

THE LOST ART OF THE COMPOUND MARCH

P/M Brett Tidswell, National Principal of Piping

Listening to the majority of young local pipers, there is a huge problem with the interpretation of compound time marches. Not only are they being incorrectly played, but they are being incorrectly taught and there is a new generation of tutors passing on an incorrect style.

There are several basic errors which affect the flow of these tunes. The worst problem is the interpretation of the quaver groupings of three notes. The dotted note is held and the semi quaver and quaver are both over clipped. This then causes a second problem, by not leaning on the last note of these groups the following beat is early.

Also tachums and semi-quaver beat notes are placed ahead of the beat, with the longer note following being the note the beat is transferred to. This gives the tune a sense of being rushed and does not lend to the controlled relaxed style that these tunes should exhibit.

Little or no emphasis seems to be given to expression or phrasing, and the length of dotted notes vary according to technical weaknesses.

The solution is an adherence to some basic rules and a different way of viewing the quavers in these tunes:

- All gracenotes and doublings that are shown on a beat note must start on the beat.
- In 6/8 and 12/8 tunes the left foot beat should be emphasised, in 9/8 the first beat in each bar, proper consideration must be given to the end of phrases and the first beat of each phrase.
- The gracenote before a cut note which is on a beat must be played as the beat (not transferred to the longer note following. This particularly relates to tachums.

The way to look at the quavers is as an "and". They are leaning notes before the next beat, and this gives the tunes their traditional "swing". Groups of three quavers are generally a dotted quaver, a semi quaver and a full quaver, in varying combinations. The rule is that the dotted note is held 50% longer than a standard quaver, the semi quaver is a short, cut note (but is still sounded cleanly) and the quaver is a note on which you lean until the next beat. e.g. hold, cut, "&" proceed to next beat. To swap the values around it might be cut, hold, "&" again leaning on the "and" (quaver) until the next beat.

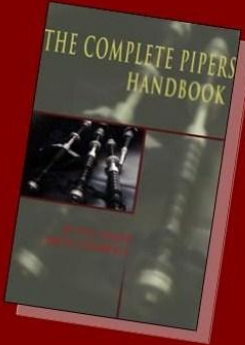
In the case of crotchet quaver groups, the crotchet is twice as long as the quaver, then the quaver is again an "and" to the next beat. Not a short cut note, as if it were a semi quaver, or played as an even value with the crotchet.

Bear in mind the differing values of these notes, don't try to overplay the quavers as a longer note than the dotted quavers, but certainly get away from the dotted quaver (of substantially varying lengths) followed by two very short cut notes which leads to a premature placement of the beat. This makes the tunes jerky and stilted, rather than a relaxed swing, with style and expression.

I hope that this gives a little more insight into what is frequently an incorrectly played aspect of our music, and I hope this new developing "style" starts to disappear.

The most comprehensive guide available today for the set up, maintenance and refinement of the Bagpipe is "The Complete Pipers Handbook". Sales of this publication help fund the freely available school of piping website. Copies can be purchased here:

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



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!

Available from: www.schoolofpiping.com selected stockists.