

Lamenting Patrick Og MacCrimmon:

A Reconstruction of the Ancient Art Music of the Great Highland Bagpipe

Annotated Film Script

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*Abstract*

The film documents the teaching, reconstruction and transmission of ancient classical Bagpipe music called Ceol Mor, Gaelic for “Big Music”, commonly known as Piobaireachd. The author engaged several leading members of the performer community in Scotland and Canada to produce this aural and visual record of the learning and performance of *The Lament For Patrick Og MacCrimmon*, composed by Iain Dall MacKay around the year 1730. The author finds that Piobaireachd’s oral tradition was once a continuum of variation and communal composition which drove the diffusion of new interpretations as it passed between performers. But whereas artistic creativity, variation and communal composition were hallmarks of pre-staff notation Piobaireachd performance, these have been replaced by ritual, stasis and conformity with stylized practices. Mainstream Piobaireachd performance now has as a fundamental object, congruence with past performances derived from strict texts.

*Keywords:* Piobaireachd learning; Piobaireachd performance; oral tradition

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I am grateful to Colonel (Retired) Angus Fairrie for his kind permission to reproduce photographs of Pipe Major Donald MacLeod, Captain John MacLellan, John ‘Ban’ MacKenzie, Calum ‘Piobaire’ MacPherson, Donald Cameron, and John and Angus MacPherson from his celebrated book *The Northern Meeting 1788-1988* (1988. Edinburgh: The Pentland Press); and Mr. Nigel Campbell, Honorary Secretary of The Northern Meeting, for his help in securing this permission.

And I wish to thank Mrs. Margaret Wilson for her kind permission to reproduce the photograph of her Late husband John Wilson from his autobiography and memoirs *A Professional Piper in Peace and War* (1978. Toronto: Author).

For my parents

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LAMENTING PATRICK OG MACCRIMMON:

A RECONSTRUCTION OF THE ANCIENT ART MUSIC OF THE GREAT HIGHLAND BAGPIPE

A Documentary Film

By John-Hugh MacDonald

*DVD Menu*

*Dedication*

*Title graphic*

*Blind Piper medallion appears*

*Sound of Piobaireachd fades in*

*Film title fades to close-up of the Blind Piper medallion, narrator begins*

SCENE 1

ABOUT THE PROJECT <sup>1</sup>.

NARRATOR        This film documents the diffusion of ancient classical Bagpipe music known as Ceol Mor, Gaelic for “Big Music.”

*Dissolve to Blind Piper cairn*

We will see and hear the transmission and reconstruction of *The Lament For Patrick Og MacCrimmon*, a piece revered by Pipers for its artistic and technical sophistication, its composer, and the person for whom it was written around the year 1730.

*Clip from a lesson with Bill*

I studied under internationally acclaimed master Piobaireachd artist Bill Livingstone in Whitby, Ontario, to produce a reconstruction consistent with

the conventions of mainstream Piobaireachd playing. He is one of the most highly respected Piobaireachd artists of his generation.

*Clip: practicing*

After receiving the tune, and after several weeks of private study and practice, I sought out members of the Piobaireachd performer community to

*Clip: airport check in*

learn more. I travelled to Scotland where I met some of the very best Piobaireachd players in the world to capture their thoughts about this music and the way it is transmitted.

*Clip: on ferry to Skye*

My journey took me to the remote West Highlands and Isles of Scotland to situate the music in the land from which it sprang. This is an aural and visual record of the reconstruction of the ancient classical Bagpipe music under a master.

*Clip: bridge, mountains, sheep*

The lessons, subsequent interviews and performance of *The Lament For Patrick Og MacCrimmon* provide a vantage point from which one might discover first hand the musical essence of Piobaireachd, its connection with the land and culture of its origin, and the

*Clip: in car driving to Boreraig*

collaboration between pupil, teacher, and experts during the learning process.

*Dissolve to opaque music score background*

SCENE 2

ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS <sup>2</sup>.

NARRATOR        The artists appearing here are members of the Piobaireachd performer community. Some are internationally acclaimed master Piobaireachd artists and teachers,

*Graphic: “internationally acclaimed master Piobaireachd artists and teachers”*

whose musical pedigree follows a direct line of descent from the original 16th Century Piobaireachd masters, and who today enjoy status in the Piobaireachd community

*Graphic: “virtuosi performers and authorities”*

as virtuosi performers and authorities. Each possesses a rich understanding of Piobaireachd derived from

*Graphic: “lifetime of musical study, performance, and immersion in Piobaireachd”*

a lifetime of musical study, performance, and immersion in the genre. Some have excelled in competitions and recitals at the highest levels internationally, receiving – conspicuously more than once – the most distinguished and sought-after prizes for Piobaireachd in existence. They are

*Clip: Bill*

William Livingstone of Whitby, Ontario,

*Clip: Roddy*

Mr. Rodderick MacLeod of Glasgow, Scotland,

*Clip: Colin*

Mr. Colin MacLellan of Edinburgh, Scotland,

*Clip: Allan*

and Mr. Allan MacDonald of Edinburgh.

We will also hear from

*Clip: Jack*

Mr. Mr. Jack Coghill of Ottawa, Ontario, who is a former military Pipe-Major, professional orchestral Trumpet player, music teacher and devoted Piobaireachd player who remains active in the Ottawa piping scene and whose meticulous knowledge of Piobaireachd qualifies him act as the official Reader at The Piobaireachd Society Gold Medal Competition, and

*Clip: Brian*

Mr. Brian Williamson, also of Ottawa and a Reader at The Piobaireachd Society Gold Medal Competition who is a retired Open Professional-level Piobaireachd competitor, respected teacher and adjudicator of Piobaireachd contests for the Pipers and Pipe Band Society of Ontario.

### SCENE 3

#### ABOUT PIOBAIREACHD: BACKGROUND <sup>3</sup>.

*Clip: mountain stream on road to Boreraig from Portree*

NARRATOR        While European musicians experimented with polyphony, and before J.S. Bach established the rules of form upon which Western music now stands,

*Clip: Looking out on Loch Dunvegan from Castle shore*

Piobaireachd was being composed around peat fires in Scotland's remote mountains and rugged coastal islands by a clan-based, oral culture of Gaelic-speakers

Clip: Boreraig

who were descended from the Vikings. Piobaireachd is the only art music to emerge from that culture. It survived for centuries without the aid of musical

*Transition Mallaig landscape*

staff notation, passing by oral transmission from teacher to pupil – a process which continues to this day.

*Clip: Receiving lesson from Bill*

Although the Piobaireachd repertoire as it stands today was transposed from human memory into Western staff notation during the early nineteenth and twentieth centuries, modern reconstructions of Piobaireachd remain dependant upon oral transmission from teacher to pupil. Learning Piobaireachd in this fashion is a rare, intimate, and humbling experience for the serious Piobaireachd student since masters are few and the process is long. It is a process, which, unlike the final performance, remains out of public sight and earshot, passing only between teacher and pupil.

#### SCENE 4

#### DISCUSSION AND LESSON WITH BILL LIVINGSTONE

*Lesson with Bill at his home*

INTERVIEWER Patrick Og. *The Lament for Patrick Og MacCrimmon*. I'm all yours; I'm in your hands.

BILL: What's to be said about this tune that hasn't been said already? First of all, it's one of the great classics, even though it doesn't have the, necessarily the long convoluted length of single line melody that something like *The Lament for The Children*, or [*Lament for*] *Donald Duaghal MacKay* has. Still, it's considered I think to be amongst the very, sort of top echelon of Piobaireachd composition. It certainly ranks in my top 10 favourites if there really can be such a thing.

I think one of the things that makes it particularly powerful is that it makes great use of the tonality of the bagpipe; and so you have whole huge chunks of the melody in this tune being produced on low g or in notes that are related to the sort of low g mode, and what that does is set up the contrast that exists between that note – low g – and the pitch at which the drones resonate. And conventionally, it would be taken as clear dissonance to have those two notes juxtaposed against each other and for some reason it doesn't really happen, and it's got to do with the peculiarity, I think, of the bagpipe and the way various harmonics get produced and produced and produced both in the chanter but also at routine and regular intervals in the drones. So, what would normally be a dissonant combination, which is (playing), you couldn't put those two together with most other instruments without hearing

dissonance. It doesn't happen in this case, and I'm trying to explain it and I'm probably not doing a really good job of it but other than to say: it works. Second thing is that the tune features what Piobaireachd players refer to as the Piobaireachd high g; and it's a peculiar way of fingering the high g note which is different from the way that it is fingered in light music. In light music the note is fingered with all three of these fingers off the chanter, and in Piobaireachd that middle finger stays down on the f note to produce the high g. The result is that the high g changes slightly in pitch, but much more dramatically in tonal quality, and we only do that now in Piobaireachd. And I'm not nearly enough of a historian to tell you if high g was played that way in other music in earlier times, or not. My sense is that it was always confined to Piobaireachd because, likely because of the nature of the chanters and the instruments that were made so many years ago with God knows what kinds of tools, and accuracy and so-on. So it may have been a solution to an inherent problem in the instrument as it was made itself.

And the tune has one of the greatest variations in all of Piobaireachd. The 1st Variation and its doubling are regarded as very, very strong and beautiful variations with a great deal of scope for delicacy of touch – which we'll try to talk about a bit – and the finishing, more technical variations – Taorluath, Crunnluath, and Crunnluath 'a Mach – all feature movements to the low g right through the low g (we'll explain that later) which also adds to the – first of all to the pure difficulty of the tune – but also to sort of the

atmosphere that's created. It's a very dark and brooding and kind of profound kind of feeling to the tune.

INTERVIEWER Do you think that's because it's a Lament?

BILL I'm not really convinced about all the titles that go with the Piobaireachd. The legend that his teacher composed this for Patrick Og on the false news of his death is fanciful, perhaps charming at the very least, and may or may not be true like so many other things in Piobaireachd. I prefer to accept it because it makes some sense. But again, the, it's just the nature of the composer and how he selects his melodic line. I mean, there are some magnificent Laments which are built on pure major keys: *The Lament for The Earl of Antrim*; *The Lament for Mary MacLeod*. These are very, very poignant sad pieces – powerful too – but not with the same dark brooding feel. I mean, the composer here was likely so ticked off and angry about what had happened he just found this sort of really dark rooted kind of melody.

INTERVIEWER So it's the sound of grief?

BILL Yes. And there's some anger in it too. At least that's how I read it.

INTERVIEWER Now, Iain Dall MacKay being regarded as the greatest pupil of Patrick Og MacCrimmon, do you think some of Patrick Og's style has rubbed off onto this tune which was composed by his protégé?

BILL Again, it's a general answer, but I don't think that there's any pupil of a great Piper, piping instructor, who doesn't get some of the master rubbed off on him. I know in my case I've had many instructors and all of them have left some kind of mark on my playing that continues right to the present time.

*Transition to Bill recalling his musical education*

Until I was 17 my only real teacher was my father, and he did not play Piobaireachd. There's an exception to that. I had when I was 14 about 2 months of lessons from the great John Wilson of Edinburgh

*Dissolve to John Wilson photo*

the Piper who blew his fingers off on blasting caps when he was a boy...

*Transition back to Bill*

I stopped playing when I was 17. I grew into other things, I started playing rock & roll and I did that for a long long time, and then I went to law school and yadda yadda and finally at about age 27, I became interested again, and I went back to John Wilson. I called him and asked him if he remembered me, and he said that he remembered me very well, and so I started lessons with him in 1969. And then from there my next instructor was John MacFadyen, and from there I took instruction from

*Dissolve to John MacLellan photo*

Captain John MacLellan

*Transition to Donald MacLeod photo*

and ultimately Donald MacLeod. And throughout all of those people

*Dissolve back to Bill*

I was getting assistance – completely generously – volunteered by Andrew MacNeill who was one of Robert Reid’s greatest pupils, A wonderful guy, who was very generous with his time and his knowledge. And so, what did these guys leave on me? John Wilson was a fanatic for precision and technique, and his watchword always was that “good piping is simply particular piping.” And, John MacFadyen was not the greatest instructor in the sense of articulating how/why and what, but he had an incredibly huge, powerful personality, very, very strong, big, big intellect, and his method of instruction was to walk you around in a circle as though you were playing Piobaireachd on your own, balling and shouting and screaming at you, and pointing when to hold the notes and when to cut them, and he gave me a sense of really assertive way of playing Piobaireachd. And that’s probably still a very prominent feature of my playing – I feel as though I play much more aggressively than many others do. Captain John MacLellan was... he was a very interesting... I love the guy... again, a very interesting teacher. He took a person at my stage as someone who didn’t need instruction – in fact I have a tape of him saying “there’s no need for instruction here, Bill

you can just simply take from the listening” – and he would give you a recording of the tune.

Then “wee Donald” got a hold of me and he was the best single instructor, pure piping instructor that I ever had. He could articulate ways of describing the melodic line and the musical line and the use of compound rhythms and simple rhythms that appear in Piobaireachd, often in the same tune...

And he really influenced my thinking about how Piobaireachd rhythms ought to be delivered, and he also opened my eyes to a lot of subtle touches, which, with his very good way of describing. This, in fact this tune *Patrick Og* I’ve had it both from John Wilson and Donald MacLeod and with John it was sort of teaching by precept, “here play along with me until you can do it”; and with Donald it was “here’s how the tune goes, and I will sing it to you, and then I will play it to you.”

*Transition to teaching tune*

INTERVIEWER    So...

BILL                So, as “wee Donald” used to say to me, “the ground of this Piobaireachd might go something like this,” when what he meant was “it goes exactly like this and make no mistake.” So, we’ll just go over it and listen to the phrases as they come; I think they become pretty evident. (Singing)

NARRATOR        As Bill sings the opening phrases of the tune I'm acutely aware that what I'm hearing is a voice from antiquity; that I am receiving information which has been transferred in similar fashion for over 400 years. It is more profound even than reading an original manuscript in an author's own hand. It is as if the author was speaking to me himself. I feel instantly connected to the lives of people long gone from the earth, but who must have felt in this music what I feel now.

BILL                (Singing). Now you'll notice that I use the word "and" That's straight from Donald MacLeod's teaching. He had categories of little notes and little tricks and one of them was his "and" note. The "and" note was designed to indicate that it was a short note and it belonged in the line but it was not to take any precedent. So, you can hear that the melody loops along with relatively steady kind of pace, it can't be too slow, which is often, often a problem in modern Piobaireachd performance: very, very slow and lacking in interest. And also listen for the balance you're trying to achieve. You want (singing)... you're looking for that kind of, really nice balance in the various phrases. I'll sing the Ground doubling, because really all you do in the Ground doubling is replace some of the double echoes with two-note cadences and you pick the tempo up ever so slightly. The thing I suppose I should point out is the throws on high g... (demonstrations on high g and double echoes on d). They want to be very clean, and clear, and articulate, not the often (demonstration) that kind of crushing of the movement – it

loses its beauty. And (demonstration), not, I think (demonstration), that's what I hear often, which doesn't really, I think, present the grace notes with the beauty that they merit (demonstration). It's really an f with a kind of ersatz e doubling on it whereas this (demonstration) each one of those little grace notes, and that's what makes them beautiful. Double echoes, almost always in Piobaireachd, are played (demonstration) with that kind of timing. There's nothing slow, sloppy, or careful about much of it. Some of the work is quite brisk. So here's the Ground doubling, and I know you'll be explaining what singlings [sic] and doublings and all the rest of that are. So here's the Ground doubling: (singing)

Now, note in that two-note cadence high g to e those notes are written as even quarters, and they're not played that way. They are played long and short, the first note long and themal [sic]... no, the first note long and themal [sic]... here, right here John, under "U" comma, (singing) so the d is an "and" note (singing). So let's do that again: (singing)... That low g at the end of the line is also an "and" note.

INTERVIEWER    This one here?

BILL                No, no, that's in the singling. Sorry, you're right, you're right there. That's an "and" note.

INTERVIEWER That's an "and"?

BILL That's an "and.

INTERVIEWER I'd have no way of knowing that. I mean, it's a quarter note!

BILL They're two quarter notes and you would say "well, play them the same."  
Well, this is the problem with the notation, and this is the reason for the oral tradition.

INTERVIEWER It's not just that you're saying it's just a shorter note, I mean... shorter or longer creates the mark or separation of where one phrase begins and another ends!

BILL Not only that, it maintains the flow of the melodic line. Now, I played this tune one time at the Northern Meeting and James Campbell of Kilberry, the son of Archibald Campbell of Kilberry, was on the bench, and I knew that the Cameron school, of which Archibald was a devotee, almost universally played 2-note cadences with the notes even. So I thought "I'll play to the bench." And I played *Patrick Og* and I made what I thought was a terrific job of it and I managed to squeak in for 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> because I played even, thinking I would please the bench whereas in fact James Campbell was quite content to hear them long and short and in fact had become accustomed to

hearing them that way even though his father might have believed differently and is responsible for writing them out in this fashion. Yes... it's a problem. Okay, so we'll repeat the first line of the Ground doubling: (singing). Now, *that* cadence at the line end *is* played with the two notes b and low a even. That, and the ones at the very end of the third line are about the only exceptions – as I was taught it by wee Donald – to the rule of long and short. So line 2 *might* be: (singing).

Now that phrase is often played (singing). What Donald does is treat it... what wee Donald did was treat it like the double echoes that you would hear in *The [Lament for] Earl of Antrim* or *Lament for The Children*, he elongated the middle e of the double echo. What Kilberry calls in his introduction “broken” or “brist” [sic] double echoes. So, that phrase again (singing); line 3 (singing). Something like: (playing chanter)

*Fade from Bill's chanter playing into Bagpipe performance of Ground singling*

## SCENE 5

### PERFORMANCE OF THE GROUND (SINGLING)

*Performance dissolves into pan of music score, the tune fades out to narration*

## SCENE 6

### ABOUT PIOBAIREACHD: TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION <sup>4</sup>.

NARRATOR      Piobaireachd consists of variations on a theme conforming to stereotyped patterns of phrase construction and ornaments, or appoggiatura, which are grouped into forms according to their arrangement. As art music it is the product of purely artificial conception, composed and performed by a body of musicians operating neither within a traditional nor folk music idiom. It is a genre in which proficiency is achieved through several years of private study under an acknowledged master, and the Piobaireachd community – by and large composed of performers – is committed to the advancement of the art through the staging of musical competitions, recitals, and teaching.

The *Lament For Patrick Og MacCrimmon* is a Piobaireachd lament,

*Freeze music score*

*Graphic: Genre: Piobaireachd Lament*

the Urlar or Ground of which – the basic melodic theme – consists of four melodic lines, essentially three when it is considered that the first line is repeated.

*Graphic: Phrases: one measure each, seldom repeated*

Each line is of four equal measures, each forming a phrase which gives the piece a meter

*Graphic: Metre: 4;4,4. Even-lined (first line repeated)*

of 4,4,4. Meter in Piobaireachd refers to the number of measures or bars per line, as opposed to the number of beats per measure as it does in Western notation.

This species is one of several Piobaireachd constructs

*Graphic: Type: Tertiary A*

known as a Tertiary Type A tune. Successive variations on the theme adhere to this construct.

*Graphic: I. Urlar (Ground, or Theme)*

Starting from the Urlar, they are

*Narrator introduces:*

*Graphic: II. Doubling of Urlar*

*Graphic: III. First Variation*

*Graphic: IV. Doubling of 1st Variation*

*Graphic: V. Taorluath Variation (no English equivalent)*

*Graphic: VI. Doubling of Taorluath*

*Graphic: VII. Crunnluath Variation (Crowning)*

*VIII. Doubling of Crunnluath*

*Graphic: IX. Crunnluath A Mach (Climaxing of the Crowning movement)*

*Graphic: X. Return to Ground*

## SCENE 7

### ABOUT THE MACCRIMMON MASTERS <sup>5</sup>.

*At Dunvegan Castle*

NARRATOR        The original Piobaireachd masters, those whose mark remains fixed indelibly on what we play today were the MacCrimmon family who were the Hereditary Pipers to the Chiefs of the Clan MacLeod, the ancestral seat of which was, and to this day remains Dunvegan Castle on the Isle of Skye.

*Transition to Boreraig*

Oral tradition places the MacCrimmons on Skye from around the year 1570, when they began teaching Piobaireachd at their school in Boreraig. It was not so much a village as it was – and still is – a collection of farming cottages accessible by a narrow winding track following the contour of the sea along the Western shore of Loch Dunvegan.

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, Piobaireachd was the only serious form of music in the bagpipe repertoire before the onset of the Highland Society of London and Scotland's sponsored competitions, and before the militarization of pipe music with its regulated marches and repertoire of smaller tunes – dance tunes and airs grouped under the heading of Ceol Beag, or “little music,” generally referred to today as “light music.” At Boreraig, the MacCrimmons taught pipers from all over the Highlands, including Iain Dall MacKay who composed this now famous lament.

This is all that now remains of the farm where the MacCrimmons lived, composed, and taught. It is the Piobaireachd of the MacCrimmons

*Graphic: The MacCrimmon Legacy*

which has made its way into the present mainstream, descending directly through the MacKays of Gairloch to the MacKays of Rassay, wherefrom it branched out laterally to John Ban MacKenzie, the Camerons, and the MacPhersons.

SCENE 8

ABOUT PATRICK OG MACCRIMMON (1640-1735)

*At Kilmuir church ruins*

NARRATOR        A master player and teacher, Patrick Og, or “Little Patrick” is remembered as the greatest Piper and teacher of his day. Born in 1640, he was one of eight sons, seven of whom died within one year of each other from plague, inspiring their father, the great Patrick Mor, to compose the famous *Lament For The Children*.

A few miles from Dunvegan Castle lay the remains of Kilmuir parish church, once the spiritual hub of the outlying community, and now the final resting place of the MacCrimmons and their MacLeod patrons.

If Patrick Og is buried here, as is likely, his marker has long since been obscured by the elements, but a tablet on the church wall reminds visitors and pilgrims of the legendary MacCrimmons.

*MacCrimmon tablet on church wall*

*Graphic: English subtitles to tablet*

*At Boreraig, views of the loch, castle, and MacCrimmon Cairn*

Patrick Og succeeded his father as Hereditary Piper to MacLeod in 1670, holding the post until his death in 1735 at the advanced age of 95. He is the central figure in the MacCrimmon family legacy, for it was during his tenure that the historic MacCrimmon College of Piping formally began.

Due to his longevity and reputed abilities as a teacher, he was to leave an indelible mark on a great number of pupils who attended the college during his lifetime. Under Patrick Og the college flourished, producing players who would pass on the MacCrimmon style to subsequent generations of pipers. According to the late great Captain John MacLellan, it was Patrick Og who established the conventions of grace notes and ornamentation used today. Today, the only physical reminders of the great MacCrimmon pipers are the ruins of the crofts at Boreraig, a plaque to their memory at the ruins of Kilmuir, and the memorial cairn in Boreraig overlooking Loch Dunvegan erected last century by members of the Piobaireachd community.

*Transition to Bagpipe performance of Ground doubling*

## SCENE 9

### PERFORMANCE OF THE GROUND (DOUBLING)

*Performance dissolves into pan Blind Piper medallion, the tune fades out to narration*

## SCENE 10

### ABOUT IAIN DALL MACKAY (BLIND JOHN, 1656-1754)

NARRATOR Patrick Og's most famous pupil was Iain Dall, or "Blind John" MacKay. A master player, composer, and teacher, Iain Dall was born around the year 1656, and studied under the great Patrick Og MacCrimmon for many years. Oral tradition maintains that he was Patrick Og's greatest pupil, perhaps his only peer.

*Transition to Gairloch village signpost*

Ian Dall lived on the MacKenzie of Gairloch

*Transition to Gairloch seascape and mountains*

estate at Flowerdale, near the village of Gairloch, several days' journey by land from Boreraig in those days, but perhaps less than a day by sea. From Gairloch's windy heights on a clear day one can easily see the Cullin Mountains on Skye, and discern the promontory surrounding Loch Dunvegan where the MacCrimmons lived and taught.

*Transition to riding academy*

Today a riding academy occupies the land once farmed by MacKay's family, and the only reminder that he lived here is a bronze medallion in a

*Transition to Blind Piper medallion and cairn*

cairn erected by local residents within the last 10 years,

*Transition to bridge, paths of Flowerdale leading to the medallion*

and the ruins of a bridge leading to what may have been MacKay's house.

His music remains the most enduring testimony to his existence.

Like the MacCrimmons, Iain Dall's life became the topic of anecdotes in oral tradition. One story relates that *The Lament For Patrick Og*

*MacCrimmon* was composed upon Iain Dall hearing false news of his

teacher's death. When he discovered that Patrick Og was indeed alive,

MacKay visited Boreraig and played the piece for him. When MacCrimmon

asked what it was called, MacKay told him the story, to which

MacCrimmon is said to have replied "indeed, Lament for young Peter, and

he is still alive! I shall learn it myself!” [The Army School of Piping, 1961:17].

Iain Dall MacKay died in 1754, leaving behind some thirty known Piobaireachd; famous tunes like

*Close-up of Blind Piper medallion and cairn*

*The Blind Piper's Obstinacy; The Unjust Incarceration; MacKenzie of Gairloch's Salute; Munroe's Salute; and The Half Finished Piobaireachd,* written with Patrick Og MacCrimmon. He was survived by two sons,

*Transition to Gairloch cliffs and seascape looking to Skye*

both Pipers: John, the younger, who some believe emigrated to Pictou, Nova Scotia in 1773; and Angus, the eldest, who followed in his father's footsteps as Piper to MacKenzie of Gairloch, and whose own son John Roy settled in Pictou in 1805 [Shears 2008].

## SCENE 11

### LESSON WITH BILL: FIRST VARIATION

*Transition to lesson with Bill*

BILL                      Now, the First Variation is really counted in threes. (Singing)

And so on like that. It's a lovely variation. There is a touch here... by the way, I should have pointed out that this MacDonald's variation is never played. I've never heard it played. There's authority for it obviously, but

I've never heard it played by anybody. Okay, so let's go to the second line of the variation singling...

INTERVIEWER    If I may though, why is it that we're not playing Donald's variation? I mean, this seems to form a quite a substantial chunk of the tune, and we're disregarding it?

BILL                As current Piobaireachd performance and as probably for a long period of history performance style dictated, it's there, it existed, there's authority for it But you'll see in the notes on the right hand side of the page, "MacDonald's Variation 1, which is seldom if ever played nowadays but which the editors consider should be entered in their text. They suggest that it can be played or not played in competition entirely at the option of the competitor"... and the option of the competitor seems to be to omit it. Now, there was a year, I can't remember when, and the PS set these, set [as in stipulated tunes for competitions] a bunch of tunes and Patrick Og was amongst them and we were encouraged to, and I did learn that variation. It doesn't deviate very much from what already exists melodically, it's just kind of a different use of embellishments.

INTERVIEWER    So would you say then that it would be unconventional to play that variation?

BILL                    You'd take every judge by surprise.

INTERVIEWER        So it's by convention that we do *not* play this?

BILL                    Yes, I suppose.

                              Okay? So, Line 2 of Variation 1 singling (singing)...

NARRATOR            I defer to Bill's authority and disregard an entire Variation. It's another example of the schism between the printed score and oral tradition.

BILL                    (Singing). You hear they're not all the same, they're just slightly different as I'm singing them. And that's just personal touch. It's just personal touch from having played the tune for so long, so many times, and found places – and they're sometimes arbitrary – where you can insert a subtle touch that doesn't mutilate the tune in any way, and ornaments it sometimes in a way that's really, really pleasing. And when you hear it on the practice chanter you'll pick it up probably a little more, rather than through my unforgiveable croaking.

INTERVIEWER        How does one come by these subtleties?

BILL                      Sometimes they're given to you, as I'm going to show you in the third line, and sometimes they present themselves to you with experience and you know what you can do and can't do and not violate the parameters.

*Transition to practicing*

NARRATOR            *The Lament for Patrick Og MacCrimmon* lives up to its reputation as a large, difficult tune. Fortunately it has been abbreviated through the use of symbols and other musical shorthand to fit on a single page. After hearing the tune from Bill the printed score proves to be a useful aide mémoire. But had I not heard it from Bill and taken my own notes, I would be at a serious loss to play it correctly since the score does not reflect the melody.

*Clip: Colin looking at music score*

In Edinburgh, I met with renowned Piobaireachd player Colin MacLellan,

*Photo: pan of Colin on Glasgow Green 2008 with his Band*

one of the world's most successful competitive pipers of the last 30 years.

*Edinburgh looking up the Royal Mile*

Here, in Scotland's historic and bustling capital he teaches,

*Walking up stairs to Royal Mile*

makes bagpipe reeds, and maintains an active role in the Piobaireachd performer community. Colin enjoys a reputation as one of the most knowledgeable Piobaireachd masters in Scotland. I'm excited, and not entirely un-intimidated by the

*Grosvenor Apartments and Edinburgh Castle from Princes Street*

prospect of sharing a discussion about Piobaireachd with someone so elevated in the Piobaireachd community.

*Transition to Colin's boyhood home and Edinburgh Castle esplanade*

As I passed by his boyhood home, beside Edinburgh's most famous address, I considered all the piping giants of an earlier generation who would call here on his father,

*Photo: pan of Captain John MacLellan*

the late great Captain John MacLellan, Director of Army Bagpipe Music for the British Army.

*Transition to pan of music score*

I had the rare good fortune to hear some of *The Lament For Patrick Og MacCrimmon* from Colin. Like Bill, he immediately singled out the 1st Variation as a special, greatly esteemed part of the tune.

*Dissolve into Colin at home*

*Graphic: Colin MacLellan*

INTERVIEWER    What are some of your favourite tunes?

COLIN            My personal favourite tunes – and there's probably three or four of them – my favourite tune of all is probably *Lament for Patrick Og MacCrimmon* because I think it's the greatest that's been composed.

INTERVIEWER    What makes *Patrick Og* your favourite?

COLIN                *Patrick Og* is... it's just the melody of the thing. It's a magnificent tune, it goes all over the place, it uses the whole scale, the whole... technically it's really demanding, it's a magnificent composition and in the first variation, you know the great one that goes: (playing Variation 1).  
  
I can say safely that that's my favourite. That's my favourite line in Piobaireachd, in piping, probably in the whole of music. I think that's it.

*Dissolve into Bagpipe performance of First Variation (Singling), fade in over Colin's voice*

## SCENE 12

### PERFORMANCE OF THE FIRST VARIATION (SINGLING)

*Performance dissolves into "The MacCrimmon Legacy" chart*

## SCENE 13

### ABOUT THE ORAL TRADITION

NARRATOR        Piobaireachd remains an oral tradition, a living art which survives in the minds of the Piobaireachd community – a small cadre of musicians sensitive to the fragility of their cultural cargo, and who, as a matter of pride and artistic credibility, trace their musical pedigree by the names of their teachers back to the 16th Century masters.

Piobaireachd has followed the patterns of Scottish emigration around the globe, including Canada, with the musical descendents of master Piobaireachd artists whose patronage and schools disappeared long ago, but

whose music continues as a living memorial to a now extinct clan-based society through the passage of Piobaireachd from person to person.

*Transition to lesson with Bill*

INTERVIEWER Do you think what we're hearing with this tune, with what you're doing, what you've just shown me, do you think it's a reconstruction consistent with what Iain Dall MacKay wrote, do you think the composer would recognize this as his tune?

BILL I do, because I believe very much in the lineage of instruction all the way from the MacCrimmons right through, we can trace all of the great teachers and their pupils who became great teachers and their pupils and you know, you can go back to what recordings we have and stuff isn't very much different back at the beginning of this [20th] century; except it's better played in the sense that it has momentum and tempo. That's the worst thing about Piobaireachd playing today is the lack of tempo, lack of assertiveness, and it's very cautious and just sort of, you know, loses stuff.

*To interview with Bill*

INTERVIEWER Do you think that Piobaireachd as it's being performed today is an accurate reconstruction of what was being played at the time of its composition, using the example of the lament for Patrick Og MacCrimmon?

BILL I do. I do. I have real faith in the oral tradition and the lip-to-ear method of instruction. And I think that faith is supported by looking at any number of

lines of teaching that exist and have existed. Now, within recent living memory we have a pretty good handle on who played what and how they did going back to probably 1890 or 1880. And it's pretty consistent. It's pretty consistent, so I'm, yes, I believe that, you know, if primitive cultures can pass on huge complicated works of poetry and storytelling verbatim word for word in this fashion, there's no reason that we can't do the same thing in piping.

INTERVIEWER    Do you think someone can just pick up a CD, a recording of Piobaireachd and become a Piobaireachd player?

BILL                No. I do not. No, I've heard far too many performances of that kind. Now, however, if you're an accomplished player – and by accomplished I mean a world class player – that's a doable task and I know because I have adjudicated or listened to other people playing tunes that I've recorded and I know they're cloned from the way I've played them. And that's a great compliment. I have no quarrel with that at all!

INTERVIEWER    So, is this another way of saying that despite our technology we still have to go back to the old way of learning from a teacher?

BILL                I think, yes, I think the singing and the playing is the way to communicate the idea. I mean, you can't do it with a metronome.

*Dissolve into Bagpipe performance of First Variation (Doubling)*

SCENE 14

PERFORMANCE OF THE FIRST VARIATION (DOUBLING)

*Transition from performance to National Piping Centre, Glasgow*

ORAL TRADITION (Continued)

NARRATOR        In Glasgow I met with Roddy MacLeod, a top-prize winning soloist on the world stage, and Director of Scotland's National Piping Centre, who is also a Member of The Order of The British Empire owing to his work in the advancement of Piping.

Roddy is much sought after as a Piobaireachd teacher, with students travelling from all corners of the globe just to spend a few days with him for instruction.

*Photo: pan of Roddy on Glasgow Green 2008 with his Band*

*Looking at display inside Piping Centre*

*Transition to Roddy interview at Piping Centre*

*Graphic: Roddy MacLeod*

RODDY            Initially I was taught by Duncan Johnstone. When Duncan was teaching the tunes he would play on the practice chanter and then primarily thereafter once it was my turn to play he would sing the tunes with Canntaireachd as I was playing. And of course that helped bring out the expression, the rise and fall in his voice. I think to bring out the emphasis, where you really had to hold the notes, you know the phrase endings or line endings whatever, the

intonation in his voice could transmit to you what he wanted you to play, what he wanted to teach you. And so that was a very important part of learning, not just putting the music in front of me and telling me that that was an eighth note or a quarter note, we didn't really discuss note values as such. He tried to impart his music to me by singing. That was very much a part of my lessons and I think that that would be very traditional, over hundreds of years, going right back to what we perceive the MacCrimmons to have been doing.

### *Transition*

I think I would have probably not learned Piobaireachd so well had it not been for my teacher singing Canntaireachd to me. Certainly if I was left to try and interpret the music from printed pages per the manuscripts that appear, for example, in the Kilberry Book or the Piobaireachd Society collection, the interpretation would be quite different from what is actually there in terms of note values and so on. So, it clearly needed an experienced teacher who had had himself been a recipient of the tradition to pass on the style of music to me I think in a way that was, had, some integrity to the way it was taught maybe a hundred years ago.

### *Transition to Colin*

COLIN            Well, it's said that they learnt from the instruction of the teachers in the oral tradition, and any time you hear that explained it's always, it always pays a lot of attention to the fact that Piobaireachd was taught orally by means of Canntaireachd. But nothing is much said that they must have learnt too from

just listening to people play, as well. So it would have been a sort of dual thing where they would have listened to the teacher sing and play.

Obviously, the singing part would have been in all probability a lot more a part of tuition than tends to be the case today. So, what these people were being taught was probably quite an individualistic sort of way of playing.

Whether they kept the tunes together and played them the same is really debatable. As these tunes were handed down I'm quite sure there were major differences and many different ways that people would have been playing the tunes. And as I say, the tune itself would have evolved until such time as the printed page became available and that would have standardized and everybody, when that printed page appeared, would have started to play the same way.

One of the interesting things about Piobaireachd in general is that it's music composed for one instrument, to be played by one person. And so much of what goes into you as a player, and what you've learned, comes from so many different sources. From different people who are contemporaries of yours, swapping advice and discussion, and learning that way; back to the person or people that taught you, your own experiences in piping, listening to competitions, listening to other people play, attending events, schools. All these kinds of things form a great big sort of learning environment that everything goes into you, and the more of these things that you gather up the more that you learn from, to me, the more accomplished and knowledgeable

Piobaireachd player you become. You make use of all these different sources that in the piping world are available to you in order to produce at the end of the day the one performance from the one person.

*Transition to Brian Williamson interview*

*Graphic: Brian Williamson: Piping teacher, judge, and retired professional competitor*

BRIAN I do have a connection, well yes. I don't feel a close connection to the ones that I haven't met, but I do recognize that they were the ones who taught my teachers or they were the ones who taught the teachers who taught my teachers, and that there is a chain and it passes on that way. I know a lot of people, a lot of teachers especially in the recent past have been quite adamant that "I got this from so-and-so and that he got it from so-and-so and that's exactly the way that it's played."

*Freeze frame*

NARRATOR Linking with the past is a recurring theme in Piobaireachd, but not purely for sentimental reasons. Piobaireachd players rely on their connection with past masters as a means of citing the authority for their interpretation of Piobaireachd. The importance of being able to connect one's own teaching with the authority of past masters is due in part to the schism between printed score and the audible melody, like that of the un-used Variation in *Patrick Og*. The connection with past masters thus fills the gap of authority left by what the printed score fails to show.

*Resume interview*

INTERVIEWER     So how important is it then, to be able to link up with past masters of the 17th, 18th and 19th Centuries?

BRIAN             I think that's the roots of the music. I think it's important to have some sort of a chain that way in the teaching. I think it's important to look at the things that they set down. You may have to take some of them with a grain of salt, most anything we have passed down from before the time of recordings is all we have is "oh I heard so-and-so play way back when and this is what I remember," or we have what they managed to write down on a piece of paper, either the published Piobaireachd books or in various manuscripts.

BRIAN             Oh I think so very much, yah. Well I think that the connection between the current Piobaireachd community and the historic Piobaireachd community is the chain of teaching and the chain of passing on the music whether it be through direct teaching, through the few older recordings, through memory, or through the historical record of printed published books. So-and-so, I may have a recording of so-and-so playing this tune and somebody else playing it later, or even of the same guy playing the same tune at a later date and maybe with a slightly different style and presentation.

*Graphic: pan of "MacCrimmon Legacy" as narration begins*

NARRATOR        I thought about this chain of teachers, and was indeed able to trace my knowledge of *The Lament For Patrick Og MacCrimmon* back to the

masters: I learned this tune from Bill, who learned it from Donald MacLeod, who was taught by the great John MacDonald of Inverness, who was taught by Callum MacPherson, who learned from John MacKay of Rassay and Iain Dubh MacCrimmon.

*Dissolve into Jack Coghill interview*

*Graphic: Jack Coghill: Piobaireachd player, Official Reader for the Piobaireachd Society Gold Medal (Canada) Competitions*

JACK                    Learning Piobaireachd comes through exposure. And the exposure is that which occurs between the master and the pupil. And it is sung, ideally, the performance is played on the practice chanter, but the tune ideally is sung by the master, listened to and absorbed by the student, and then the student tries to replicate that performance. And...

INTERVIEWER        Do you think that's been done for a long time?

JACK                    I believe that that system of teaching Piobaireachd has been done since the beginning of time. I will assume that the techniques of teaching are the same now more or less as they were since the 16th Century when they were teaching it in the original school, although we have that additional teaching aid so to speak of the printed page.

INTERVIEWER        How hard is it to find a Piobaireachd master from whom you can get a tune?

JACK

To find a Piobaireachd master in this day and age is a considerable chore, I think. Two things considering, to be considered are: just the density of teachers on the planet, they are few and far between, people that you would respect to the point where you'd like to go stand in front of a judge saying "I learned this particular tune from so and so," and that's a very rare thing just because there aren't many good teachers around; and the other thing...

*It is* important that I'm playing it in the style that my teacher did teach me.

But, this day and age I now have certain reservations about the art itself, and I find that that art is somehow being distributed in such a fashion that I'm actually insecure about my feelings about whether or not I'm projecting a piece that would be appreciated by a judge based on who I learned it from or the variation, the subtleties that I'm placing on the tune as a performer.

Maybe as a new player and not within the ultra ranks of the Piobaireachd player this day and age I also think that... I'm a little bit hesitant to perform in the big contests because I don't think that my grounding is as good as some of the other competitors in the field. I think they've had more exposure to bigger better teachers, more important players, people who'd be recognized by the judges, the more respected. I learned my tune from someone that is in the Ottawa scene so to speak, and they might say, "well, they don't qualify that as highly" if I'd played a tune that I learned from someone in Scotland, say. And that's critical. And the other thing that bothers me about performing in contests in this area, in the Ottawa area, is that because I don't have that exposure to the judges, the judges are so rare –

sorry, teachers are so rare in this vicinity that I have to impart a certain amount of myself in the tunes. I have to make up stuff. Very subtle, very subtle turns of phrase, very subtle emphasis in certain parts of the melody that I think works for me. Based on the title of the tune... if it's a Salute and I want it to sound like a Salute so I'm going to do that to it. Heck, you know that sounds more like a Salute to me and I'm a performer so why can't I play it like that? A judge would say "no, that's not how it should be because so and so said it has to be played in such a manner." And that, unfortunately, is somewhat of a hindrance to my own personal Piobaireachd performance.

*Transition to photo with Allan MacDonald, begin narration*

*Transition to Mountain scene*

NARRATOR        I spoke with Alan MacDonald at his home in Edinburgh. He is a native Gaelic speaker from the village of Glenug on Scotland's west coast near the southern tip of Skye.

*Transition to Allan close-up*

After winning the coveted Highland Society of London's Gold Medal for Piobaireachd at Inverness, as well as the Gold Medal Clasp, the premiere prize reserved for former Gold medal winners, he went on to research the relationship between Gaelic song and Piobaireachd, and now lectures at Edinburgh University.

*Transition to Allan MacDonald interview*

*Graphic: Allan MacDonald*

ALLAN

Well, I think what we have today is the culmination of a tension, a continuous tension between what was essentially an oral tradition with a hell of a lot of freedom, with a rhythm which was like what Bartok would call *parlando*, which is close to the rhythms of language. For instance in any country's music, if you want to look at their classical music, and compare it to the language of the people of that nation, you will find some correlation between these two aspects. *Piobaireachd* moved from being a functional music to what it is now. Essentially for me it's an art music which is staged, which is far removed from the original context in which it was performed and composed for. Again, composed I mean sometimes in a loose way, because I think a lot of these compositions, these tunes moved around, and they were added to, and they were a community composition as it were. And so, although we do have some, we certainly do have pieces which have clearly been composed by Iain Dall, or Patrick Og, or whatever, but a lot of them are the result of a very rich oral tradition. And when you have these complex rhythms, linguistic rhythms, essentially, in song, out with that area because this music is freer, much freer than any notation could even approximate.

That notion I had of communal composition. For instance if you look at a number of *Piobaireachd* that we play that have been notated. Well they've all been, for the most part notated. I think there's about 40 or so in the Campbell *Canntaireachd* that haven't seen the light of day yet – but tunes

like the *Park Piobaireachd*, and *Too Long In This Condition*, and *Macfarlane's [Gathering]*, tunes like that where there are variants, there are tunes in the tradition where one is just simply a variant of the other. The *Park Piobaireachd No. 1* and *No. 2*, it's simply a variant. Now that occurred because these tunes moved around. These tunes were passed on in the community, and they became what they became. And you know Bartok talks of the "wonderful metamorphosis" of the oral tradition, and that is exactly what is so beautiful about the oral tradition, because tunes are composed without one being aware that you're composing. You'll find the same, I think Albert Lord in *The Singer of Tales*, a seminal book on the oral tradition and transmission of song, talks about the reinvention which is occurring all the time when someone sings a song, and when someone, obviously when you're singing a piece which is 20, 40 verses long, you're changing, you're keeping the interest of the listener by changing. You know, you wouldn't present it the same way all the time.

And I think the same to a certain extent would apply for *Piobaireachd*. Because I think *Piobaireachd* came out of that same Bardic tradition, that same oral tradition, and it was transmitted in such a way that allowed for variations or variants, rather, and people would add variations to these pieces as well.

INTERVIEWER     So I think I'm starting to understand now what you meant at the beginning of our discussion when you said "the diffusion of Piobaireachd as far as I'm concerned is no more." I'd like to hear more about that.

ALLAN             You mentioned something about something is frozen. I think, I have often described it like, for instance the MacArthur manuscript, and Donald MacDonald's books, and Angus MacKay, it's almost like a camera shot has been taken of them, and it's been frozen in time and nothing has changed since then.

INTERVIEWER     Which is very much alien to the tradition?

ALLAN             Absolutely, from the oral tradition, the tradition in which it survived.

*Transition to Taorluath Variation lesson with Bill. Narration over Bill playing chanter.*

NARRATOR        After showing me the Ground and First Variation, Bill moved on to the Taorluath. This is the variation where the theme notes begin to be heard more prominently with the addition of the Taorluath ornament.

I focus intently on the score to correct the inevitable discrepancies which occur in print, and note the subtleties of what is being played. Things which, in the absence of musical signs for tempo and style, I would never know except by hearing them in this fashion.

My markings are a sort of instinctive shorthand, useless to anyone looking at my score. But which I know will bring me back to this moment even years from now when I refer to them.

*Dissolve into Bagpipe performance of Taorluath Variation (Singling and Doubling)*

## SCENE 15

### PERFORMANCE OF TAORLUATH VARIATION (SINGLING AND DOUBLING)

*Performance dissolves into pan of music score and the tune fades out to narration*

## SCENE 16

### ABOUT PIOBAIREACHD RECONSTRUCTION AND STAFF NOTATION <sup>6</sup>

NARRATOR        It is impossible to regard what appears in staff notation as an accurate representation of Piobaireachd, and therefore impossible to reconstruct Piobaireachd from staff notation alone. One must have a teacher and learn in the oral tradition. Although Western musical notation is a highly sophisticated language capable of supporting major works, it remains woefully inadequate at representing Piobaireachd with the degree of accuracy necessary to facilitate reconstruction. And so Piobaireachd may not be learned from sight in the Western manner of reading music. Western notation is therefore merely a practical aide mémoire.

Musical terms indicating metre, tempo and expression are not to be found. The problem is essentially one of musical time, due in part to the non-

metrical character of Piobaireachd, especially in the Ground, and the ubiquitous presence of ornaments which feature so prominently and fundamentally in Piobaireachd as to be inseparable from the melody.

NARRATOR      The original system of notation for recording Piobaireachd on paper was called “Canntaireachd.” Virtually all Piobaireachd appearing in staff notation was transcribed from this ingenious and elaborate system of vocables by which tunes were written down either from memory, or dictated from singing or playing. But whereas Canntaireachd afforded detailed recording of musical pitch and ornamentation, it did not allow for the showing of musical time, critical information which could be relayed only by ear.

*Dissolve to Donald Macdonald’s Book cover over opaque music score*

*The Lament for Patrick Og MacCrimmon* was put into staff notation for the first time in 1822 by Donald MacDonald, nearly one hundred years after its composition,

*Dissolve to Angus MacKay’s Book cover over opaque music score*

and again in 1838 by Angus MacKay.

The two settings of *The Lament For Patrick Og MacCrimmon* used by pipers today are those found in the

*Dissolve to Piobaireachd Society Book cover over opaque music score*

Piobaireachd Society Collection, and

*Dissolve to Kilberry Book cover over opaque music score*

*The Kilberry Book of Ceol Mor*, virtual mirror images of each other.

*Back to lesson with Bill*

INTERVIEWER Just from looking at the printed page it doesn't tell me a whole lot about the tune. I don't get a real true sense of this piece just from looking. I have to hear it.

BILL Well you're right, and this is a real problem with Piobaireachd notation.

INTERVIEWER So, an accomplished pianist for example, might take a score written 10, 20, 100 years ago and reproduce that music from sight. Why is it that I can't, with the same facility, the same degree of success, take this tune and reproduce it from sight? Why is it I need to have it sung to me, I need to have it shown, shown to my ear?

BILL That question is really to imply the answer. It's because of the oral tradition. And attempts at notation - I mean there's still, as you know from current literature - they're fraught with controversy as to whether these notated Piobaireachd in the Kilberry Book and the PS are even close to accurate recordings of how the tunes were played, which is why you are always looking to have some kind of lineage. You want to see some sort of, what's the word I'm looking for, it's not pedigree, pedigree will have to do for the moment, but who are you learning from and where did they learn from and

that's kind of the line you're always looking for, because it is really and oral, it's really based on an oral tradition. Lip to ear.

INTERVIEWER I'm looking at this and I see a line of melody that's written in Common Time – four beats per measure – and yet you're singing this, you're playing this back to me in three. It doesn't make any visual sense whatsoever. It makes perfectly good sense to my ear, but it bears no resemblance to what's in front of me here.

BILL Okay. There's a lot of that in Piobaireachd. MacCrimmon's *Sweetheart*, written in 4/4 time (singing)... and there's *nothing* about that that is Common Time. It's pure 6/8 (singing)... you could almost march to it, it's that regular in compound rhythm. So, this is again part of the overall problem of teaching and learning and understanding Piobaireachd because there's so much which is not represented in the score. There's so much.

INTERVIEWER And yet this score represents the best efforts of perhaps the most literate and most learned Piobaireachd scholars, or musicologists, performers, and listeners and experts of the day.

BILL Well, not necessarily. If you read Dr. William Donaldson you will find that he's severely critical of almost all of the PS scores, and feels that Archibald Campbell wasn't adequate to the task as a player and an "understander" of,

if that's a proper word, of the music. And so this is why you have scores like this, which are so unrepresentative of the way the material is produced. I mean, this is... Allan MacDonald refers to all of this Piobaireachd scholarship somewhat snidely as "all was fine until the 'improvers' came along." So, that's part of what you're dealing with.

INTERVIEWER And yet this [The Piobaireachd Society collection] was someone's best effort. This represents the... well this was the product of a generation! It's almost the Piobaireachd "bible" if you will.

BILL What's the expression "the book , the book, the bloody book, they should throw it away."

*Transition to interview with Bill*

INTERVIEWER So, whereas pipers of old transmitted tunes using Canntaireachd, a language, a musical language that's fallen out of use – out of practical use – I shouldn't say completely forgotten but it's forgotten, although it could be re-learned, it's not used any more it's not widely known, do you think Canntaireachd has been replaced by staff notation?

BILL No. I think we all invent our own Canntaireachd... so you just hear me singing, and I'm using some of the original Canntaireachd things because all you're trying to do is use vocables that evoke the necessary sound of the embellishments. So... (singing) is very little different from (singing) which

is the Canntaireachd of that movement (singing). I mean you can't mistake that I'm playing a double echo with a g grace note which is the (sound) which is the same thing in Canntaireachd (sounds). So we all take our – all Canntaireachd was, was an attempt to make a vocal sound that duplicated what was being played on the bagpipe in the absence of paper.

*Back to Roddy MacLeod*

RODDY            Yes well, the printed scores for Piobaireachd very often don't portray the way that the tunes have been played over the past, you know, several decades at least. And so it's frustrating when, probably for students when they see a score and you say to them "Yes, that's the way it's written but that's not the way you play it." And I think that maybe the earlier interpreters of Piobaireachd who did try to notate the tunes in manuscript and in some cases edit them. You know have tried to conform to a pattern of writing it down where there's a time signature which means that they're having to put in bar lines. And you know they're having to make the note values add up so that the arithmetic adds up. Very often unfortunately in doing that I feel that it doesn't always put across the way the music was intended to be played.

RODDY            Well, I think that the problem with much of the notation of Piobaireachd just now is that if you give that to a student and you ask them to play it, in most cases it would be quite different from the way that you want them to play it.

It doesn't always accurately portray the style of play that is commonplace amongst you know, the top pipers or whatever. You know the teachers over the years or the styles that have been passed down are very often not what is written down in the major collections. And so, it doesn't help, particularly with the teaching. Because very often you say "I want you to play it like this" and the student immediately comes back and says "Well, why isn't it written like that?"

RODDY

Well I think there's no doubt that once you put, you know clearly it would be well-intentioned to get the music down on manuscript form – preserve it for the future. But in doing that you're only going to be putting down one interpretation. Or you know in these times there may have only been a handful of people with the skills to put the music down on manuscript form. And so clearly there'd be a limited number of interpretations that had been put in the Piobaireachd collections. I mean people refer to Angus MacKay's book as the "bible," you know, so that suggests that you have to conform to that style of play. And so, you know, and you get to the earlier part of the 20th century with the PS being formed and starting to set tunes to be performed for competitions. And then that inevitably guides the competitive pipers, the leading pipers maybe in their day to looking at the sources where they can find these tunes in manuscript form. And so it sort of possibly becomes more restrictive in terms of interpretation because everybody's going to the same sources for the music. And so there's no doubt that, you

know, putting the music down in manuscript I think might have limited the variety of interpretation.

*Back to Colin MacLellan*

INTERVIEWER Do you think that it's ironic that you had Piobaireachd being put into print in the beginning of the 1900s, there was a big rush to get it all in print, to save it, to preserve it or whatever. But they only got one very slender picture of it. What did putting it into writing do to these "other ways" of playing it, other interpretations?

COLIN Well, it almost destroyed other ways of playing. And it's only now that piping as a whole has got over a sort of a very, very blinkered type of close-minded period, if you like. One of the fresher things that's happening in the modern age, starting almost right now, in the time that we are living and not even in the time that we are living, right now in the year 2009. I'd say this is a development probably that's only happened in the last five years. People are beginning to be very, very enthusiastic about finding out about other styles and other settings. We call them "alternative settings," which to me has been a bit of an odd way of describing them, as something as alternative. It's just another way of playing the tune. To call it "alternative" implies that it's a branch of something else.... But anyway, so we have more and more people exploring different ways of playing the music and becoming accepted in the playing of Piobaireachd. Which is obviously a very very good thing.

INTERVIEWER    So do you think that the printed page helped or hindered the transmission of Piobaireachd?

COLIN             It's the million dollar question. I think it greatly helped it. It possibly didn't help the actual playing, the actual quality and the standard of playing, but it made the tunes available to a wider audience. The books that first appeared, obviously, were commissioned or sponsored or financed by the pipers' employers or the patronage or things like that. And so you had stuff like the manuscripts coming out with piano scores underneath them in an attempt to make it desirable for a wider audience. Which was ironic because I don't think it really did. But the books were widely available, although they were very expensive to buy, I think, and very expensive to produce. So, in answer to that question, it would be the kind of thing where, yes, a lot of people started to play from the books and perhaps more people started playing Piobaireachd. But everybody inevitably would start to play possibly a little bit more similar fashion and in a less individualistic way than before there was the printed page. It's all conjecture.

INTERVIEWER    Why is it that Piobaireachd is not accurately represented on the page? What is it about the notes, the print?

COLIN             Well, I think one of the things I think that's really interesting about it is that before things were committed to print I think that there must have been

probably a great variety of ways of playing tunes. So you wouldn't have this sort of slavish interpretation that we have, that we've developed from learning Piobaireachd from a printed score. And so I think when the printed score came out, probably things got a little more standardized and people started playing much more the same.

*Back to Allan MacDonald*

ALLAN            There was a man in my own village. And every place had examples of these people who had incredible amounts of information, literary, stories, of the Fingalians, of the Fenian warriors, of the great traditions going right back, tunes, whatever, poetry, going back centuries. And you know, the worth of any writer is you know, or anyone in academia, is this ability *not* be dependant on *a* written book. They didn't need books. And then suddenly society changed to "Oh, what is in the book is correct." You know, there was this complete change philosophy, of education, which was this kind of education that came in with English education. And it put a whole complete different slant in it, including this literate education in music.

I often describe the earliest sources – I mean the first source it's Joseph MacDonald in 1760

*Graphic: Joseph MacDonald's book cover*

who writes a complete theory. He's trying to inform about the old ways that lay about this, what he sees a dying tradition, and he tries to describe

*Dissolve back to Allan*

all the aspects of, different aspects of what we now call Piobaireachd. It was not called Piobaireachd until very late on – this was again, a problem. They were called Marches, Gatherings, Salutes, they all had their particular characteristic, like MSR's [Marches, Strathspeys, and Reels] have. Laterally.... it could have been Walter Scott, or someone, who came up with the word Piobaireachd which put it all into one block and homogenized it. And made it all [the same], and everything was performed the same way despite the fact that Gatherings and Laments are quite different pieces altogether and had to be performed at different tempos, and different spirit, you see?

I think if you look at the frozen pages, the cold pages of a book of music and look at that, these notes on a page they're nothing, until they go through that head of yours and the fingers and are played and listened to, you know, they mean nothing. What happens, I could interpret the same piece of music from you in a completely different way because I come from a different cultural standpoint. So I put that piece of Piobaireachd in front of me and I will interpret ten different ways if you want and it will still be arguably valid for that piece of music that was written there in front of you. So it's all about interpretation and it's all about interpreting within the certain parameters that are implied by or set out by this music written on the score.

*Back to Jack Coghill*

JACK                    The idea of the printed page in the art is something which is quite interesting to me. Insofar as I find it so artificial and such a binding element in the music itself because I've been exposed to the Piobaireachd Society volumes, and Kilberry etc. I've also been read the law that this is how it is played, there's no other way to play this tune, every note, every minutia in the performance is contained on that page. But the thing that the page doesn't tell you is the inherent quality of Piobaireachd which has to be taught through, through the vocalization of a teacher to the student, the Canntaireachd so to speak. And it's the singing of the tune which is most important, as in, as in a poem. You can read a poem, a piece of, a piece of paper with words on it and you read the, if you just visualize, you look at the words on the sheet and the poem doesn't resonate the same way that the poem would resonate if you actually were to read it out loud. And that is, that's the part of Piobaireachd that removes it from that sheet even though the sheet is doctrine and that's the absolute technique that must be performed, the actual. The tune that wins the contest is the one that has that inherent quality which cannot be written on a piece of paper.

*Graphic: pan of music score, begin narration*

## SCENE 17

### ABOUT PIOBAIREACHD ANECDOTES

NARRATOR            Piobaireachd is both art music and a medium through which stories of the Highland people are transmitted. Through anecdotes shared during the

learning of Piobaireachd, players gain a view of history not found in history books. The music is a repository of folkloric information which survives in the minds of Piobaireachd performers as cultural relics of a people who enshrined their creativity in music without words, music which cannot survive on paper.

Today, the reconstruction of Piobaireachd perpetuates the transfer of texts which, in the century following the demise of the clan system in 1746, were nearly lost during the Highland Clearances. But which have survived by oral transmission between pipers.

*Back to Colin*

COLIN

You have these stories about these tunes. And if you were in school you wouldn't get that as part of your history lesson, you wouldn't get it in school at all. You wouldn't get it unless you were a piper that was learning the tune at the time. I don't think you would get that information anywhere unless you were a piper playing the pipes. I think you could probably really really dig it up, if you were a non-piper for instance and you picked up something like the Kilberry Book at a public library, and decided to take that a little bit further. Perhaps out there you would but no, generally, as a piper that's information that only pipers get.

The legends and the stories of the tunes, as more and more people, as more and more pipers learn the instrument and they learn these stories, more and

more people are able to find out about the stuff like the stories associated with *Lament For The Children*, *Lament for Mary MacLeod*. I mean I remember being absolutely fascinated when I learned the whole thing about Mary MacLeod. The idea that she was a poetess and she was associated in some sort of relationship with Patrick Og MacCrimmon, and this great Lament was composed for this very cultured woman on Skye.

But I remember being fascinated by hearing all about this and the part, as a fairly young person, about her being buried face down on stones because she was supposedly, had the reputation due to this relationship as a woman of ill repute. So that kind of thing communicates anecdotes, and a window into what life was like I suppose at the time. And the culture, the traditions, like that sort of arrangement on her death, what happened to her due to her reputation. We wouldn't know about that, unless it was through the playing of Piobaireachd and the stories behind the tunes.

Another one is the lament *For The Viscount of Dundee*... The battle of Killiecrankie, with the silver bullet: there was only meant to be one thing that could kill the Viscount of Dundee – it was a silver bullet. And apparently that's what happened to the poor man. And I know hanging in Blair castle just now there's an actual breastplate with a hole in the middle of it that I went to see, when I was there. I'm not sure if it was entirely authentic or not, but it still supports the story.

*Back to Allan MacDonald*

ALLAN                   The other type of laments were Bardic laments. So you would have, for instance, eulogies for certain people. It was the tradition that the Bard of the family, or someone in the community would make this poem or song for the dead. And these poems were always... they were never slow and depressing, as far as I'm concerned. You would get some, yes, that were slow, but they weren't, they had rhythm, they had rhythm of language in them of course.

INTERVIEWER       I'd really like to hear some of the rhythm of the Gaelic language.

ALLAN                   Well for instance the Lament for... for instance, for my namesake Allan MacDonald at the Battle of Sheriffmuir was something...(singing).  
Now you see, that's a praise poem, that was... from the death of the Chief. So you'll have people kind of wonder when they say "Oh MacAllister's lively lament," or Duncan MacRae of Kintail's Lament...

*Lesson with Bill: Crunnluath*

BILL                    So, from the last two notes of the Taorluath doubling: (playing)

*Narration over bill playing chanter*

NARRATOR           While watching and listening to Bill I find it ironic that the most physically demanding and technically difficult variation is also the easiest melodically, because it is virtually all theme notes. The tune slips naturally into the Crunnluath 'a Mach, the final "crowning" variation.

BILL                   Patrick Og has a Crunnluath a' Mach, and actually a very, very good one.

So here's the 'A Mach movement (playing).

*Dissolve into Bagpipe performance of Crunnluath Variation (Singling)*

#### SCENE 18

#### PERFORMANCE OF CRUNNLUATH VARIATION (SINGLING)

*Performance dissolves to a look back at the participants, as the tune fades out to narration.*

#### SCENE 19

#### CONCLUSION

NARRATOR      My experiences with Bill and the artists along my journey have led me to a new and deeper understanding of what we mean by the oral tradition as it relates to Piobaireachd. It is more than the act of filling in the gaps between the printed note and audible melody. It is more than the act of inspiring a more fulsome interpretation of old texts; and it is certainly more than the use of singing to assist the teaching of Piobaireachd.

*Dissolve into Bagpipe performance of Crunnluath Variation Doubling and 'A Mach and return to Ground*

#### SCENE 20

#### PERFORMANCE OF CRUNNLUATH VARIATION (DOUBLING) AND 'A MACH AND RETURN TO GROUND

*Performance dissolves to close-ups of instrument as the tune fades out to narration.*

NARRATOR All of these things have value and play an important part in the transmission of Piobaireachd. But in its essence, the oral tradition is that which empowers Piobaireachd to live, to grow, and change as it passes from one person to the next. It allows for more than communal ownership: it allows for communal composition through the addition of changes by those with whom it makes contact. When Piobaireachd was put into staff notation it was frozen in that one instant, and became a snapshot of just one interpretation, one way of being.

And whereas variation was a hallmark of pre-staff notation Piobaireachd performance, it has been replaced by conformity with stylized practices, becoming a reiteration of itself in the image of previous reconstructions. It has become ritual.

*Back to Allan MacDonald*

ALLAN There's roughly what, 300 tunes or so in the repertoire, probably 200 in total if we take the fact that a lot of them are variants of variants of variants. However you identify a piece as being original and quite separate from another piece, that's a moot point. When a tune moves you could argue, well, put it in the hands of each performer, it's a different tune in your hands than it is in my hands. And I think that's what we're losing today. We're losing that individuality and that character by standardizing everything to the point where everything is predictable, everything is known beforehand, as far as I'm concerned.

INTERVIEWER It's the antithesis of an oral tradition?

ALLAN Absolutely. I think it's the antithesis of what the oral tradition is all about. And it's that wonderful range, and that continuous change, and that artistic freedom and development that we all need.

*Back to boat trip to Skye*

NARRATOR Like Ceol Mor itself, the pre-notation oral tradition was a continuum of variations on a theme which drove the diffusion of new Piobaireachd interpretations in the performer community. But today, the term oral tradition as it is used by the Piobaireachd community represents the transmission and preservation of the status quo.

It is a question of values: on the one hand diversity, change, and growth; on the other, conformity and stasis. It was the former which had attended the

*Transition to Loch Dunvegan from Cairn*

Piobaireachd genre prior to its reduction to staff notation, but which the Piobaireachd community shed in favour of its members playing, quite

*Transition to Dunvegan Castle*

literally, from the same sheet. A curious paradigm for a performer community made up entirely of soloists,

*Transition to Kilmuir parish church ruins*

but understandable in view of the dramatic social changes<sup>7</sup> which overtook Highland society in the

*Transition to Borerraig ruins*

18th and 19th Centuries and prevailed over the language and social system  
from which Piobaireachd sprang.

*Transition to walking to Blind Piper medallion*

Piobaireachd is to me a sacred artifact, and must remain so until such time  
as it again becomes the object of communal composition. For the present,

*Zoom in on Blind Piper medallion*

reconstructions of Piobaireachd such as mine will continue to have as a  
fundamental object,

*Fade in the first line of the Ground*

congruence with past performances.

*Dissolve from medallion to performance of the first line of the Ground, fade to black*

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>. The Project

My membership in the Piobaireachd performer community brought an emic perspective to this participatory research in which I filled the roles of pupil, performer, and interviewer. This afforded the project the benefit of three modes of ethnographic writing which I trust lend authority to the film. First, the film draws upon experiential authority derived from my feeling for and “accumulated savvy and sense of the style” (Clifford, 1988, p. 35) of the people I engaged and the material under study. And since the primary activity involved in experiential research is “language learning in the broadest sense” (Clifford, p. 35), my membership in the performer community predisposed me to be sensitive to the language and modes of behaviours of the group under study. I was then able to assert the “‘I was there’ of the ethnographer as insider and participant” (Clifford, p. 35).

Second, the film benefited from an interpretive mode which furnished a thick description of Piobaireachd reconstruction, one sensitive to the “unwritten behaviour, speech, beliefs, oral tradition, and ritual” (Clifford, 1988, p. 38) of the group in study and the music. Finally, the dialogical mode allowed for the presentation of discourse between the participants and me in my capacities of interviewer, pupil, and performer. These modes benefited from my knowledge and experience as a member of the performer community.

My aim was to document the teaching, reconstruction and transmission of Piobaireachd in the oral tradition in a DVD film culminating with a solo performance by me of *The Lament For Patrick Og MacCrimmon*, a Piobaireachd revered by performers for its artistic and technical sophistication; for its composer, Iain Dall MacKay – who was perhaps the greatest Piobaireachd composer in terms of the substantial number and quality of his tunes; and for its namesake, the

great Piobaireachd master Patrick Og MacCrimmon for whom it was composed around the year 1730.

A video documentary was selected as the best medium to accomplish this because it allowed me to present an actual Piobaireachd performance while providing a first-hand audio-visual record of the collaboration between pupil, teacher, and experts during the learning process. It also afforded me the means to visually situate the music in the geographic and cultural surroundings from which it sprang.

I was fortunate to receive the piece from master Piobaireachd artist Bill Livingstone, the most celebrated piper to emerge from the North American piping community. His knowledge of Piobaireachd and his musical accomplishments are known to pipers universally. In 1977 he won the prestigious Highland Society of London Gold Medal for Piobaireachd at the Northern Meeting in Inverness, a feat he repeated in 1979 at the Argyllshire Gathering, and in 1981 he won the “Clasp” to the Gold Medal at Inverness in the Former Winners competition.

I learned from Bill in the teacher-pupil dynamic customary of this art form, involving private music study, rehearsal, criticism, and exposure to musical reflections and anecdotes by the master, to produce a reconstruction consistent with the conventions of present-day Piobaireachd performance. I then traveled to Scotland to engage other experts, and journeyed through the West Coast and Isles to document the location wherefrom Piobaireachd originated. Here too the MacCrimmons and their pupils handed it down to the present through a slender line of artists whose musical descendents include Mr. Livingstone and my other research participants.

In addition to my role as pupil, I functioned as interviewer and narrator, posing open-ended and specific questions to elicit information during videotaped interviews; these serve to produce an aural and visual record of the learning and reconstruction of ancient Piobaireachd

through study under a master. The film provides viewers and listeners with an intimate vantage point from which to discover Piobaireachd, its musical essence, and to learn of the connection it shares with its land and culture of origin, and how it has come to exist in the New World.

## 2. The Participants

Members of the Piobaireachd performer community are part of a system of sound, an “acoustic community” (Truax, 1984, p. 58) in which they are recognizable “socially and culturally in terms of shared activities, rituals, and dominant institutions” (Truax, p. 58). They are connected and defined by the sounds of Piobaireachd which pervades their lives, and they manifest themselves as a community in several ways. They organize around regular festivals where competitions for the best performances of Piobaireachd are held, and they defer to the musical authority of bodies such as The Piobaireachd Society, the Army School of Piping, and The National Piping Centre. Members of the Piobaireachd performer community are connected by a sound which, to persons outside the community may not be understood, but to which is attached information understood by members (Truax).

Members of the Piobaireachd performer community are also linked by conventions unique to their sound environment. These conventions normally allow “people who have little or no formal acquaintance with or training in the art to participate as audience members” (Becker, 1982, p. 46) But examples of this are rare in Piobaireachd, since audiences at Piobaireachd events tend overwhelmingly to be members of the performer community. This was noted during my research where there was consensus among participants that this was a phenomenon unrelated to the music, and that Piobaireachd ought to be presented to a wider audience. Each participant shared anecdotes of Piobaireachd concerts attended by large, appreciative non-

Piobaireachd playing audiences. These are rare exceptions, however, and not the norm in Piobaireachd, an art in which the distribution of knowledge remains a “fact of social organization” (Becker, p. 41), and “[E]very art world uses... conventions known to all or almost all well-socialized members of the society in which it exists” (Becker, p. 42). This suggests that in order for there to be a wider, non-performer audience for Piobaireachd the social organization surrounding its transmission would need to be modified to reach and include a greater number of non-performers. In other words, it would be necessary to expand Truax’s acoustic community beyond the borders of Scottish culture.

Research participants provided advanced Piobaireachd instruction, artistic and cultural information, and answers to questions based on their expertise in the genre and knowledge of the oral tradition of Piobaireachd. They provided information outside the body of written work surrounding Piobaireachd, and facilitated reconstruction of this highly esoteric music through their participation.

In addition to Mr. Livingstone, the persons participating in my research are respected performers on the Great Highland Bagpipe who possess a deep understanding of Piobaireachd derived from musical study, performance, and their lifetime of exposure to the genre. Access to these participants represented an extraordinary opportunity for they represent the most knowledgeable and accomplished members of the performer community. Some are internationally acclaimed master Piobaireachd artists and teachers whose musical pedigree follows a direct line of descent from the 16th Century masters of Piobaireachd in Skye, and whose success in Piobaireachd competitions and recitals since the 1970s endorses their status as virtuosi performers and authorities on its history, teaching, composition, performance, and conventions. They included Mr. Colin MacLellan, of Edinburgh, Mr. Allan MacDonald, of

Edinburgh, Mr. Roderick MacLeod, of Glasgow. I also engaged two respected members of the Piobaireachd performer community in Ottawa, Ontario, Mr. Brian Williamson, and Mr. Jack Coghill.

### <sup>3</sup>. About Piobaireachd: Background

Piobaireachd, or 'Pibroch' (pronounced 'pee brock') is a Gaelic word with no English equivalent, other than such approximations as 'the art of pipe playing'. The word is constructed upon the Gaelic words “piob,” meaning pipe, piobaire, meaning piper, and the suffix “achd,” alluding to the action of the piper. Piobaireachd is a noun in the practical sense, and falls into a division of Highland Bagpipe music broadly named Ceol Mor, or 'Big Music'.

Piobaireachd consists of variations on a theme conforming to stereotyped patterns of meter and musical ornaments, and is grouped into forms according to the arrangement of these patterns. As art music it is the product of purely artificial conception, composed and performed by a small corps of musicians operating neither within a traditional nor folk music idiom. Highly esoteric in nature, it is interpretive music in which proficiency is achieved through several years of private study under an acknowledged master, and the performer community is committed to the advancement of the art for its art's sake, and is not engaged in revivalism.

The words Piobaireachd and Ceol Mor are used interchangeably to identify the same genre of music. Piobaireachd begins with a theme or “urlar” (Gaelic, meaning ground) based on melodic strains grouped into lines. Lines are constructed of musical phrases, the duration and arrangement of which conform to one of several diagnostic types of Piobaireachd. Briefly, it is the number of measures – sometimes referred to as “bars” – per line which determines the metre of a piece. For example, a metre of 6,6,4. indicates an urlar of three lines, the first of which is 6

measures in duration, followed by 6 measures in the second, and 4 in the third. In this regard, metre refers to the number of measures per line, as opposed to beats per measure in the Western musical sense.

From the urlar, Piobaireachd proceeds with several variations on the original theme. The number and pattern of these variations determine the diagnostic form, or species of the piece. All variations employed in Piobaireachd conform to stereotyped patterns of metre and ornamentation. These variations, which become more complex and technically demanding in their sequential order of appearance, are judged by the performer community according to their congruence with the main theme, their technical sophistication, and the skill with which they are executed by the performer.

#### <sup>4</sup>. About Piobaireachd: Technical Description

Piobaireachd lends itself to classification by tune title, stereotyped variation patterns, and phrase construction. No single classifying element prevails at the expense of another, meaning for example that the title or phrase construction of a piece does not dictate the variation pattern that follows. On the contrary, several combinations are possible and occur frequently.

#### Piobaireachd Classification by Title

Piobaireachd may be identified by tune title based on allusions made therein regarding the function, setting, or venue which has inspired its composition. All Piobaireachd are therefore classified as one of the following: Gathering pieces; Marches; Battle pieces; Salutes; Descriptive pieces; Pastoral pieces; and Laments.

The Piobaireachd Lament is a unique form of music indigenous to the Highland Bagpipe, composed solely for the purpose of mourning the deceased while evoking solemn thoughts of remembrance in the living. The Lament is essentially a musical eulogy, and as such it seeks to fill the void left in the human heart by the passing of loved ones by providing a vivid artistic impression of grief. Some of the most compelling Piobaireachd are in fact Laments, like *The Lament For Patrick Og MacCrimmon*.

#### Piobaireachd Classification by Variation Pattern

Identifying Piobaireachd by stereotyped variation patterns provides a more substantial method of classification than by title, for these are physical as opposed to abstract phenomena. It also exposes the musical devices used during performance to bring out the desired affect of a piece. The variation pattern in Piobaireachd is determined by the final movement, which can be a Standard Crunluath, Crunluath Fosgailte, or Crunluath Breabach.

#### Standard Crunluath Piobaireachd

Pattern:

- I. Urlar (Ground)
- II. Urlar doubling
- III. Dithis (pronounced “jeesh”) singling
- IV. Dithis doubling
- V. Taorluath singling
- VI. Taorluath doubling
- VII. Crunluath singling

VIII. Crunnluath doubling

IX. Crunnluath a Mach

X. Urlar

Crunnluath Fosgailte Piobaireachd

Pattern:

I. Urlar

II. Urlar doubling

III. Suibhal (pronounced 'shule' singling

IV. Suibhal doubling

V. Tripling singling

VI. Tripling doubling

VII. Crunnluath Fosgailte singling

VIII. Crunnluath Fosgailte doubling

IX. Urlar

Crunnluath Breabach Piobaireachd

Pattern:

I. Urlar

II. Variation of Urlar

III. Taorluath doubling

IV. Crunnluath doubling

### Piobaireachd Structure

While phrase construction is indeed an effective means by which Piobaireachd may be classified, it speaks more of the physical structure of the piece, and therefore has greater practical application for the player in matters of interpretation than the previous methods of classification. A thorough understanding of Piobaireachd phrase construction is crucial to the performance of this music, for it will aid in the memorization of the piece, and give shape and direction to melodic lines. The science of Piobaireachd phraseology was not formally documented until just prior to the turn of this century by Major General C.S. Thomason, whose work in this area preceded that of Mr. Justice Archibald Campbell, and Pipe Major John A. MacLellan. Their findings led to the identification of seven species of Piobaireachd:

### Primary Piobaireachd

In the Urlar, and each subsequent variation:

LINES: 3 Lines.

METRE: 6,6,4

PHRASES: 2 Phrases, A& B. each of 2 measures in duration.

STRUCTURE :

Line 1: A. A. B.

Line 2: A. B. B.

Line 3: A. B.

Where no changes of melody occur, the piece is regarded as a “pure Primary” Piobaireachd. Slight changes of melody may occur in the following: Line 1 in the latter part of phrase A., once; Line 2: latter part of phrase B., once; and in Line 3: in latter part of phrase B.

### Secondary Piobaireachd

In the Urlar, and each subsequent variation:

LINES: 3 Lines

METRE: 6,6,4.

PHRASES: 4 Phrases, A, B, C, & D. A& B are of 1 measure in duration each, while C& D are of 2 measures each.

STRUCTURE:

Line 1: A. B. C. D.

Line 2: C. B. A. D. or C. A. B. D.

Line 3: C. D.

Slight changes in melody may occur in phrases A& B of line 2, and in phrase D, line 3.

Lines 2 and 3 always begin with phrase C, and all lines must end with phrase D.

### Tertiary Type A Piobaireachd

In the Urlar, and each subsequent variation:

LINES: Even-lined, first line repeated.

METRE: Even-metre, e.g. 4:,4,4 / 6:,6,6 / 8:,8,8.

PHRASES: Various. Usually two measures in duration.

STRUCTURE: Through-Composed (phrases seldom repeated).

### Tertiary Type B Piobaireachd

In the Urlar, and each subsequent variation:

LINES: Even-lined, first line repeated

METRE: Even-metre

PHRASES: 4 Phrases, A,B,C,& D, of 1 measure each

STRUCTURE:

Line 1: A. B. A. C.

Line 2: D. B. D. C

Line 3: D. B. A. C.

Supplementary Type A Piobaireachd

In the Urlar, and each subsequent variation:

LINES: 3 Lines.

METRE: 6,6,4.

PHRASES: A& B. each of 2 measures in duration, and  
supplemented by one or two other phrases.

STRUCTURE:

Line 1: A. B. A.

Line 2: C. B. A.

Line 3: B. A. or B. D. or D. E.

Supplementary Type B Piobaireachd

In the Urlar, and each subsequent variation:

LINES: 3 Lines

METRE: 4,6,4 plus one or two measures Hiharin.

PHRASES: A& B. each of 2 measures in duration, and  
supplemented by one or two other phrases.

STRUCTURE:

Line 1: A. B.

Line 2: A. C. B.

Line 3: A. B. or A. D.

Irregular Piobaireachd

In the Urlar, and each subsequent variation:

LINES: 3 Lines, first line may be repeated.

METRE: Variable.

PHRASES: Variable.

STRUCTURE:

Variable

Irregular Piobaireachd are those which do not conform to any of the previously described forms.

<sup>5</sup> About The MacCrimmon Masters

Piobaireachd as we know it stems from the MacCrimmon family. They were Hereditary Pipers to the Clan MacLeod, and people whom oral tradition places on the Isle of Skye circa 1570 when they began teaching Piobaireachd at their school in Boreraig, on the Isle of Skye (Campbell, 1980, p. 9). Until the middle of the nineteenth century Piobaireachd was the only serious form of music in the bagpipe repertoire, and at Boreraig the MacCrimmons taught pipers from all over the Highlands “knowledge of that particular class of music which cannot be acquired except by several years of assiduous study and practice” (MacKay, 1972, p. 7). The

origin of the MacCrimmon family remains the topic of mystery. The story accepted by the Clan MacCrimmon Society places their origin in Cremona, Italy (Orme, 1979, p. 25). Still, all accounts place the MacCrimmons on Skye before the birth of Donald Mor MacCrimmon circa 1570, where they are “popularly reputed to have had a college or school of instruction at Boreraig in Duirinish for centuries” (Campbell, p. 9). Angus MacKay relayed that:

The most celebrated Pipers were the MacCrummens [sic], who, under the liberal patronage of the Lairds of MacLeod, became famous all over the Highlands; and their abilities were so well appreciated, that students from all quarters resorted to them, or were placed by their respective chiefs under those famous masters, whose residence consequently became dignified with the name of College. Here was imparted a knowledge of that particular class of music which cannot be acquired except by several years of assiduous study and practice; for the simple reels and strathspeys are far inferior in the estimation of a Piobaireachd player. (MacKay, 1972, p. 27)

Much folklore exists relating to the lives of MacCrimmon family members, some of which may have its origin in truth. Nevertheless, the existence of these stories signifies the esteem in which the MacCrimmons are held. Like the legend of Mozart being visited by a specter prior to his death, a story which serves as a mysterious sidelight to his famous Requiem, one story related to a similar premonition by Donald Ban MacCrimmon who “had a presentiment of the lamentable fate which awaited him” (The Army School of Piping, 1966, p. 7), and composed the epic Piobaireachd *MacCrimmon Will Never Return*.

Ultimately, it is the Piobaireachd of the MacCrimmons which has made its way into this century, and to which performers of Ceol Mor trace their musical lineage. The MacCrimmon legacy has descended to the present in linear progression through the successive generations and pupils of the MacCrimmons of Skye, the MacKays of Gairloch, the MacKays of Rassay, John Ban MacKenzie, the Camerons, and the MacPhersons.

## The MacCrimmons

### Iain Odhar MacCrimmon

Iain Odhar (Dun-Coloured John) became Hereditary Piper to the MacLeods of Dunvegan in 1600, a post which he held until his death in 1620 (MacLellan, 1964, p. 27). He established a line of successors who would be hailed as the greatest players, teachers, and composers of their period, and whose musical mark would rest on the best players in the performer community throughout history.

### Donald Mor MacCrimmon

Donald Mor (Big Donald) was born on the Isle of Skye in the year 1570, and succeeded his father as Hereditary Piper to MacLeod in 1620 (MacLellan, 1964, p. 27). While Donald Mor is remembered chiefly as a great composer of *Piobaireachd*, the esteem in which MacLeod held him as a performer is evident since he “sent Donald to Ireland, where a celebrated Piper, who had gone from Scotland, had established a college of celebrity” (MacKay, 1972, p. 8).

One of the most compelling anecdotes in bagpipe folklore concerns the events which purportedly inspired Donald Mor to compose one of his better known *Piobaireachd*. The story relates that Donald Mor's brother Patrick Caogach (‘Squinting Patrick’, alluding to his defective eyesight), a resident of MacLeod's lands in Glenelg, Ross-shire, was savagely murdered by his foster brother from the Kintail region. The story goes that against the wishes of his Chief, Donald Mor resolved to extract revenge on the man twelve months after the incident, and so secretly set out for Kintail. News of Donald Mor's intentions preceded him on his journey, and upon reaching his destination:

[T]he offender, having been apprised of his arrival, concealed himself in the house of a friend, and the inhabitants of the village not choosing to deliver him

up, MacCrimmon was so enraged that he resolved to set their houses on fire, a resolution which he found an opportunity of carrying into effect that night, and burned eighteen of their houses, which caused the loss of several lives. This incident was known as "Lasan Phadruig Chaogaich" or Squinting Patrick's Flame of Wrath. Donald then made his escape to Lord Reay's county where he remained for some time under the protection of Donald Dughal MacKay, afterwards Lord Reay, with whom he had been formerly acquainted. (MacKay, 1972, p. 8)

In commemoration of this episode, Donald Mor composed "A Flame of Wrath For Patrick Caogach" (MacLellan, 1964, p. 28). Other Piobaireachd compositions attributed to him are *Lament For Donald Duaghal MacKay*; *Lament For The Earl of Antrim*; *Lament For MacLeod of MacLeod*; *The MacLeod Controversy*; *The Earl of Ross's March*; *MacDonald's Salute*; and *MacLeod's Salute*.

Donald Mor remained as Hereditary Piper to MacLeod until his death in 1640 at age 70. His compositions gained him the distinction of being the first recognizable Piobaireachd composer of substance in piping history. As such, Donald Mor was the author of a musical legacy which passed through five generations of MacCrimmon pipers.

#### Patrick Mor MacCrimmon

The eldest son of Donald Mor, Patrick Mor MacCrimmon was born around 1595 and became Hereditary Piper to MacLeod in 1640, remaining thus until his death in 1670 (MacLellan, 1964, p. 27). Patrick Mor's portfolio of Piobaireachd composition is rivaled by few, and like his father he has come to be regarded as one of the greatest composers in piping history. Like his father, Patrick Mor's greatest composition is the subject of a compelling anecdote which lends insight to the creative process of the artist. In his "Account of The Hereditary Pipers," Angus MacKay (1838) related a story told to him by his father John MacKay of Rassay in which it was revealed that Patrick Mor "was accompanied to church one Sunday by eight sons, who all,

with one exception, died within twelve months, on which bereavement he composed a tune called Cumha na Cloinne, or Lament for the Children.” (MacKay, 1972, p. 10).

*Lament For The Children* has been held in high musical esteem by generations of pipers, and it is considered to be finest tune ever written. Despite the absence of original manuscripts which would ascribe this or any other piece to Patrick Mor, oral tradition is confirmed in this instance by the existence of graves which may still be seen at Kilmuir cemetery, near Dunvegan. His other famous works include *The Groat; I Got A Kiss of The King's Hand; Lament For Donald of Laggan; Lament For John Garve MacLeod of Rassay; Lament For Mary MacLeod; Lament For The Only Son; and Too Long In This Condition* (MacLellan, 1964, p. 27).

#### Patrick Og MacCrimmon

A master player and teacher, Patrick Og (Little Patrick) was the sole surviving son of Patrick Mor. He was born in 1640, and succeeded his father as Hereditary Piper in 1670, holding the post until his death in 1735 at age 95. Patrick Og is the central figure in the MacCrimmon family legacy, for it was during his time that the historic MacCrimmon College of Piping formally began. Due to his longevity, and his consummate abilities as a teacher, he was to leave an unprecedented and indelible mark on a great number of pupils who attended the college during his lifetime.

It was in Patrick Og's time that the college flourished best, and produced the largest number of players who would in turn pass the MacCrimmon style on to subsequent generations. It was he who "laid the foundations of our present Piobaireachd gracing" (MacLellan, 1964, p. 28). MacLellan (1964) points to statements attributed to the great Donald Cameron, one of the most outstanding pipers of the nineteenth century and founder of the Cameron School of piping.

Cameron held that "when Padruig Og came on the scene, he found Piobaireachd music overloaded, in his opinion, with all sorts of fancy grace-notes, and he said these were 'too much,' and 'he cut them all out,' with the result that our present style is Padruig Og's" (Campbell, 1980, p. 10). Patrick Og's compositions include *The Half Finished Piobaireachd* (co-written with Iain Dall MacKay) and *The Pretty Dirk*.

#### Donald Ban MacCrimmon

A renowned piper, Donald Ban MacCrimmon (Fair Donald) was born on Skye in 1710, and became Hereditary Piper to MacLeod in 1735 (MacLellan, 1964, p. 27). He was superseded in this capacity by his younger brother Malcolm in 1737 for an unknown reason, either on account of his suitability or politics. What is known about Donald Ban is that he marched with his Clan against the Jacobites, and in a botched attempt to capture Prince Charles Stuart at Edinburgh Castle was killed in the Rout of Moy – the day before the Battle of Culloden. His untimely death was a tragedy compounded by the fact that he was the sole casualty of the affair. Before his military adventures, Donald Ban had a revelation of his approaching death, and composed *MacCrimmon Will Never Return*, the only piece which can be ascribed to him with certainty (MacLellan, p. 28).

#### Malcolm MacCrimmon

Born in 1690 (out of Patrick Og's first marriage), Malcolm MacCrimmon took on the mantle of Hereditary Piper from 1737 until his death in 1769 (MacLellan, 1964, p. 27). A renowned teacher, he witnessed the twilight of the once thriving MacCrimmon College in the years following the Battle of Culloden. To Malcolm fell the responsibility of preserving and

passing on the knowledge accumulated by his predecessors, thereby upholding the integrity of the College. Eventually, the MacCrimmon College yielded to the tremendous socio-political forces besieging the highlands and went into decline. His most notable composition was *Lament For Donald Ban MacCrimmon*.

#### Iain Dubh MacCrimmon

Born in 1730, Iain Dubh (Black John) MacCrimmon became Hereditary Piper in 1770, although by this time the position was titular only, for Britain's Abolition of Heritable Jurisdictions Act succeeded in destroying the clan system in the highlands, effectively nullifying the offices associated therewith. Iain Dubh continued teaching and piping, and was reputed to have been an extraordinary player in the tradition of his ancestors. But after a quarrel with MacLeod over the terms of holding the lands of Boreraig, Ian Dubh "resigned the whole farm and broke up the establishment" (Campbell, 1980, p. 9). He is credited with having composed *The Glen is Mine*. Iain Dubh died in 1822.

#### Donald Ruadh MacCrimmon

The last great MacCrimmon piper, Donald Ruadh (Red Donald) was born in 1740, and like his brother Iain Dubh, he received instruction from his father Malcolm. After the quarrel between MacLeod and Iain Dubh, Donald Ruadh continued to teach at the college, which by this time had lost its former grandeur. Donald Ruadh carried on for some years after the 1770 closing, and Boswell's journal entry at Coll, 1773 stated that "[T]here was a College for the Bagpipe in Skye, kept by the MacCrimmons, the hereditary pipers to the Laird of MacLeod. It

subsisted in a certain degree till last year; that an admirable piper went to America” (Campbell, 1980, p. 9).

Donald Ruadh was therefore instrumental in the survival of the family tradition from 1770-1772, for the "admirable piper" mentioned above was none other than Donald Ruadh, who became an officer in a corps of loyalist Scotsmen during the American Revolution. During the final years of the MacCrimmon musical dynasty, Donald Ruadh

returned to Scotland, played at Dunvegan in 1799 to welcome home General Norman MacLeod (being then alluded as the hereditary piper), was also described as the hereditary piper by Sir Walter Scott in his diary entry of 24th August 1815 about his visit to Dunvegan, was commissioned as a lieutenant in the 4th Royal Veteran Battalion in 1808, and died in London in 1825. It can probably be said, therefore, that Iain Dubh succeeded his father, Malcolm, at least as titular hereditary piper, and that subsequently he was replaced in that position, such as it was and so far, at least, as the MacLeod family was concerned, by his brother, Donald Ruadh. Both Iain Dubh and Donald Ruadh have left descendants, but to none of these, nor to any collateral MacCrimmon, has anything of the family art descended. In other walks of life many of them have exhibited what the writer of the New Statistical Account calls "the talents of their progenitors," but if the MacCrimmon art has come down to us, it has done so through another channel. (Campbell, 1980, p. 9)

### The MacKays of Gairloch

#### Ruairaidh Dall MacKay

Ruairaidh Dall (Blind Roderick) was MacKenzie of Gairloch's Piper, and moved to Gairloch in 1610 from Sutherland when MacKenzie of Gairloch occupied the estate at Flowerdale. His only known composition is *Corrienessan's Salute*.

## Iain Dall MacKay

A master player, composer, and teacher, Iain Dall (Blind John) MacKay's Gaelic name was "Piobaire Dall," or "The Blind Piper." He was born around 1656, and became one of the key figures in the history of Piobaireachd by virtue of his many years studying under the great Patrick Og MacCrimmon. Iain Dall is traditionally regarded as being Patrick Og's greatest pupil, indeed his only peer (Campbell, 1980). Like the MacCrimmons, Iain Dall became the subject of folklore. The most common story relates that upon hearing a false report of his teacher's death, Iain Dall composed *The Lament For Patrick Og MacCrimmon*. When he discovered that Patrick Og was indeed still alive, he paid him a visit and played the piece for him. When asked what it was called, MacKay told him the story, to which MacCrimmon responded: "indeed, Lament for young Peter, and he is still alive! I shall learn it myself!" (The Army School of Piping, 1966, p. 17). (The name Peter is sometimes used as a nickname for Patrick, in the way "Jack" replaces the name John).

He died in 1754, leaving an enduring musical legacy of in his pupils and descendants. He was a solid link to the MacCrimmons who composed some thirty known Piobaireachd, including *The Lament For Patrick Og MacCrimmon*; *The Blind Piper's Obstinacy*; *The Unjust Incarceration*; *MacKenzie of Gairloch's Salute*; *Munroe's Salute*; and *The Half-Finished Piobaireachd* (with Patrick Og MacCrimmon). Iain Dall died in 1754.

## Angus MacKay (of Gairloch)

The son of the great Iain Dall, Angus was a celebrated piper in his day, and the recipient of his father's valuable teaching. A great player, composer, and teacher, his work includes *The Desperate Battle (of the Birds)*; *MacKenzie of Applecross's Salute*; and *MacLeod of Rassay's*

*Salute*. Together with his son John Roy MacKay, he taught the great John MacKay of Rassay, without whom the MacCrimmon Piobaireachd would have vanished in the eighteenth century.

### The MacKays of Rassay

#### John MacKay of Rassay

John MacKay of Rassay was the single most important person linking the MacCrimmons to all subsequent generations of Piobaireachd performers. He was born around 1767, but was orphaned as an infant. At an early age, he was employed as a herd boy in Rassay by Captain Malcolm MacLeod of Eyre, the composer of *Prince Charles' Salute*. In recognizing young John's musical potential, Captain MacLeod "sent him to the College of the MacCrimmons and to the MacKays of Gairloch" (Campbell, 1980, p. 9). Although he was taught foremostly by the MacKays of Gairloch, he was said by his son Angus to have also been taught by Iain Dubh MacCrimmon.

A master player, composer, and teacher, John MacKay became Piper to James MacLeod of Rassay, and in 1792 won first prize at the Highland Society of Scotland's Annual Bagpipe Competition at Edinburgh (MacKay, 1972, p. 16). It is ultimately from John MacKay of Rassay that the Piobaireachd community has inherited the music of the MacCrimmons through his numerous pupils, including his sons Donald, Roderick, John, Angus, and their pupils. His knowledge, received from Patrick Og MacCrimmon through Iain Dall and the Gairloch MacKays, as well as Iain Dubh MacCrimmon has been handed down from three sources: John Ban MacKenzie, the Camerons, and the MacPhersons. His compositions include *Davidson of Tulloch's Salute*, *King George III's Lament*, *The Battle of Waterloo*, and *Lady Doyle's Salute*. His

eldest son Donald won "The Prize Pipe" in the 1822 Highland Society competition, and his third son Roderick won "The Prize Pipe" in 1832 (MacKay, p. 19).

#### Angus MacKay of Rassay

Born in 1813, Angus MacKay was the most celebrated piper of his generation. Between 1826 and 1840 he transcribed some 183 Piobaireachd from his father's Canntaireachd. In 1838 he published *A Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd or Pipe Music* containing 61 Piobaireachd written in Western staff notation. The Piobaireachd Society's collection cites MacKay's manuscript as the authority for many of its own volumes in use today. In addition to accepting MacKay's settings of Piobaireachd as being representative of the MacCrimmon era, The Piobaireachd Society continues to cite him as an authority, and to publish Piobaireachd employing MacKay's particular system of phrasing, gracing, metre, and musical abbreviations.

MacKay is also acclaimed for having originated a new genre of Bagpipe music - the 'Competition March' in 2/4 time. In 1843 he became Piper to Queen Victoria, the first person to hold the title of Sovereign's Piper, a post reserved today for the most distinguished and deserving Pipe-Majors in the British Army. MacKay held this appointment for ten years.

Following a five year struggle with mental illness, MacKay died in 1858 while trying to escape from Bedlam mental hospital in London. MacKay's authority on Piobaireachd was challenged by Alistair Campsie's controversial book *The MacCrimmon Legend: The Madness of Angus MacKay* (1980). MacKay's manuscripts are now on deposit at The National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh.

### John Ban MacKenzie

Born in 1796, John Ban (Fair John) MacKenzie was taught by John MacKay of Rassay (senior), and as such he represents a main link to the MacCrimmon tradition. Between 1834 and 1860 he was the Piper at Taymouth Castle (MacLellan, 1964, p. 30) and was a master player, teacher, and composer who won the first ever Gold Medal for Piobaireachd offered by the Highland Society of London (Campbell, 1980, p. 16). His only son, Donald, died of smallpox at age 30, inspiring him to compose His Father's Lament For Donald MacKenzie. He lived until 1864.

### The Camerons

#### Donald Cameron

Born in 1810 at Strathcona, Ross Shire, Donald Cameron was one of the most celebrated pipers of his day, being both a master teacher and competitive player. The tuition he received from John Ban MacKenzie, Angus MacKay of Rassay, and possibly John MacKay of Rassay (MacLellan, 1964, p. 30) enabled him to become the progenitor of the influential Cameron School of Piping, where along with his brother Alexander (Sandy) he taught numerous pupils, including his own sons Colin, Alexander (Alick), and Kieth, all players of great ability whose own pupils carried the MacCrimmon Piobaireachd forward into the twentieth century.

Mr. J.F. Farquharson, a pupil of Donald Cameron in 1861 related that "Donald Cameron had said that his first teacher was one Fraser, a pupil of the last MacCrimmon" (Campbell, 1980, p. 10). If this is accurate, then Donald Cameron's connection to the MacCrimmons, already secure through his known teachers, was perhaps broader than any other piper in history. Donald Cameron was held in such high esteem by pipers in the nineteenth century, that he enjoyed

universal recognition as being "supreme in Piobaireachd, even in comparison with such eminent and older pupils of John MacKay as John Ban MacKenzie" (Campbell, p. 10). Donald Cameron was Piper to the Earl of Seaforth, and also Pipe Major of The Ross Shire Rifle Volunteers. In 1859 he won the contest for former winners of the "Prize Pipe" at The Northern Meeting at Inverness, thus taking the Highland Society of London's Gold Medal for Piobaireachd. He died in 1868, aged 57, and is entombed in the High Church cemetery at Inverness.

Donald Cameron's legacy – essentially the MacCrimmon legacy – endured after his death mainly through his son Alexander or "Alick." His pupils were among the best players of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and were instrumental in deciphering the Canntaireachd manuscripts of Angus MacKay.

#### The MacPhersons

Malcolm 'Calum Piobaire' MacPherson (1828 - 1898)

Malcolm "Calum Piobaire" (Malcolm The Piper) MacPherson was taught by his father Angus, and Archibald Munroe, both of whom were taught by John MacKay of Rassay. Calum was Piper to Cluny MacPherson, and winner of the "Prize Pipe" at the 1866 Northern Meeting, and the 1871 Highland Society Gold Medal (Farrie, 1988, p. 176). His greatest pupil was Pipe Major John MacDonald MBE, of Inverness (1866-1953), who in his dual capacity as the first tutor to both The Piobaireachd Society and The Army School of Piping was able to leave his mark – and that of Calum's on hundreds of pipers. It is interesting to note that Angus MacKay's arrangements of Piobaireachd (1838), which were edited in staff notation by Cameron School adherent Archibald Campbell, were ultimately transmitted mainly by a MacDonald, a MacPherson School product.

John MacLellan described the importance of Callum MacPherson's musical pedigree, and his importance as a teacher by noting that "[T]uition is useless unless the recipient be worthy of it, and in this respect Calum as he was known, drank deeply at the fountain of knowledge. He was a brilliant player and a teacher who was able to count among his pupils most of the best-known pipers of the latter part of the nineteenth century" (MacLellan, 1964, p. 31).

#### <sup>6</sup>. Notation

Today, the reconstruction of Piobaireachd perpetuates the transfer of cultural information which, in the century following the demise of the clan system in 1746 was nearly lost, but which has survived by oral transmission between master and pupil. It is impossible to reconstruct Piobaireachd from staff notation alone. To do so one must seek out a teacher and learn in the oral tradition. Whereas Western musical notation has been used to transpose Piobaireachd, it is incapable of representing Piobaireachd with the degree of accuracy necessary to facilitate a valid reconstruction, and so Piobaireachd may not be learned from sight in the Western manner of reading music. Instead, Western notation is essentially a practical aide mémoire, and nothing more. Piobaireachd remains an oral tradition, a living history which survives in the minds of a small cadre of musicians sensitive to the fragility of a cultural cargo, and who are able to trace their musical pedigree by name back to the original masters on Skye. It has followed the patterns of Scottish emigration around the globe, coming to rest in Canada with the descendents of master Piobaireachd artists like the research participants appearing in this film.

Western staff notation did not go into use for pipe music until the early part of the 19th century. Prior to this time, Piobaireachd was recorded and taught by means of an ancient syllabic form of notation called Canntaireachd. Canntaireachd stems from the Gaelic words cann,

meaning chant, and canntaire, meaning chanter. Accordingly, Canntaireachd refers to a singer with the human voice. It is for all practical purposes a noun, used to denote vocal renditions of Piobaireachd. Canntaireachd may be regarded as a sort of piper's solfege insofar as it arranges vowels and consonants of the alphabet into a system of vocables which represent the degrees of the diatonic scale. Canntaireachd outstrips the French system used today in its facility for representing musical sounds as they appear in relation to the sounds which immediately precede and follow them, including ornaments.

The advantage of Canntaireachd, which pre-dated the French sol fa system by at least 350 years (MacLellan, 1976, p. 1), is that it represents not only pitch, but also the host of minutiae present within its scope. This affords the system the further ability to represent melodic nuances even when they occur during passages thick with ornamentation. On the other hand, it is a system with no means of representing duration. The oldest record of pipe music in staff notation is from Joseph MacDonald's *A Complete Theory of The Scots Highland Bagpipe* (1760). Although it bears the distinction of being the first such attempt, the author, a skilled amateur fiddle player and piper of sorts was unsuccessful in capturing the essence of Piobaireachd in his writing. As a consequence, his work has endured as an example of the difficulties associated with transcribing pipe music onto the stave.

The next attempt at putting pipe music on the stave came from Joseph MacDonald's brother, the Reverend Patrick, whose 1784 *Collection of Highland Vocal Airs* contains some Piobaireachd, but written for keyboard. The next attempt at placing Piobaireachd into staff notation came from Angus MacArthur, the last Hereditary Piper to Lord MacDonald of The Isles, and who served from 1780 until sometime early in the nineteenth century. In 1796 he went with Lord MacDonald from Armadale Castle, Skye, to London where he lived out the remainder

of his life. Around 1800, he produced a manuscript of thirty Piobaireachd which is now "the oldest complete record of pipe music on the stave" (Campbell, 1980, p. 11). Angus MacArthur "left several MSS of Piobrachds,[sic] most of which were noted down when he lay on his deathbed, by John MacGregor, for the Highland Society of London" (MacKay, 1972, p. 12). His manuscript is known as "The Highland Society's MS," and is held in The National Library of Scotland, in Edinburgh.

Following MacArthur's pioneering work in the field of notating Piobaireachd was Donald MacDonald (1749-1840), a London-based bagpipe maker and pupil of Angus MacArthur. In 1817 he won the "Prize Pipe" at The Highland Society of Scotland's annual bagpipe competition in Edinburgh, indicating that he was a masterful player. His collection entitled *The Ancient Martial Music of Caledonia Called Piobaireachd* (1822) was the first published volume of Piobaireachd in staff notation which was both complete and accurate, insofar as this is possible with Piobaireachd. The notation and symbols employed by MacDonald are universally accepted by pipers today. Mr. Justice Archibald Campbell sums up MacDonald's contribution to piping by saying that MacDonald was "the pioneer of the style of writing pipe music on the stave, which has been used for the last hundred years and more" (Campbell, 1980, p. 12).

After MacDonald's reproduction of Piobaireachd in staff notation came Angus MacKay of Rassay (1813-58). MacKay, whose manuscript contained 183 Piobaireachd which he transcribed from his father, John MacKay of Rassay, between 1826 and 1840. In 1838 he published 61 of these in *A Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd*. At that time, it was the largest publication of its kind, and it met with instant success for four main reasons. First, Angus MacKay of Rassay was himself a reputable Piobaireachd player. Second, he was the son of the venerable John MacKay of Rassay, a name synonymous with the MacCrimmon legacy, and

therefore beyond musical reproach. Third, the decline of Canntaireachd created a need for written pipe music, and finally, MacKay used MacDonald's successful process of notation. MacKay's book was so successful that until the advent of the twentieth century "most printed books of Piobaireachd music consisted largely, and sometimes wholly, of facsimile copies from Angus MacKay's book" (Campbell, 1980, p. 12).

#### <sup>7</sup>. Social Forces Affecting Piobaireachd

The transmission of Piobaireachd – the way it is recorded in print and taught – is today the result of Scottish political and social developments after the Battle of Culloden. No informed discussion about Piobaireachd may proceed without a general understanding of the social forces by which Piobaireachd has been influenced, and no understanding of these forces is possible without at least a general appreciation of their context. Social changes in Great Britain in 1745 threatened the patronage by which the art had survived for centuries, and the demise of the clan system brought about the end of the once flourishing piping colleges – first among which was the MacCrimmon College on Skye, the chief repository for Piobaireachd in Scotland.

#### Before 1745: The roots of Scottish-English conflict

The line of Robert Bruce gave way to the Stewarts with the reign of James I (1406-37), and in 1603 James VI's accession to the English throne marked the union of the crowns of England and Scotland. James I and VI, as he was known, sought to placate the two rival kingdoms but in London he was viewed with suspicion by his Protestant subjects. His edition of the Holy Bible did little to bolster his popularity there, as did his refusal to renounce the Roman Catholic Church. His son Charles I also refused to leave the Church, and his marriage to

Henrietta Maria, a Spanish Catholic princess, galvanized English Protestant resentment of their Scottish, Catholic King. Charles I was beheaded by Cromwell's newly formed republic in 1649, to the outrage of the Scots. Scotland was still reeling from their King's assassination when Cromwell decreed their inclusion in the legislative and incorporating union of the Commonwealth and Protectorate. This infuriated the Scots, and gave way to two decades of border skirmishes.

With the restoration of Charles II in 1660, Scottish anger abated, and a period of relative security endured until the brief reign of James VII and II (1685-88) was usurped by William of Orange, and his wife Mary, the King's daughter. They established themselves as the joint rulers of the two kingdoms, and reigned as William II of Scotland and III of England, and Mary II of Scotland. The English were now content with their Protestant King, unlike the Scots who continued to swear fealty to James VII and II, who by this time ruled in absentia from the Court of France. On May 1st 1707, the kingdoms of England and Scotland alike were dissolved, and incorporated into The United Kingdom of Great Britain by the union of the Scottish and English parliaments.

Eight years later, an attempt was made to restore James VII and II to the defunct Scottish throne during the failed Jacobite Rising of 1715. The Rising kindled widespread Scottish sympathy for their exiled king who was known in England as "The Old Pretender." Jacobite sympathies were increased in the wake of reprisals aimed at Scotland by the London-based British parliament, chief of which were the Disarming Act of 1716 and the Disarming Act of 1725. These legislative measures sought to diminish Scotland's capacity for waging war by outlawing the possessions of arms by all persons except those acting in the service of, or swearing allegiance to George I. Then on August 19th, 1745, Prince Charles Edward Stewart, or

“Bonnie Prince Charlie” as he was known to his followers, unfurled his white standard at Glennfinnan, Moidart, and acting as Prince Regent for Scotland asserted the reign of his father, James VII and II. Thus began the second Jacobite Rising, and with mixed support, Prince Charles' army advanced to within sight of London, winning a series of military victories along the way.

But upon reaching the British capital, the Highland Army lost stomach for conquering England, and notwithstanding the fact that George II was making a hasty sail down the Thames in preparation for exile to Germany, the Highlanders withdrew North. This afforded the English the opportunity to regroup and mount a pursuit. Their pursuit ended at Drummossie Moor, near Inverness, where was fought the last battle on British soil – The Battle of Culloden. There, on Wednesday, April 16th, 1745, the Hanoverian Army of George II, commanded by the Duke of Cumberland defeated the Stewart forces, marking the beginning of a period of harsh reprisals and policies which nearly succeeded in wiping out Gaelic language and music in Scotland. As it was, the Highlands were essentially emptied of human settlement under policies aimed at “improving” the country (Prebble, 1963, p. 106).

#### After 1745

In the aftermath of the Battle of Culloden, scores of atrocities befell the Highlanders at the hands of Cumberland's Hanoverian troops. The greatest atrocity, however, did not occur in the field, but in the British Parliament, where two successive Acts brought a once prosperous culture to the brink of extinction.

### The Disarming Act (1747)

Whereas the earlier Disarming Acts of 1716 and 1725 were leveled at diminishing Scotland's ability to wage war, the Act of 1747 was a more sweeping initiative aimed at removing Scotland's ability to maintain even a defensive posture. It was enacted so as to deprive the Scottish people of the trappings and manners of their culture which might serve to foster national pride. The British government not only wanted Scotland pacified -- they wanted it sterilized. This is evident in the following extract from the Disarming Act of 1747:

And it is further enacted, that from and after the 1st of August 1747 no man or boy within Scotland other than such as shall be employed as officers and soldiers in the King's forces, shall on any presence whatsoever, wear or put on the cloaths commonly-called Highland cloaths, that is to say, the plaid, philebeg or little kilt, browse, shoulder belts, or any part whatsoever of what peculiarly belongs to the Highland garb; and that no tartan or party-coloured plaids or stuff shall be used for great-coats, or for upper coats; every such person offending, being convicted thereof shall suffer imprisonment, without bail, during six months and longer; and being convicted of a second offence shall be liable to be transported to any of His Majesty's plantations beyond the sea, for seven years. (Prebble, 1987, p. 311)

While there was nothing in the Act which specifically proscribed the playing of the Highland bagpipe, piping was such a significant expression of Highland culture that one year before the legislation was enacted English Common Law asserted itself over the music. An awful precedent was set in this regard at the trial of James Reid, a piper in Clan Ogilvy who was taken prisoner at Culloden. Reid's defense against the charge of treason had been that he had not taken up arms or inflicted a blow against the King's men, but had only played his pipes. The court ruled that "[No] regiment ever marched without musical instruments, such as drums, trumpets and the like; and that a Highland regiment never marched without a piper, and therefore his bagpipe, in the eyes of the law, is an instrument of war" (Prebble, 1987, p. 274). James Reid was executed at York, 15 November, 1746.

Still, piping was able to survive among those "employed as officers and soldiers in the King's forces" (Prebble, 1987, p. 311), for while many Scots were either disinherited or deported after the 1745 Rising, thousands flocked to the Colours in a wave of requiting which lasted until the end of the First World War. England, after all, needed soldiers to fight its imperial wars in Europe and on other continents. It was therefore in England's interest to mobilize the martial prowess of the Scots, and turn it towards her enemies abroad.

#### The Abolition of Heritable Jurisdictions Act (1747)

The Abolition of Heritable Jurisdictions Act of 1747 made the job of finding recruits for the British Army an easy affair. By threatening Clan Chiefs with forfeiture of their ancestral estates, the crown worked in collaboration with the Scottish Peerage to lull young Highland men into military service. By capitalizing on the Highlander's willingness to serve their chiefs, the crown tapped a human resource which not only bolstered Britain's military adventures, but met an economic agenda as well. Scotland, after all, was a country rich in open spaces and natural resources, and was ripe for the taking – if only its inhabitants could be relocated. The Act gave way to a phenomenon known as the Highland Clearances, wherein the clan system was abolished and entire settlements of people were evicted from their ancestral lands, then moved wholesale to places like the Americas, Australia, and the New Hebrides. Once cleared of its former inhabitants, land was turned over to foresting and sheep grazing.

James Loch, author of the policy of "improvement" in the Highlands, published a pamphlet of 1815 while he was Lord Stafford's (later the Duke of Sutherland) Commissioner for Improvement. In that pamphlet, he predicted that "[I]n a few years, the character of the whole of this population will be completely changed, the children of those who are removed from the hills

will lose all recollection of the habits and customs of their fathers” (Prebble, 1963, p. 69).

Among these habits and customs, Piobaireachd was in particular danger of being erased from memory, for the genre was in jeopardy on three fronts. First, the Disarming Act placed restrictions on piping outside the army. Second, the Abolition of Heritable Jurisdictions Act deprived pipers of their traditional patronage, and dissolved their posts which had existed under the clan system. Third, there was until the middle of the 19th Century no reliable system of staff notation with which to record the ancient Piobaireachd which had hitherto survived in the oral tradition of the clan system. This was the backdrop against which responsibility for the continuation of the MacCrimmon legacy passed to a handful of individuals in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

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