

March, Strathspey and Reel Playing

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The playing of Marches, Strathspeys and Reels is the foundation stone of good piping. This is the “test piece” of pipe band playing and the most serious element of Ceol Beag when playing solos. It is essential that the good piper familiarise themselves with these idioms and learn to play them as a balanced set.

The Australian Pipe Band Association now has an MSR element in grade 4 replacing the old set of March time tunes. The new contest rule states:

B.3.01.03 The music for Grade 4 shall be 4 parts of 2/4 March (one or two tunes), and one Strathspey and Reel each of 2 or more parts played once through.

Some thought needs to be given as to the selection of tunes and the manner in which the MSR should be performed.

Tune Selection

First a Pipe Major should ensure that the tunes are within the capabilities of the band, but equally important they should issue a realistic challenge to the band.

March

For the March, bands only have to play two tunes of two parts, but can obviously submit a 4 parted tune. The march should be spirited with good accenting and two bar phrasing. Some suggested tunes would be:

Atholl and Breadalbane Gathering
Auchmountain's Bonnie Glen
Australian Ladies
Campbell's Farewell to Redcastle
Corriecholies's 43rd Welcome to the Northern Meeting
Greenwood Side
I'll Gang Nae Mair Tae Yon Toon
Jenny's Bawbee
MacKay's Farewell to the 74th
McKenzie Highlanders
Men of Argyll
Mhari Bhan
Pipe Major William Ross's Farewell to the Scots Guards
Rantin' Rovin' Robin
Teribus
The 25th K.O.S.B.'s Farewell to Meerut
The 72nd Highlanders Farewell to Aberdeen
The Brown Haired Maiden
The Drunken Piper
The Earl of Mansfield
The Pipers Cave

The Sweet Maid of Glendaruel

Strathspey

Again with Strathspeys, the requirement is for a 2 parted tune, but some may opt for a longer tune to display the bands abilities. What is important is that the tune display good strathspey idiom. They should be lively with bounce and Strong, Weak, Medium, Weak accenting. The drumming should enhance this, not detract from it. Generally 1 bar phrasing is appropriate, depending upon the nature of the particular tune. Some tune suggestions would be:

Aspen Bank
Because he was a Bonny Lad
Campbeltown Kiltie Ball
Captain Horne
Colonel MacLeod
Dalnahassaig
J F MacKenzie
Lady MacKenzie of Fairburn
Lady MacKenzie of Gairloch
Louden's Bonnie Woods and Braes
Marquis of Huntly
Mc Phederan's Strathspey
Molly Connell
Munlochy Bridge
O'er The Bows to Ballindalloch
Orange and Blue
Seonaidh's Tune
The Inverness Rant
The Keel Row
The Market Place of Inverness
The Smiths a Gallant Fireman

Reel

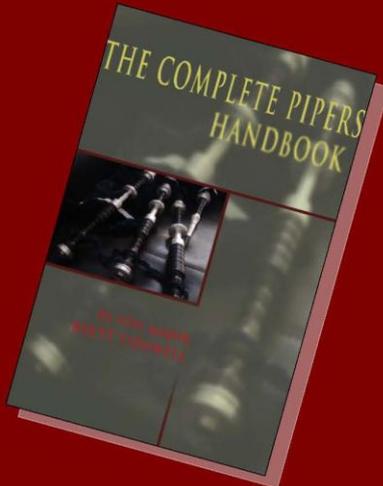
Reels are another dance idiom. They should flow musically rather than bounce as a Strathspey does. They should be of similar tempo to the march and should be played in two bar phrases with good attention to up beats. Round horn/reels the likes of those often heard in medleys **are not suitable**. A good display of reel idiom will be sought. Also fancy medley style finishes and harmonies are **totally inappropriate**. Some suggested tunes are:

Circassion Circle
Colonel MacLeod
East Wood Cottage
Famous Ballymote
High Road to Linton
Jock Wilson's Ball
Lord James Murray
Marion and Donald
Miss Girdle
Molly on the Shore
Piper of Drummond
Sleepy Maggie
Tail Toddle

The Ale is Dear
The Fairy Dance
The Silver Spear
Willie Murray

Remember that the MSR is a traditional set of tunes played to a traditional formula. The idioms must be displayed correctly with good break clearly demonstrating the difference between the tune types. With a little thought and musicality they should be enjoyable to perform and to listen to. We wish the best of luck to all bands that are attempting this set of tunes for the first time.

For information on running band practices, setting up a band in various weather conditions, sound practice techniques and setting up a bagpipe ***The Complete Pipers Handbook*** has it all.

The image shows the cover of the book 'The Complete Pipers Handbook'. The cover is dark green with a central photograph of a bagpipe. The title 'THE COMPLETE PIPERS HANDBOOK' is written in yellow at the top. Below the photo, the authors' names 'BY JOHN MURPHY AND IAN GIBSON' are visible in red. The book is shown at an angle, giving it a three-dimensional appearance.

The Complete Pipers Handbook is a must for every serious piper. Never before has a more comprehensive guide been published. Maintenance, set up, refinement, tuning, setting up bands, performance psychology and much more!

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