

EXERCISES FOR THE HIGHLAND BAGPIPE

Brett Tidswell, National Principal of Piping

When we first learn to play the practice chanter we spend the first lessons learning exercises. I am sure it is not uncommon for many to progress to tunes and rarely look back. *“Exercises are there to teach us the movements and once we have learnt them we move on”. “Tunes provide adequate opportunities to practice the movements”.*

Exercises should not be just about learning the movements. They can be used through our entire playing career to improve the quality of the movements that we play by repetitively practising embellishments and also by training our minds and hands. We learn the movements and train our brain to perform them; we should also develop strength in the hands to be able to perform the movements well. Exercises of any sort build strength and muscle memory.

To use a system of exercises we should ensure that we play all of the movements correctly, including all of the changes between notes etc. That way, not only are we practicing the movements themselves but also all of the notes changes, removing crossing noises etc. The exercise routine is a good opportunity to re-evaluate our playing and the quality of all embellishments.

The routines do not need to be complicated. I teach a series of scalic exercises to intermediate students that serves all of the purposes a good routine should. I have others that I teach anyone with persisting issues, but the attached exercise routine is the primary one I recommend to all intermediate students. I do not teach this to learners as it would take too long and be too boring for a learner to master. The routine however for accomplished players only takes 10 – 15 minutes to perform. There are a series of further exercises that follow the same pattern for all Piobaireachd movements as well.

The routine I suggest is performed each day until it is second nature. It should be done before any other practice. Once you are extremely proficient with the routine, it can be used as a build up in the months before major competitions or performances and that way it stays fresh in your memory and for a portion of each year you are having the opportunity to evaluate and improve your embellishments.

Repetition is important. I repeat either the exercise 4 times each before progressing, or as indicated each movement 4 times over. The scalic exercise routine is shown below.

Exercise Routine

4x RAPIDLY

4x

4x

4x EACH MOVEMENT

4x EACH

Written with PiobMaster (Ceol Mor Software Ltd.)

Exercise Routine

CONT...

The image shows a series of musical exercises on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The exercises are as follows:

- Exercise 1: A single melodic line in the treble clef, starting with a G4, followed by eighth-note patterns. Labeled "4x EACH".
- Exercise 2: A rhythmic exercise in the bass clef, consisting of a sequence of eighth notes. Labeled "4x".
- Exercise 3: A rhythmic exercise in the bass clef, consisting of a sequence of eighth notes. Labeled "4x EACH".
- Exercise 4: A rhythmic exercise in the bass clef, consisting of a sequence of eighth notes. Labeled "4x EACH".
- Exercise 5: A rhythmic exercise in the bass clef, consisting of a sequence of eighth notes. Labeled "4x".
- Exercise 6: A rhythmic exercise in the bass clef, consisting of a sequence of eighth notes. Labeled "4x".

Below these exercises are four empty grand staves for practice.

Further information on practice routines and methods as well as comprehensive details on setting up and refining a bagpipe can be found in "The Complete Pipers Handbook" available here:

<http://www.schoolofpiping.com/handbook.html>

Downloadable lessons for these exercises and tunes are available here:

<http://www.schoolofpiping.com/lessons.html>

The Complete Pipers Handbook
Available from: www.schoolofpiping.com