

Classical Pipe Music

Scotland's Hidden Treasure

A concert of
piobaireachd in
St Cecilia's Hall,
Edinburgh,
August 11, 2019



*Promoted by the
Piobaireachd
Society*





*The Pìobaireachd Society present a
concert of ceol mor*

Classical Pipe Music

Scotland's
Hidden
Treasure

St Cecilia's Hall,
Edinburgh,
August 11, 2019

The Concert

In tonight's concert you will hear a wide variety of piobaireachd (pronounced approximately 'pee-broch'), the classical music of the great Highland bagpipe, Scotland's national instrument. The musicians are all leading exponents of this music. The tunes will be played in continuous fashion so that the end of one will blend with the start of the next, giving a unique musical experience. Some understanding of the make-up of the instrument may help the novice. The melody is played on the chanter; it has only nine notes. On the piper's shoulder are three drones tuned in two octaves below the chanter's tonic, a note pipers call 'low A', though it is actually pitched higher than concert Bb. The seventh of the octave is flattened considerably. Most piobaireachd are composed using pentatonic scales or variations thereof, so although the pipe has a limited number of notes, a wide variety of tonal mood is possible as you will hear this evening.

Programme:

Introduction and welcome

The Daughter's Lament..... Dr Peter McCalister

Queen Elizabeth II's Salute.....Niall Stewart

The Blind Piper's Obstinacy.....Darach Urquhart

The Massacre of Glencoe..... Stuart Easton

Interval

The Little Spree Dr Peter McCalister

The Old Men of the Shells.....Stuart Easton

Lament for Donald Duaghal MacKay..... Niall Stewart

Chisholm's Salute Darach Urquhart

The Pipers



Stuart Easton has been a prolific prizewinner throughout New Zealand, Australia, France and Scotland. Last year he won the Gold Medal at the Argyllshire Gathering to add to his 2017 Northern Meeting Silver Medal. Other prizes include the Commun na Piobaireachd NZ Gold Medal and Clasp and the Australian RU Brown Gold Medal. Stuart and his wife Shelley live in Palmerston North, New Zealand, and run a piping and dancing business. They have two children, Kate (6) and Rory (3).



Darach Urquhart began piping aged eight taught by the solo piping champion Iain MacFadyen, his next door neighbour in Kyle of Lochalsh. Darach won all the major prizes as a junior, and since moving to Glasgow for university has been successful at senior level winning the 'B' Marches and Silver Medal (2018) at the Argyllshire Gathering, and the Snuff Mull and Strachan MSR at London. Darach is a civil engineer specialising in railway bridges and last year married his fiancée Helen.



Peter McCalister started learning pipes aged nine, taught by P/M Andy Wilson in Belfast. After Edinburgh Medical School he became a GP in Bonnybridge, Stirlingshire. He competed as an amateur for some years, and it was not until 2009 that he turned professional, going on to win the Silver Medal at Oban (2012) and then the Gold Medal at Inverness (2018). For some years he has been an active member of the Piobaireachd Society working on its committees.



Niall Stewart is originally from Alness in Easter Ross and now resides in Kyle of Lochalsh with his wife Cara and children Maria and Fraser. He is the schools piping instructor for South Skye and Lochalsh. Niall has won several of the top awards in piping including the Gold Medal for piobaireachd at both the Argyllshire Gathering and the Northern Meeting. He formed Lochalsh Junior Pipe Band in 2014 and in 2017 they won the World Championship in their grade.

The Piobaireachd Society

When the musicians of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland adopted the bagpipe, perhaps some eight hundred years ago, what emerged was the instrument we know today as the great Highland bagpipe and a classical form of music, piobaireachd, which is unique to the instrument. Nothing resembling this music has been discovered in any other country in the world and, to the ear of the devotee, this is the only instrument which can reproduce piobaireachd satisfactorily. The word 'piobaireachd' literally means pipe playing or pipe music, but is now used to describe all classical Highland pipe music. Another name for it is *ceol mor* (pro. approx. 'kee-ol mor') meaning 'big music'. This differentiates piobaireachd from all other forms of pipe music (marches, reels, jigs etc.). These are referred to as *ceol beag* (pro. approx. 'kee-ol bik'), little music. A piobaireachd consists of a theme and variations and these vary in number and complexity. The theme is often slow, and the general effect of the whole piece of music is slow, slowness being a characteristic of non-dance Highland music. It is very stylised, yet there is freedom in the theme or 'ground' to express joy, sadness, or sometimes, in the 'gathering' tunes, a peremptory warning or call to arms.

The Piobaireachd Society was formed in 1903 to encourage the study and playing of this music. The Society has collected most of the available piobaireachd manuscripts and published several books which have promoted the music worldwide. In addition the Society has now developed a comprehensive website with sound files, manuscripts, new music, photographs and other information all designed to encourage the understanding and playing of piobaireachd. The Society currently sponsors important piping competitions held annually in London and at Oban and Inverness. The Society believes tonight's concert provides an opportunity for music enthusiasts to hear *ceol mor*, some for the first time. The wonderful setting of St Cecilia's Hall and the expert pipers performing for you tonight will, we hope, enhance everyone's enjoyment of Scotland's hidden treasure of classical pipe music.

The Music

Notes by Dr Peter McCalister

The Daughter's Lament is the only one you will hear tonight where the melodic line is in the key of 'G'. This pitches all the theme notes against the drones of the bagpipe tuned to the tonic 'low A'. The complex harmonics of the drones cover any apparent discords and the 'weeping note', the piper's 'high G', can, depending on how it is interpreted, suggest sadness or anger. This tune features frequent 'high Gs', which have a beautiful tone but are hard for the piper to tune accurately. The melody, with this harmonic background, is unmistakably a lament. The title comes from Angus MacKay, piper to Queen Victoria and a pivotal collector of piobaireachd in the 19th century. Other collectors, including Donald MacDonald (1820), suggest it is a lament for John Graham of Claverhouse, Viscount Dundee, who died at Killiecrankie in 1689. However to counter this argument, there is another well-known but entirely different tune called Lament for Viscount Dundee. After his death, Dundee's widow then married Lord Kilsyth, another Jacobite supporter, but she died in her first pregnancy. In 1795, when repairs were being made to a church in Kilsyth, the embalmed body of Lady Kilsyth and her baby daughter were discovered. This may or may not be the daughter of the title.

Queen Elizabeth II's Salute was written by P/M Donald MacLeod MBE and it is particularly apposite for tonight's concert given that Her Majesty is Patron of the Piobaireachd Society. P/M MacLeod was a highly successful competitive piper and teacher, and one of the finest pipe music composers of the 20th century. His piobaireachd are simple and melodic and this tune is a good example. It is in the less common pipe key of 'D' and this draws an interesting set of harmonics from the bagpipe, tuned (as mentioned above) to the note 'A'.

The Blind Piper's Obstinacy: Iain Dall MacKay [Blind John] was born in 1656 and lost his sight after contracting smallpox at the age of seven. Nonetheless he became a prolific and renowned piper, composer, and poet. Like many who wished to excel in piping at the time he sought out the MacCrimmons of Borreraig, Skye, and became one of their greatest pupils.



He was so successful that some of the other pupils became jealous and threw him over a cliff, still known locally as 'The Piper's Leap'. He escaped unhurt and lived to be 98. He was a prolific composer of strathspeys, reels, and jigs, and his 24 piobaireachd include classics such as Patrick Og MacCrimmon's Lament and the Unjust Incarceration. Patrick Og was his teacher, and one story tells us that Ian Dall, hearing of Patrick's death, composed a piobaireachd in his honour - only to discover on arriving on Skye that Patrick was alive and well! Amusingly, Patrick asked for his lament to be played by Iain and said he hoped to learn it himself. The Blind Piper's Obstinacy is rhythmically unique, and referred to by one respected commentator as 'a brilliant but singularly bloody-minded piobaireachd', with variations increasing in speed and complexity. The MS of Angus MacKay (1812-1859) suggests that the later variations be 'very lively', and this teaching has passed down through the generations of pipers.

The Massacre of Glencoe: The story of the massacre of the MacIains of Glencoe (a sept of Clan Donald) by Government troops has resonated down the centuries. In late January 1692, approximately 120 soldiers arrived in Glencoe. Their commander, Robert Campbell of Glenlyon, whose niece was married to one of MacIain's sons, asked for 'free quarter', an established alternative to paying taxes in what was a largely non-cash society. The Glencoe MacDonalds themselves were similarly billeted on the Campbells in 1678. On 12th February, another officer (Lt. Col. Hamilton) led 400 men to block the western exits from Glencoe at Kinlochleven. A further 400 men under Major Duncanson were then to join Glenlyon and sweep through the glen, killing anyone they found, removing property and burning houses. MacIain was killed, but his two sons escaped. Recent estimates put total deaths resulting from the massacre at 'around 30', whilst claims others died of exposure have not been substantiated. To be murdered by one's guests broke the sacred law of Highland hospitality, enshrined in statute in 1587 and banning 'slaughter under trust'. This law was intended to reduce feuding and applied to murder committed in cold blood after hospitality had been accepted. Glencoe was possibly unique for this reason, but not particularly unusual in Highland history. Other massacres include the 1578 Battle of the Spoilt Dyke and the 1647 Dunaverty Massacre. There is still a provocative sign on the door of the Clachaig Inn in Glencoe: 'no hawkers, or Campbells'.

The Little Spree: David Glen (1853-1916), a noted collector and publisher of piobaireachd, suggested that ‘This tune was composed by the chief of the MacGregors on one of his vassals, a valiant man. He was a blacksmith by trade, and he was often the foremost of all the battles he was engaged in, but there were times when he would get quite deranged, occasioned by his partaking too free of ardent spirits ... There are three Daorachs ... all of which are composed upon the same wild hero’. There are indeed three related tunes, the Little Spree, Middling Spree, and Big Spree. The Little Spree is highly melodic and simple for the listener to follow, and may be a good tune to illustrate how a piobaireachd is constructed. It starts, as all tunes do, with a theme or *urlar*. A series of variations, all based on this melody, follow. The last is the sparkling *crunluath* variation where the piper endeavours to hold the melody in check while playing a dazzling display of demi-semiquaver gracenotes. The tune is now thought of as one of the simpler or shorter piobaireachd to perform, but in the 1920s it was a popular piece among the top exponents of the day.

The Old Men of the Shells: A seashell is a convenient and popular drinking vessel, so one tradition holds that this tune is about the distillers or purveyors of strong liquor. There is an old song ‘hand me over the scallop shell, the shell that has ruined me’. The consumption of alcohol is to this day a feature of many Highland gatherings of one type or another. In 2018 Scotch whisky topped the UK export list, netting £4.7 billion (\$6US), a new record. The USA spends the greatest sum on importing Scotch whisky, but France imports the largest volume in the world. A second legend links the tune with a battle at the head of Loch Sligachan in Skye in 1395, when MacDonald (brother of the Lord of the Isles) attacked Skye with a force of men on longships. William MacLeod of Dunvegan met the MacDonalds at Sligachan and drove them back to Loch Eynort. There, to their consternation, they found that their galleys had been moved offshore by the MacAskills, and they were trapped. The entire force of MacDonalds was killed. At the foot of a rock which has ever since been called Creag na Feanish, or the Rock of the Spoil, William divided the proceeds amongst his followers. In a typical Highland display of overkill, any surviving MacDonalds were beheaded (possibly by the MacAskills) and the heads carried in triumph back to Dunvegan. This bloody tale does not really fit with the pleasing melody and variations you will hear tonight, so perhaps the story of the whisky is the right one?

Lament for Donald Duaghal Mackay: Sir Donald Mackay, 1st Lord Reay, and Baronet of Nova Scotia, was born in 1590. He was an active and energetic politician and soldier who led an eventful life. He played a prominent role in the service of the king of Denmark in the Thirty Years' War in Sweden and Germany, taking a large force of Scottish soldiers with him. He subsequently quarrelled with David Ramsay at the English Court and, having challenged him to a duel, both were imprisoned in the Tower of London to preserve the peace. During the English Civil War Sir Donald fought for King Charles I and was captured and imprisoned in Edinburgh Castle. After Charles's execution, he went into exile in Denmark where he died in February 1649. There is no agreement on the meaning of the epithet 'Duaghal' (pro. Doo-al) which accompanies his name. The tune is highly melodic, focusing on the top hand of the chanter and entirely in the pentatonic key of A which matches the drones of the bagpipe. Perhaps because of this, or for other reasons, this lament is often put forward by pipers for competition, and frequently wins first prize. Although sometimes claimed as a MacCrimmon composition, it is more likely to have been a composition of Ian Dall MacKay, the blind piper.

Chisholm's Salute: This bold, simple, but beguiling tune was probably composed in the 19th century. The Chisholms were a Norman family who arrived in Britain after the conquest of 1066, the original surname being De Chese to which the Saxon term 'holme' was added. The clan seat was at Erchless Castle near Struy, Inverness-shire, but they sold this in 1937 and it is now in private hands. Initially Chisholm was a lowland clan, the first chief John de Chisholme settling at Berwick in 1254. Like many clans, they were active in the many conflicts in Scotland over the centuries and, when not fighting, were well-known cattle thieves. They supported Robert the Bruce at Bannockburn, and the Jacobites in the uprising of 1715 where they were defeated at the Battle of Sherrifmuir. At Culloden in 1746, 30 Chisholms were killed including the son of the chief. The tune's relatively simple theme is gradually developed in eight short variations, finishing with the crunluath and crunluath a-mach variations. In Gaelic 'a-mach' means 'going out' and is achieved with a somewhat syncopated rhythm, where the listener will at times hear 17 demi-semiquavers played in a row, a feat which the skilled piper can achieve in approximately one second.



www.piobaireachd.co.uk

© The Piobaireachd Society