' below it.

I. URLAR. (Ronald MacDonald of Morar's Lament)

1 2 3 4 5 6

1st time 2nd time

5 (alt.)

II. VAR. I.

1 2 3 4 5 6 (= 5)

5 (alt.) 2 (alt.)

III. VAR. II.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5 (alt.) 2 (alt.) 4 (alt.)

IV. TAORLUATH (T) VI. CRUNLUATH (C)

Ronald Mac Donald of Morar's Lament

Lines

1.

2.

3.



II. VAR. 1.

1.

2.

3.



III. VAR. 2.

1.

2.

3.



Lady Margaret MacDonald's Salute

T. SINGING A B C

The musical score is divided into three sections: A, B, and C. Each section consists of two staves. The top staff in each section contains red geometric shapes (triangles and rectangles) that correspond to the notes in the bottom staff. The bottom staff contains musical notation for a single system with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature. The notes are primarily eighth and sixteenth notes, with some rests. The shapes in the top staff are red and are placed on the lines of the staff.

SECONDARY PIPER EACH:

LINE 1: A B C

LINE 2: B $\overleftarrow{A}$ C

LINE 3: B C

Conclusion: advice from Itzhak Perlman

- ▶ When performing, trust your memory, don't overthink
- ▶ Keep looking at the music, even when memorised, so you don't forget important points
- ▶ Sing the music in your head just before sleep
- ▶ Be able to start at any point of the piece, to avoid the false security of "finger memory"
- ▶ Listen to the music actively, with the score in front of you
- ▶ Look at your hands when practising. Or practice in the dark!
- ▶ Write out the music
- ▶ Work backwards from the end of the piece
- ▶ Practice away from the instrument

Conclusion: advice from the musicians I know personally

- Use aural memory initially – learn the piece and be able to sing it to yourself, so you know the structure
- Make a mental photograph of the music – a map - in your mind, and “look” at that, while performing
- The difficult bits – where the music turns away from the established structure, are key bits to memorise
- You should be able to play those difficult sections (which might mean naming every note in detail) separately - and out-with the whole piece
- Learning these details is hard work – it’s difficult – but it’s worth it
- Don’t rely on your “subconscious finger memory” - as it will fail you, if distracted
- When performing, trust your memory (don’t get hung up on the detailed notes) ... but to do that, you must have memorised it!
- Hard pieces are easier to memorise than easy pieces

Conclusion: advice from the Music Committee members

- ▶ Listen to the tune a lot, and sing it frequently
- ▶ Practice away from the instrument – fingering and singing – sing a lot!
- ▶ Pick sections which are hard to remember, as a focus for practice
- ▶ Mentally visualise the score – if you are a visual learner.
- ▶ Phrase structure helps – start from the later variations as a guide
- ▶ Build up chunks of the tune at a time.
- ▶ Some people colour code the phrases – or the difficult bits
- ▶ Practice with music on a stand - even when you “know” the tune
- ▶ **Memorise** the tune, rather than playing the music over and over





**Good luck with
memorising
the Big Music**

Any questions?