

Gold and Silver Medal Set Tunes 2008 Judges' Seminar Notes – 25 November 2007

Piobaireachd judges' seminars are held twice a year to give judges the opportunity to discuss styles and settings of the set tunes in an informal way. The following notes are from the first of the seminars to discuss the 2008 set tunes. A second seminar to discuss the remaining tunes will be held on 30 March 2008 and notes from this seminar will be published shortly afterwards.

These notes are published in the hope that they will be of some interest to competing pipers and others. They should, however, be regarded only as the output from an informal discussion and neither as a complete and authoritative analysis of the tunes nor as a set of directions on how they should be played. Like wise, the sources listed should not be taken to be comprehensive.

Alan Forbes
Secretary to the Music Committee

The Blind Piper's Obstnacy

PS 3 p96; K p45; Further Sidelights p36; Binneas 1 p38

As this is a tune of rhythms rather than melody, the different rhythms should be clearly and properly defined during the performance and drawn together to produce a vibrant piece in order to keep it interesting for the listener.

Whilst the theme notes are short, the degree of shortness is very important in the musical portrayal of the tune.

The last low A in the second last bar of line 3 in variation 1 is sometimes omitted. Whilst the origin of this is not clear, it was an established difference to the norm in the oral tradition. Competitors who intend to follow this variance should advise the judges.

Sobieski's Salute

PS 5 p129

It is acceptable to play D instead of E in the last bar of line 2, variation 1, singling and doubling, as per the canntaireachd and as described in the notes in PS 5. The judges should be advised.

The frequently recurring B cadences must be treated musically and sympathetically to keep the tune interesting. The tune seems to fall naturally into two-bar phrases. Sensitive timing of line-ends, and cadences generally, is important to avoid monotony.

The Stewarts' White Banner

PS 7 p201; Donald MacDonald Tune 20; Glen

Although a few pipers play a 'run-down' in this tune there was general agreement that it is inappropriate to do so as it spoils the flow of the music. Careful thought needs to be given to the expression of the grips towards the end of the ground.

The PS setting has four 'hiharins' at the end of each variation; Donald MacDonald has only two.

Variation 1 needs to be kept flowing and should not become too regular or static.

Variation 2 may be played in the conventional way (e.g. Glen's setting).

In the Donald MacDonald setting, the double echoes on E and the 'hiharins' may be played either as written or in the conventional way. The judges should be informed of any such changes.

The Clan MacNab's Salute

PS 15 p520; K p79; Further Sidelights p50; Angus Mackay p93

Also known as James William Grant's Salute (or "The Elchies Salute"). Donald MacDonald's and Peter Reid's settings are also given in PS 15. Donald MacDonald's setting, which is given in full, is acceptable, even although it has a different name and many differences from Angus Mackay's setting. Although a crunluath a mach is required in the standard setting, it is not required in Donald MacDonald's setting.

'Further Sidelights on Kilberry' draws attention to Angus Mackay's book, which has low Gs appearing once in variation 2 and in the last bar but one of each line of the taorluath and crunluath singlings, instead of low As. These are usually considered to be incorrect and the judges should be informed if they are to be played.

This is a long tune with the simple but attractive theme persisting throughout. It therefore needs to be kept moving along, with plenty of variation in tempo between singlings and doublings, to keep it interesting.

Hector MacLean's Warning

PS 2 p51; Angus Mackay p37; Macarthur Macgregor Tune 6

The ground is in common time with the emphasis on the 1st & 4th beats. 'Run downs' may be played in the ground, and there are various ways of expressing these, but they must be consistent and musical.

Probably best not to be too aggressive in playing the dithis. Consider playing it in two-bar phrases, with emphasis on the Bs and Cs.

A crunluath a mach is required in this tune. A taorluath a mach is optional.

There is an extra variation in the Macarthur Macgregor setting.

The Rout of the MacPhees

PS 4 p119

A straightforward tune in $\frac{3}{4}$ time with a ‘medium, medium, strong’ pulse in the variations. It must be kept interesting, with good contrast in tempo between singlings and doublings.

Alternative ways of timing the cadences in the ground and variation 1 were discussed.

Although not prescribed, the judges consider that a crunluath a mach would suit the tune well, but its inclusion would be at the discretion of the competitor.

The Lament for the Castle of Dunyveg

PS 1 p25

The themal progression is strong throughout the tune. A slightly ‘soft’ treatment of the dithis is probably preferable to a tightly ‘clipped’ approach in this tune.

Sensitive timing of cadences is necessary to ensure that the musical flow is maintained.

Alternative ways of timing the high G/A/F figure in bar 3 of line 3 of the ground were considered.

As an alternative setting, it would be acceptable to play the Campbell Canntaireachd versions of the urlar and dithis (as described in the notes in PS 1) with the later variations from Angus MacKay (as in the written score). The judges should be advised.

I am proud to play a Pipe

PS 6 p166; K p17; Binneas is Borreraig

This tune requires a certain amount of pride, or 'swagger', to make it come alive.

Binneas is Borreraig gives a lot of weight to the cadential Es.

A 'run down' may be played at the end of lines 1 and 2; this is not commonly heard.

Different ways of timing the C, D and E in bar 2 of the ground and variation 1 were considered – for example, 'rolling off' the D rather than playing all notes equal.

The taorluath is shown as being played 'up', but could be played 'down' as an alternative.