

CANNTAIREACHD

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For generations piping was handed down orally through a complicated method of vocalising each note and embellishment known as canntaireachd (pronounced cownterochk). This method is still used today whether in a systemised format (usually the Nether Lorne Canntaireachd) or more commonly by a less formal style adopted by each piper. It was not until the mid-eighteenth century that pipe tunes were transcribed (scientifically) in a system of staff notation, which is still considered as an inferior method of adequately passing on the musical aspects of a tune.

There are two commonly known systems of canntaireachd. The Gesto Canntaireachd was published by Niel McLeod of Gesto and was a compilation of twenty tunes in the style taught by John (Iain Dubh) McCrimmon. There were few who understood this system even when it was first published.

The Nether Lorne or Campbell Canntaireachd is the most developed and commonly used formal system of canntaireachd. Today it is used in most piping exams that contain references to canntaireachd. It is said that John Campbell produced tunes written in this canntaireachd at the 1816 Edinburgh competition. Little interest was taken and few understood the system. These were said to be tunes from three volumes transcribed from the playing of John's grandfather Colin Mor a noted piper from Nether Lorne in Argyll. The first volume was lost by Sir John McGregor Murray to whom it was loaned, but two subsequent volumes surfaced in 1909 in the possession of John Bartholomew of Edinburgh. These contain 168 tunes (64 of which are completely unknown elsewhere) and are now housed in the National Library of Scotland.

A system known as "seantairachd" was presented by Simon Fraser of Australia. He was said to have been taught the system by his mother in 1853. Fraser's grandfather was claimed to have been taught the system by Patrick Og McCrimmon. Fraser was taught by Peter Bruce, a piper also familiar with the system. Fraser showed that he could translate the Gesto manuscripts. Two volumes of tunes have been published from his manuscripts and some versions are now included in the Piobaireachd Society Collection.

Another system of canntaireachd was said to be in use by the McArthur pipers, however no record of this system is known to exist.

To this day all serious exponents of piping pass on the intricacies of Piobaireachd playing through the oral method. Manuscript is seen as a convenient system of recording and learning the actual notes, but is regarded as a poor substitute compared to learning the musical nuances from an experienced teacher using the inflexions of the voice.

Below is an example of the tune, the MacDonald's Gathering from the Campbell Collection.

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MacDonald's Gathering

1. Hindaendo four times himbabemba him
daendo himbabemto himem

2. Hindaendo four times himbabemba himdaen
do hieen himbabemto himem himdaendo hieen
himbabemba himdaendo himbabemto himem

3. Hindaen do himbabemba himdaendo hieen
himda ^{himbabemba himdaendo} himto himem

4. Hinda four times himda himda himda himda
himem

5. Hinda four times himda himda hieen himda
himem himda hieen himda himda himto
himem

6. Hinda himda himda hieen himda himda
himto himem

7. Hinda four times himda himda himda himto
himda himda himda himto

8. Hinda four times himda himda himda himto
himda himda himda himto

9. Hinda four times himda himda himda himto
himda himda himda himto

10. Hindaendo four times himbabemba him
daen do himdaendo himbabemto

11. Hindaen do four times himbabemba him
daendo three times himbabemba himdaen do
hindaen do himbabemto

12. Hindaendo four times himbabemba him
daendo himdaen do himbabemto

13. Hindaendo himbabemto two times
hindaendo himdaento

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