

A CONCERT OF PÌOBAIREACHD FROM  
THE 1999 EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL



CEÒL NA PÌOBA - PÌOB MHÒR

Barnaby Brown



Allan MacDonald



Roderick Macleod



William McCallum

William MacDonald



Robert Wallace

These seven pibrochs were recorded on the evening of 30th August 1999 during a memorable concert devoted to the music of the Highland pipe, the *Pìob Mhòr*. The concert was held in Edinburgh University's Reid Hall, which has an excellent acoustic for pipe music, and was part of a wider series promoted by the Edinburgh International Festival under the banner of **Ceòl na Pìoba**, 'Music of the Pipes'.

Six pipers took part, all leading players, each with a gift for breathing life and passion into the old tunes. The concert consisted entirely of pibroch, a daunting prospect, perhaps, for performer and listener alike, but one which ultimately proved highly satisfying. The format was suggested by Allan MacDonald, and was based on a model pioneered in Brittany in France over the past ten years. Each player was invited by Allan to perform two or at most three tunes over the course of the evening, the music being carefully selected to represent a broad cross-section of the pibroch repertoire. As one tune finished, the next began, creating a rolling sequence of the big music, free from the usual distraction of tuning on stage, and providing a startling study in contrasting styles and technique. The audience was spellbound. The music flowed as it has rarely done on the competition platform.

Pibroch devotees will find plenty here to surprise and entertain them, from Willie McCallum's stately rendition of the little-heard *Lament for Hugh*, to Allan MacDonald's fiery interpretation of *Cill Chrìosd*, Glengarry's March. In the two tunes from the Campbell Canntaireachd we have music which has not been heard in public for some 200 years, played by Barnaby Brown in period style, on a reproduction 18th century instrument made of Scottish almondwood with horn mounts. For those who are new to pibroch, this recording should serve as a useful introduction to one of Gaeldom's most enduring art forms, played by pipers who are masters of both the music and the instrument.

**Iain MacInnes**

Many of the tunes on this disc are featured in the downloadable lesson at [www.pibroch.net](http://www.pibroch.net)



## CEÒL MÓR

There are, broadly, two kinds of music played on the Scottish Highland bagpipe. These are represented in Gaelic by the terms of convenience *Ceòl Beag*, literally 'small music', and *Ceòl Mór*, or 'big music'. *Ceòl Mór* is the less familiar genre, to most people, as well as to pipers themselves, and is sometimes called the classical music of the pipes. Individual examples are referred to in English as a pibroch. In Gaelic, however, *Piobaireachd* means the art of piping in general.

As in *Ceòl Beag*, one type of pibroch is distinguishable from another in performance. Although it is dangerous to generalise, one should be able to sense the calling in a typical **Gathering** tune, by its short, repeated rhythmic motifs, often of four pulses. The **Bardic Lament** can be recognised by its strong melody and more expansive phrases; the **Keening Lament**, by its high-pitched sobbing, commonly using two and three pulse rhythmic motifs. Other types such as **Salutes**, **Marches** and **Battle** tunes are less easy to distinguish, at least in modern performance style. Most pibrochs, however, have titles which do not fit into any of the above categories. Indeed, some have several titles which may indicate previous widespread popularity, and it is probable that the same melody was performed in different styles, with tempo and rhythm adapted to the different social circumstances, just as in the Gaelic song tradition.

In general one can see that pibroch was originally functional music in the day to day milieu of clan society. The demise of this society and culture led to pibroch's decline but much of it was rescued and preserved as staged art music by the quasi-sophisticated societies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

### What constitutes a Pibroch?

Pibroch consists of a theme, normally of eight phrases, with four stresses in each just as in the line of an *amhran* or song. As the theme or *Ùrlar* [lit. floor] is often played in a rubato style, the stresses can be difficult to identify.

The *Ùrlar* is followed by a series of variations, which may run from as few as one to as many as twenty. Most pibrochs played today, however, have between five and ten variations, including their singling form (first time played) or doubling form (repetition with a slightly faster tempo). These variations or *Siubhlaichean* [lit. wanderings] have even more specific Gaelic titles. In brief, as the variations proceed they become technically more complex, from the *taorludh* progressing & eventually culminating in one of several forms of the *crunludh* movement. The *crunludh-a-mach*, the most complex played today, represents the final crescendo of the performance. The variations develop in one of two ways. The *Ùrlar* is either reworked, developing the initial statement of the theme or else, at an early stage, the prominent notes are selected and appropriate embellishments applied in turn.

## Procedure

Pibroch is easier to memorise and listen to once the structure of the tune is appreciated. What is termed a 'Primary' pibroch proceeds in a simple two phrase procedure - AAB ABB AB - totalling eight phrases. Other patterns are more complex. One should be able to identify the musical phrases in performance, how they recur in slightly variant forms, the modal contrasts between these, and the particular melodic and rhythmic motifs adopted in a particular performance.

## Transmission

Pibroch has traditionally been transmitted by means of *canntaireachd*, a Gaelic term which means the oral transmission of the melody and rhythm of pibroch. It uses an intricate system of vocables to distinguish between different tones and rhythms. Some canntaireachd was logically developed into a highly specific phonemic system in written form, in order to allow the music to be transmitted for posterity. One example is the Campbell Canntaireachd manuscripts. Although the melodic line can be ascertained from these, the rhythm cannot. A knowledge of and insight into the socio-cultural context of canntaireachd, however, can allow one to understand more clearly the parameters within which pibroch moves.

## **Total Repertoire**

Approximately three hundred pibrochs survive, of which three quarters are published. We may never be sure of their provenance, merely that this music arose in a sophisticated society that greatly valued creative arts. Pibroch was, naturally, influenced by song melodies, a number of which can be identified in the first four phrases of the pibroch *ùrlar*, which is equivalent to the song quatrain. Similarly, the harp tradition, which co-existed and predated pibroch, was a major influence although more research is needed to show the nature and extent of this.

### **Too Long in This Condition (Is fhada mar seo tha sinn)**

**Roderick MacLeod (8.32)**

This tune is generally attributed to one of the dynasty of MacCrimmon pipers and has been variously associated with Donald Mór, Patrick Mór, as well as Patrick Òg MacCrimmon. One early tradition concerns Donald Mór while he was taking refuge in the Reay or MacKay country of Caithness following his involvement in avenging his brother's death in Kintail. This dates it to early 1600's. Fragments of Gaelic song, sung to the first 'line' of the *ùrlar*, have come down to us where Donald Mór is telling us how he had been unrecognised and ignored at a MacKay wedding. One pibroch variant of this tune is popular today - "MacFarlane's Gathering". (Togail nam Bó) It too has words associated with it and it may be that its provenance lies in MacFarlane territory adjoining Loch Lomond. This performance consists of an *ùrlar* and its doubling variation, a 1st variation and doubling, a *crunludh* and doubling followed by a *crunludh-a-mach*..

### **The Old Woman's Lullaby (Crònán na Cailliche)**

**Robert Wallace (7.19)**

A short tune consisting of an *ùrlar* and two variations. The title relates to a solitary figure in Highland Folklore, a deer goddess, who causes heavy mist to fall so as to protect her deer in the presence of hunters. She is an unkempt and agile figure, capable of sharp satire on the cattle owners around her and the subject of a number of songs. Some Gaelic song versions of this pibroch exist, one of the melodies having a similar melodic contour as



this one. As with many of the tunes passed on aurally in the pibroch tradition, before having been committed to the musical stave, several titles and at least as many melodic variants commonly existed. The earliest of these in the Campbell Canntaireachd (c.1800) is an unclear Gaelic one 'Bhair bhi dhilan n'a bhi pos'd' (sic) which might translate as 'Better to be a bachelor than be married.' This tune was frequently played at funerals and may explain the later titles of 'Seaforth's Lament' and 'George Donn MacKenzie's Lament'.

### **Hioemtra haentra (One of the Cragich)**

**Barnaby Brown (6.20)**

This tune is the title as given in the Campbell Canntaireachd Ms. which is the single most important source of pibroch extant, containing one hundred and sixty eight tunes, many of which remain to be published and performed. As in the Gaelic waulking song tradition, a pibroch tune could be identified by some of the canntaireachd vocables of its opening phrase and may never have had an alternative title. This tune, however, is one of several in the Campbell Canntaireachd headed 'One of the Cragich' the meaning of which is unclear. It is as if these tunes had some particular distinguishing features in their melody or structure or had a particular functional significance. The tune proceeds in a symmetrical fashion where the phrases AABA contrast with the following inverse arrangement of BBAB giving a typical eight-fold pattern.

### **Glengarry's March (Cill Chriosd)**

**Allan MacDonald (6.54)**

Another tune from the turbulent period in Highland History known as 'Linn nan Creach,' which followed the downfall of the Lordship of the Isles in 1494. The MacKenzies and the Macdonells of Glengarry were often in dispute. One tradition has it that the tune 'Cill Chriosd' celebrates an incident in Muir of Ord, north of Inverness, in which an entire congregation of MacKenzies is said to have perished at the hands of the Glengarry Macdonells. Finding the MacKenzies at worship, the church was set alight and the Macdonell piper circled the burning building playing 'Cill Chriosd', (Lit. 'The Cell [churchyard] of Christ'). Retribution, however, was swift

and the Macdonells were overtaken and slaughtered. Although there is no historical documentation for the church burning, a raid certainly took place in 1603, led by Allan MacRonal of Lundie.

The tune is played in a re-interpreted style which is faster and more rhythmically fired than one might hear in a typical modern performance. This pace makes it easier for the piper to return and play the ùrlar after each variation without overstatement. The performance of the ùrlar after each variation was a common feature of the early competitions in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This practice seems to have been dispensed with, probably because the tunes became too long at the pace performed. In this performance one can hear the ùrlar and its thumb variation, a siubhal variation and doubling, a tripling and doubling, crunludh and doubling, followed finally by the crunludh-a-mach. This tune is in the low GBD mode which has a chordal dissonance against the drones giving an effect appropriate to the historical tradition.

### **The Fingerlock (An Glas Mheur)**

**William MacDonald (8.58)**

This is another tune in the low GBD mode. The title remains a puzzle to this day. In the Gaelic oral tradition it was often associated with the fairies, giving it a rather obscure and mysterious character. The fairies bestow on a young piper, (as they did on the MacCrimmons and others), the ability to play pibroch. As the young piper strikes up, the first tune he plays is 'An Glas Mheur'. It may have been this association with fairy-lore and its unusual title that gave rise to further intrigue - that it was the most testing and difficult of pibrochs to play. It was used as a reveille in the early Scottish Regiments, most likely played much faster than as heard today, some Gaelic burlesque having been found which associates it with Highland soldiers.

Another popular tradition attributes the tune to the piper and hero, Ràghnall MacAilein Òig of Cross (c1662-1741), third son of Allan MacDonald of Morar. In this performance one can hear most of the tune, ie. the ùrlar, first variation and doubling, taorludh and doubling.



This is another short tune from the Campbell *Canntaireachd*. This one consists of an ùrlar followed by three variations. It has characteristics which are found amongst those tunes which may have their provenance in the *caoineadh* or keening ritual which buried the dead. These were usually performed by women in Ireland and Scotland and although banned as a pagan ritual by the Synod of Argyll in 1642 it survived till as long as 1905 in the Island of Barra, Outer Hebrides. The highly emotionally-charged extempore songs were, it would seem, highly irregular in time but consisted of short repeated motifs of three stresses or pulses which rose to a high pitch. It is only natural then that, with the demise of this sung tradition and its replacement by the bagpipe, the piper should imitate aspects of the keen as in this performance.

**Lament for Hugh (Cuma Eòin)****William McCallum (9.27)**

Nothing is known of the history of this tune. It has a very 'minor' taste, concentrating as it does on the low G and B notes at the lower end of the scale. The dissonance of these notes against the drones followed by the contrasting Es and As make it a very unusual lament. As in the previous tune, there is a suggestion of a chant-like provenance associating it with the *caoin*.

**Barnaby Brown**

Barnaby Brown is an accomplished performer and scholar in both the Western classical and Highland piping musical traditions. A graduate of Cambridge University and former principal flautist of the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain, he is also the first Highland piper to enlist the principles of the early music movement to enrich understanding of how pibroch has developed over the past three centuries. Through his painstaking interpretation of the Colin Campbell *canntaireachd* manuscripts, produced in Argyll in the late 18th century, Barnaby has restored 70 works to the repertoire, and has discovered exciting evidence relating to the practices of

trained Gaelic musicians in the classical bardic period. Currently undertaking research in the Isle of Skye, Barnaby has performed on numerous CDs, and has worked as a music teacher in the UK and abroad.

### **William McCallum**

A native of Campbeltown, Willie was taught piping by his uncles Ronald and Hugh McCallum, and by the late piper to the Duke of Argyll, Pipe Major Ronald McCallum, MBE. His formidable competitive record is distinguished by both consistency and versatility. He has won the Gold Medals in Inverness and Oban, the senior piobaireachd (twice) and former-winners March, Strathspey and Reel at Oban (twice), a record-equalling four Glenfiddich championships, three Silver Chanters, the Bratach Gorm in London (twice) and the Dan Reid Memorial Competition in San Francisco. An accountant by profession, his performing skills can be heard on three CDs, *Piper of Distinction* (1989), *Hailey's Song* (1995) and the *Piping Centre Recital Series* (1997).

### **Allan MacDonald**

Raised in the isolated Gaelic-speaking community of Glenuig, Allan MacDonald started piping when he was nine, and went on to pursue a competitive career which included winning the Inverness Clasp on two occasions. He soon, however, became ambivalent towards the competitive discipline of piping, and he was at the forefront of efforts to introduce alternative styles of playing light music in the 1970s and 80s. In the more classical genre of *Ceòl Mòr*, he set out to explore the extent to which modern styles of pibroch playing differ from early 18th century performance style. This he did by re-uniting pibroch notation with the Gaelic language rhythms in song, thereby placing the tunes in the socio-linguistic context in which they belong. His work is contained in an M. lit thesis completed at the School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh. He has also published a collection of music, *The Moidart Collection*, and in 1998 released a highly acclaimed album with the Gaelic singer Margaret Stewart entitled *Fhuair mi Pòg*.

## **William MacDonald**

William MacDonald was born in Glasgow in the 1920s and, as his father was in the army, was brought up from the age of two by his grandparents in Benbecula. Taught initially by a number of local pipers in Benbecula, he joined his father's regiment (Highland Light Infantry) at the age of 18, and remained with them, until they amalgamated with the Royal Scottish Fusiliers. After leaving the army, Willie took part in piping competitions for seven years, winning the Gold Medals at the Northern Meeting and the Argyllshire Gathering.

## **Roderick MacLeod**

One of the world's most accomplished competitive solo pipers, Roddy MacLeod is also pipe major of the highly-regarded Scottish Power Pipe Band, and founding director of the Piping Centre in Glasgow. He was tutored from an early age by the eminent piper and composer Duncan Johnstone, and he went on to win many of piping's highest laurels. In addition to the top awards at Oban and Inverness, he has won the Glenfiddich Championship, the Uist and Barra Association overall award, the Dunvegan Medal and Clasp, the Silver Chanter at Dunvegan, the Bratach Gorm and the Open Piobaireachd in London, and the Dr Dan Reid Memorial overall award. Roddy is in international demand as a recitalist, judge and instructor. With a background in teaching, a dedication to the promotion of standards within piping, and a zeal to widen popular appreciation of the pipes, he exemplifies the role, task and standing of the Piping Centre.

## **Robert Wallace**

Robert Wallace's competition highlights range from the Gold Medals at Inverness and Oban to the Bratach Gorm, the Dunvegan Medal and the 1999 Northern Meeting Clasp. He has also won the former-winners March, Strathspey and Reel in Oban. Robert began playing at the age of nine in the 214th Boys Brigade in Glasgow, and he later joined the well-remembered Muirhead and Sons Pipe Band, many times world champions. He studied under Pipe Major Robert Hardie, and later received pibroch tuition from Andrew Wright. In 1974 Robert joined the renowned traditional music group The Whistlebinkies, with whom he has recorded seven albums, and his solo piping recordings include *Chance Was a Fine Thing* (1984), *Piper of Distinction* (1991) and



*Breakout* (1996). He has performed with Scotland's top orchestras, and has taught at summer schools in Europe, North America and South Africa. In 1999 Robert was appointed principal of the College of Piping in Glasgow. He currently edits *The Piping Times* and is consultant for the RSPBA journal *The Pipe Band Magazine*.

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Edited and mixed by Peter Haigh and Iain MacInnes.

Recorded in association with BBC Radio Scotland, Producer Iain MacInnes (Pipeline).

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Sleeve Notes by Allan MacDonald

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I am also indebted to Brian MacMaster of Edinburgh International Festival for allowing us the facility to record this quite unique concert.

**Ian D. Green**

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