

Programme 1 The Pipe Band “All for One”

Broadcast Dates

Programmes are broadcast on BBC 2 in Northern Ireland on Thursday mornings from 10.50 - 11.20am.

Programme	Title	Broadcast Date
1	The Pipe Band	9 th November
2	The Harp	16 th November
3	The Metrical Psalm	23 rd November
4	The Uilleann Pipes	30 th November

Programme 1 – The Pipe Band By Samuel Baillie

Learning Objectives:

At the end of the programme pupils will have:

- Developed an awareness of the extent of the pipe band tradition in Northern Ireland and its strong community links and social function.
- Learned about its separate musical sections and the importance of teamwork.
- Become acquainted with Piobaireachd (Pibroch – pronounced “pibroch”), the ancient music of the Scottish Highland Bagpipe.
- Gained an understanding of the complexities of the structure and tuning of the instrument.

About the Programme

This programme provides us with a close and personal view of the complexities and commitment of what it is like to be involved in pipe bands. The main thrust is the competitive edge of playing in bands and the importance of working as a team. The development of pipe bands and their contribution to the social fabric of local communities is illustrated but this is set beside the need for highly developed technical skill and a full understanding of the component parts of the bagpipe as an instrument, which is essential to obtain good sound. People on the programme emphasise this aspect of their enjoyment of pipe bands and appear to relish the challenge of getting it “just right” for the moment of performance. Complex factors such as the weather, types of reeds and bags used, as well as individual blowing styles, are all taken into account in order to produce each band’s own unique sound.

People express their deep feelings of excitement when they are involved in what is seen as a good performance, particularly as this is the climax to hours of practice and preparation. Whilst pipe band competitions as such may be seen by the participants to be like a sport, it is clear that this

refers only to the actual competition itself. The content of the performance is the highly developed art form, taking years to achieve competition standard and therefore demanding a high degree of commitment.

Background

Pipe bands may be seen as a relatively new phenomenon as distinct from the bagpipe itself (which has no clear origin, being found in countries throughout the world for thousands of years) and perhaps not particularly Scottish, having developed from the formation of army bands around the end of the 18th century. At that time the British Army boasted twenty-two pipe bands made up from eleven Highland Regiments, one from each of their home and away battalions. Two centuries later, whilst the regiments might have changed somewhat, the number of bands within the British Army had remained almost constant.

There was a time when the Scottish bagpipe and its music might have been lost forever. After the defeat of the Jacobite army at Culloden in 1745 and the passing of the Disarming Act of 1747, the bagpipe, though not mentioned in the Act, was treated as an instrument of war and was therefore forbidden along with weapons and Highland Dress. The Act was repealed in 1782, probably to allow the raising of Scottish regiments.

The first Highland Regiment to be raised was in 1757 and in 1854 the fifes of the English regiments were replaced by the pipes of the Highland regiments. Even to-day the army refers to these pipe bands as “pipes and drums”.

The Scottish bagpipe, however, was not originally intended to be used as a group instrument and has been preserved in its present form, not by bands, but by a type of music known as piobaireachd (pronounced “pibroch”), simply meaning “pipe playing”, or Ceol Mor (the big music), dating back to the 15th century. Its origin is obscure, but it is associated with the legendary piping family of the MacCrimmon's who are said to have run a piping school at Boreraig on the island of Skye until 1773. The MacCrimmon's were the hereditary pipers of the MacLeod's of Dunvegan who lived in Dunvegan Castle and in 1967, Dame Flora MacLeod instituted the Annual MacCrimmon Memorial Piobaireachd Competition at Dunvegan Castle. The trophy is a silver chanter and the competition is open only to winners of the highest piping awards.

After the repeal of the Disarming Act the Highland Society in London held an annual bagpipe competition. In 1784 the competition was transferred to Edinburgh and from 1785, as now, competitors were required to wear Highland Dress.

Piping competitions were solely for the playing of piobaireachd and it was not until 1859 that prizes for strathspey and reel playing (Ceol Beag – little music) were introduced in the Northern Meeting in Inverness. Marches, that is, pipe tunes for marching, originally referred to as quicksteps, were introduced at around the same time. Angus MacKay (1813 -1859), Queen Victoria's first piper, is credited with introducing the competition type march and he left a collection of piobaireachd in both staff notation and in canntaireachd (pronounced - canterrock).

Until the late 18th or early 19th century, pipe music had been transmitted from player to player by *canntaireachd*, which is a form of singing where each note is represented by a different vowel and embellishments are represented by consonants. This form of teaching is regarded, even today, as the proper way to learn *piobaireachd*, but the move towards staff notation was probably necessitated by the inevitable acceptance of *Ceol Beag* as a legitimate form of pipe playing.

The MacCrimmon tradition disapproved of the playing of light music and it was forbidden in their school, probably because it could be played on other instruments and was not therefore, strictly speaking, pipe music. Nevertheless, by the mid 18th century, reels and jigs had become an integral part of pipe playing. The Highland Society believed that strathspey, reel and jig playing helped in the fingering of *piobaireachd*. Clearly this could have been a face-saving way of allowing their introduction into competitions.

In 1903 the *Piobaireachd* Society was formed to preserve the music which itself had preserved the instrument. It established a piping school at Edinburgh Castle in 1910 which was taken over by the army in 1959. The debt owed to the army for the development of light music, particularly marches, which provides the repertoire for pipe bands is widely acknowledged, as is its support for the preservation of *piobaireachd*, a form of music not usually associated with band performances.

The Scottish Pipe Band Association came into existence in 1930 and in 1980 was granted the title of The Royal Pipe Band Association. This is now a world wide organisation responsible for a range of competitions including the World Pipe Band Championship. The first pipe band competition on record took place in 1905, but the World Championship was only instituted in 1947, after the Second World War.

This popular interest has had the effect of lessening the interest in *piobaireachd*, the very reason for the Highland bagpipe being extant. The attraction for most pipers lies in the competition type tunes, but recently there has been a resurging interest in *piobaireachd* and also in *canntaireachd*.

Band competition tends to focus on well tuned pipes, the absence of errors and an integrated band performance between pipes and drums. Drumming has now become a highly technical art, having moved from providing a tempo and basic rhythm to following the melody, but now contributing to the overall performance as a group instrument in its own right, giving extra drive and excitement.

The structure of the drum has altered to accommodate this change. Rope tensioned drums have been replaced by screw tensioned instruments with tighter heads, snares have been added to both top and bottom heads to provide a brighter and sharper sound and the shell of the drum has been redesigned to facilitate greater tensioning of the head. All of these were needed to allow the playing of an increasing number of strokes per bar and it is quite difficult to pick out single strokes in modern pipe band drumming.

Developments have also been evident in materials used in the manufacture of bagpipes, with synthetic bags and plastic drone reeds being introduced to counteract the effect of moisture from the atmosphere and differences in blowing but the basic chanter reed remains unchanged. Reeds are made from cane and chanter reeds are "double vibrators" like an oboe reed but drone reeds are "single vibrators" such as a clarinet. The difference is that pipe reeds are blown through reed

chambers with the use of an air bag where the reeds do not come into contact with the mouth of the player as in other reed instruments. This necessitates the skill of blowing evenly to maintain a steady sound as the player has to ensure that four reeds (chanter and three drones) are kept sounding at constant pressure.

Pipers thus learn their melodies on a “practice chanter” without drones or airbag and progress to the full pipe when this has been accomplished. In effect this means the mastering of two instruments rather than just one. The tuning of drones is accomplished by altering the length of the drone which is made in sections for this purpose. Drones are made up of one bass drone and two tenor drones, with the bass drone being an octave lower than the tenor drone, therefore being twice the length. All the drones are tuned to the fundamental note on the chanter which is an octave higher than the tenor drones. This is called “A” on the pipes but in pitch is just slightly sharper than B flat on the piano, maintaining a “pedal” note, that is, a sustained single note lower than the melody. As the melody moves about on the chanter the harmonics of the drones allows an internal harmony to be heard. Traditionally the drones were tuned by ear but now electronic tuners are often employed.

There is no doubt about the appeal of the sound of the pipes to some and its offence to the ear to others. The pipe is very rich in harmonics, with a limited range of notes and does not produce a diatonic scale. This does not make it any less musical, only musically different, which others find attractive and exciting. It remains the case that the playing of the Scottish bagpipe and pipe bands is growing in popularity throughout the world and across cultures, demonstrating the power of music and art to unite people from disparate backgrounds.

Resources:

- CDs

World Pipe Band Championships 2004 (3 volumes)

Qualifying Heat CD MON 858

 CD MON 859

 CD MON 860

Available from retail outlets.

Piobaireachd & Canntaireachd

“Whispers of the Past”

Vol 1 Piobaireachd and Canntaireachd

Vol 2 The Harmonic Piobaireachd

Available from:

The Northern Ireland Pipe and Drumming School

38 Railway Street

Lisburn BT28 1XP

Tel. 028 9262 8591

- Publications

Roderick D Cannon 1988 (Reprinted 1990). *The Highland Bagpipe and its Music*, John Donald Publishers Ltd. Edinburgh. ISBN 0-85976-153-3

William Donaldson 2000. *The Highland Pipe and Scottish Society*, Tuckwell Press, East Lothian, Scotland. ISBN 1-86232-075-6

Classroom Activities:

How do players know when to start?

Listen to a pipe band starting to play and identify how each player knows when to begin playing.

Identify different drums

Watch a pipe band playing and pick out three types of drums which look different and are played differently.

Count the different sound sources that come from a pipe

Look at a piper playing and count the number of different sources of sound coming from the instrument.

How do you tune a drone?

Watch drones being tuned and decide how this is done.

Pick a favourite instrument

Which instrument, pipes or drums, do you find most exciting? Give a reason for your preference.

Questions For Discussion After the Programme:

Tuning

Why is tuning a pipe band so difficult?

Teamwork

What makes a band an example of good teamwork?

Classical Music

What is known as the classical music of the pipes?

Pipe band competitions

Would you consider pipe band competitions as art or sport?

Local pipe bands

Do you know of any pipe bands in the area where you live?

Pipe band appeal

What do you think makes being in pipe bands attractive to many people?