PIBROCH RHYTHM: TRANSLATING EARLY GAELIC BAGPIPE MUSIC IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Robinson McClellan

Bachelor of Arts (Music Composition), Vassar College, 1999
Master of Music (Composition), Yale School of Music, 2006

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Abstract

Since the early nineteenth century, rhythm in pibroch (a Gaelic musical tradition of the Highland Bagpipe) has been a subject of heated debate among pipers and a cause of bewilderment for newcomers. Conflicting sources and confusing rhythm terminology have helped to lend pibroch an aura of impenetrability that has, in part, kept it isolated from the wider interaction of world musical cultures in recent years. Drawing on concepts and terms from the Western classical and pibroch traditions, this study seeks to make pibroch's rhythmic idiom more easily accessible to musicians both within and outside of the piping community. The analysis separates two elements of rhythm in pibroch: first, the cognitive maps of rhythmic patterns and groupings perceived by listeners and performers; and second, the actual performed durations through which those underlying rhythmic structures manifest. Taking an ethnomusicological approach to pibroch's dual history of oral and written transmission, the study compares precise transcriptions of recorded performances with existing scores and written and spoken explanations. The study builds a simple but meticulously defined set of terms and concepts for understanding and discussing pibroch rhythm.

Email: robin@robinsonmcclellan.com

Web: www.robinsonmcclellan.com/pibroch

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…to John Bradley, my piping teacher, who set me on the path and introduced me to the world of pibroch; to Barnaby Brown, whose advice has been indispensable from first inklings to final product; to Roderick Cannon and Allan MacDonald for their generous guidance; to Alasdair Pettinger at the Scottish Music Centre for providing essential sources; to John Purser, who helped me to understand the land this music came from and who introduced me to several transformative composers and performers; to Sarah Weiss, whose careful thinking and ethnomusicologist's perspective likewise made this work possible; and to Michael Friedmann, Robert Holzer, and my MMA colleagues who have all offered valuable advice and constant encouragement. I am also grateful to Roz McClellan and Zach Leeds, who made it through a first draft and provided crucial feedback, to Anita McClellan for lending her professional editing skills, and to Erin Jeanette, because there is only one Erin Jeanette.

Introduction

Bagpipe Music

Let me play to you tunes without measure or end,
Tunes that are born to die without a herald,
As a flight of storks rises from a marsh, circles,
And alights on the spot from which it rose.
Flowers. A flower-bed like hearing the bagpipes.
The fine black earth has clotted into sharp masses
As if the frost and not the sun had come.
It holds many lines of flowers.
First faint rose peonies, then peonies blushing,
Then again red peonies, and behind them,
Massive, apoplectic peonies, some of which are so red
And so violent as to seem almost black; behind these
Stands a low hedge of larkspur, whose tender apologetic blossoms
Appear by contrast pale, though some, vivid as the sky above them,
Stand out from their fellows, iridescent and slaty as a pigeon's breast.
The bagpipes — they are screaming and they are sorrowful.
There is a wail in their merriment, and cruelty in their triumph.
They rise and fall like a weight swung in the air at the end of a string.
They are like the red blood of those peonies.
And like the melancholy of those blue flowers.
They are like a human voice — no! for the human voice lies!
They are like human life that flows under the words.
That flower-bed is like the true life that wants to express itself
And does…while we human beings lie cramped and fearful.

~ Hugh MacDiarmid, 1943

Ghosts of Pibroch, Past and Present

It is the late 1600s on the Isle of Skye in the West of Scotland, and bagpipe student Iain Dall MacKay has just heard that his mentor, Padruig Oig Mhic Cruimein, has died while away on business. High on a hill, Iain Dall takes up his Pìob Mhòr[1]—the Great Highland Bagpipe—to compose a lament for his teacher. Barefoot, bearded, and wrapped in a six-foot swatch of heavy wool tartan woven in the light grays, greens and browns of the heather that surrounds him, he fills the air with piercing music that seems to reach the mountaintops of Uist and Harris across the sea (Audio Sample 1). A few days later, Patrick Og returns to Skye alive and well. Upon hearing the story of the fine new tune Iain has composed, Patrick exclaims (in Gaelic): "A lament for young Peter [Patrick] and he is still alive! I shall then learn the Lament for myself!"[2] A professional piper like Iain Dall (later famous as the Blind Piper of Gairloch), retained in the service of a Highland chieftain, would compose pieces for many kinds of occasions—a rowing tune to guide his clan's boat to a neighboring island,

[1] Pronounced '*peeb vore.*'
[2] Haddow, *The History and Structure of Ceol Mor*, 111.

a Salute to welcome an important visitor, or a March to motivate warriors in battle. The music he and his colleagues composed for the ceremonial purposes of daily clan life belongs to the rarely heard repertory of the Highland pipes known as Ceòl Mór—the Great Music—a theme-and-variation form unique to the Highland pipes, called by the Gaelic word for 'pipe playing,' *pìobaireachd*, or anglicized as *pibroch*.[3] Stories like Patrick Og MacCrimmon's unearned lament, freely mixing historical fact with legend and pithy anecdote, abound in the history of this music.

Fast forward: it is February 2004 at the Holiday Inn in downtown Newark, New Jersey, and the Metro Cup Piping Competition is underway. A handful of people sits in a low-ceilinged hotel conference room waiting for a pibroch competition to begin.[4] A white-haired man—the judge—sits at a folding table sternly perusing a score. A piper enters the room: he is shaven and shod, wearing a pleated kilt, knee socks, a formal jacket, and a light military-style cap. Filling the small space with overwhelmingly loud sound, he painstakingly tunes his pipes for almost ten minutes. He then begins to pace with slow, stiff steps in a wide circle, to the first strains of Iain Dall's tune, now famous in its English translation as the *Lament for Patrick Og MacCrimmon*. The seemingly measureless theme soon transforms itself into a series of insistent variations. Over the course of almost fifteen minutes, the ornaments of each successive variation become faster and more elaborate, building to a height of tension before the sorrowful theme rings out a final time.

Rhythm: A Puzzle in Pibroch

These two scenes, from the Gaelic-speaking Highlands of the seventeenth century to the English-speaking competition circuit of the twenty-first, span a dramatic musical and cultural journey. In the course of its long history, the pibroch tradition has shown remarkable resilience at the same time that it has seen profound transformations. Today, pibroch provides a glimpse of musical practices that were probably widespread in Europe at one time but have almost completely disappeared outside this tradition.[5] At the same time, subtle but fundamental changes have taken place in the music as a result of its contact with the wider Western musical environment. Diverse cultural and musical forces have come together, and they have blended in surprising ways. Perhaps the most intriguing way pibroch has manifested its particular blend of influences—and certainly the most difficult to untangle—lies in the realm of rhythm.

For many performers, listeners, and analysts, rhythm is the most noticeable and perplexing aspect of pibroch. Among pipers, the nuances of rhythmic interpretation define a performer's mastery of the genre. For listeners first approaching the music, whether for pleasure or formal analysis, pibroch's 'free' or 'un-metered' rhythm is often the feature that most attracts or repels, intrigues or frustrates. Some listeners, expecting music they can tap their feet to like the marches and reels they usually hear on the pipes, find pibroch esoteric and unapproachable. Others find its elusive rhythms strangely beautiful.

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[3] Pronounced '*peeb-rock.*'
[4] Most competitions also include a March, Strathspey, and Reel ('MSR') component.
[5] Brown in Paterson, *Iain Dall MacKay's Chanter.*

Pibroch's unique rhythmic idiom is the result of a confluence of oral and written musical paradigms. First developed as an oral tradition perhaps as early as the fifteenth century, pibroch was taught entirely by ear and performed from memory. Most of the tunes still played today were composed in the sixteenth, seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, fifty years or more before they were first written down.[6] As the old clan system of the Gaels began to fall apart in the late eighteenth century in the face of the sweeping cultural and economic changes that followed Bonnie Prince Charlie's defeat at Culloden in 1745, and the subsequent Highland clearances, many people perceived pibroch to be on the decline. To preserve the tradition, the Highland Society of London initiated a competition system in 1781.[7] These competitions became the primary setting in which pibroch has been heard and appreciated ever since (the 2004 Newark Metro Cup is typical). Responding to a desire for standardization and consistency in their pibroch competitions, the Highland Society began to push for the creation of a system for writing pibroch 'scientifically,' in conventional staff notation. At a piping competition in 1806, John MacDonald received a special award for "producing the greatest number of ancient pipe-tunes set to music [i.e. transcribed into staff notation]."[8] Pipers have continually experimented with pibroch notation, and standard published collections such as *The Kilberry Book of Ceol Mor* have become integral to the way pibroch is taught and understood.

Despite the efforts of pipers to portray the music on paper, there remains a startling discrepancy between the rhythms written in pibroch scores and rhythms as they are actually performed.[9] The incongruity between notation and performance is the result of the ongoing presence of an old oral tradition in pibroch teaching. Pipers learn the music aurally from their teachers (and, more recently, from recordings), using the notated music as a secondary source and memory aid. In performance, tunes are always played from memory. Robert Brown, a respected twentieth-century teacher of pibroch, summarized the way pibroch tuition has been understood by many pipers since at least the early twentieth century:

> Staff notation for me was just a very good reference for the initial memorizing. Then when I had the tune memorized, shut the book, go to him [his teacher, John MacDonald] and learn it by singing, as this is the only way one can get the proper lights and shades, or scansion of the bars and phrases with which one can make a tune live [pronounced as the verb]. The composers of these fine tunes portrayed them in a certain way, passed it on by canntaireachd [a solfege-like system of syllables for teaching], and only by the continuance of this method can it be kept pure.[10]

Pibroch's dual oral and written transmission has created tensions within the pibroch tradition, especially regarding rhythm, which has long been a subject of heated debate among pipers. Much of the scholarship deals with problems of rhythm and the ways it has been transmitted since the end of the pure oral tradition in the early nineteenth century. At stake is pibroch's early, pre-nineteenth-century playing style: many scholars and performers seek an 'authentic' original rhythmic performance practice. As Robert Brown's comment indicates, no one claims that the pibroch tradition has remained purely oral—all admit some role for notation.

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[6] Cannon, *The Highland Bagpipe and its Music,* 75.
[7] Collinson, *The Bagpipe,* 179.
[8] Ibid., 190.
[9] For example, written grace notes often have longer performed durations than written sixteenth notes (see Chapter 2).
[10] *Masters of Piobaireachd*, vol. 3, track 1 (transcription of spoken word).

Instead, the dispute revolves around the degrees of influence from the two kinds of transmission. The uncertainty lies in two areas: first, the degree to which the original oral tradition was interrupted or lost, and second, the usefulness and accuracy of early written scores and the ways they should be interpreted by performers today.

At least two distinct views can be discerned among pipers and pibroch scholars today, with significant overlap between the two and a wide range of opinion among individuals. Some believe that the oral tradition has survived mostly unchanged, thanks to an 'apostolic' succession of students learning the tunes by ear from their teachers. Many pipers claim direct lineages of only four or five steps reaching back to the MacCrimmons—a famous family of teachers and pipers to the MacLeods of Skye credited with the early development of the tradition itself and the composition of many famous tunes.[11] This view relies on two basic convictions: first, that the current playing style reflects an authentic, accurate, and evolving oral tradition, and second, that the music cannot be captured adequately in written form—that pibroch's free rhythmic idiom simply defies the strictures of notation. As a result, scores can be no more than secondary memory aids. In this view, the earliest attempts at written notation dating from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—which often depart further from current performance practice than many twentieth-century scores do—either are wrong and incompetent, or represent an inferior form of the art than that carried forward in the oral tradition. This 'mainstream' view (my term) tends to be promoted by the majority of performers and teachers, and dominates the competition circuit.

Others challenge the belief that pibroch's oral tradition has accurately preserved early playing styles, arguing that the music has been constantly changing throughout its history (as most oral traditions do). Since at least the late nineteenth century if not earlier, some pibroch performers—especially from the Gaelic-speaking community—have complained of corruptions in pibroch's performance style.[12] Beginning around the 1940s and gaining momentum since the 1970s, a group of scholars and performers has sought to rediscover the ways pibroch's early composers and performers understood and practiced this music. According to these 'revisionists,'[13] the end of the patronage system of the Gaelic clans (every clan chief retained at least one piper in full-time professional service) in the late eighteenth century, and the introduction of the competition system beginning in 1781, led to a fundamental change in the societal role of the music, which in turn altered its underlying ethos. On a musical level, the introduction of written scores in the early nineteenth century had a negative impact on the tradition, denying performers the creative role they had enjoyed during pibroch's earlier development: scores gradually introduced a culture of standardization and musical 'fundamentalism' into an oral tradition that had been characterized by variation and continual creative

[11] In popular piping legend the MacCrimmons have eclipsed other families that were probably equally accomplished, such as the Rankins and the MacKays.
[12] Cooke, "Problems of Notating Pibroch," 41-42.
[13] I borrow this term from Emmett Miller's online customer review (23 May, 2000) of the CD release of a 1999 pibroch concert that included performances by 'revisionists' such as Allan MacDonald and Barnaby Brown: www.amazon.com/Ceol-Mor-Na-Pioba/dp/B00004STL9 (accessed 26 March, 2007).

renewal. Revisionists tend to believe that early scores can provide an informative, if imperfect, picture of early conceptions of pibroch as long as we interpret them in light of the musical culture in which pibroch developed—in particular, many revisionist scholars and pipers feel that modern pibroch performance can benefit from a deeper understanding of the rhythmic idiom of Gaelic language and vocal traditions that surrounded pibroch during its formation.

As with all such searches for past musical practice in other cultures, the very notion of an 'authentic' pibroch style is problematic (as many pipers and pibroch scholars are well aware); even if it were possible to reconstruct early performance practice with certainty, it is likely that there was never a single 'authentic' style. Though we can never know how pibroch actually sounded in its early days, we can be sure of at least two things: First, written and oral modes of transmission, in tension and dialogue since the early nineteenth century, have both contributed in important ways to the sound and performance style of the music. Second, the ways these two modes interact, and their effects on pibroch's rhythmic idiom, will continue to be the subject of controversy and debate as the pibroch tradition develops in the future.

Making Pibroch Accessible: An Act of Translation

As I have learned as a beginning piper, it is not easy for one approaching the tradition for the first time to make sense of pibroch's complex history and treacherous mix of opinions and terminology—especially when it comes to rhythm. Familiar musical terms such as 'meter,' 'phrase,' and 'stress' mean different things in different situations, and each tune comes with a host of scores showing a wide variety of only loosely related rhythmic interpretations. Worse, the way rhythms actually manifest in performance departs significantly from all of the written sources.

To make pibroch more accessible, this study carries out an act of translation: by creating a simple, but thorough and meticulously defined, framework for pibroch rhythm, I hope to help those interested in pibroch—pipers and newcomers to the tradition alike—to more easily and completely appreciate this intriguing and beautiful music. In particular, I follow the approach taken in a new collection of ethnomusicological analyses edited by Michael Tenzer, *Analytical Studies in World Music*, in which the aim is to "make the diverse systems of musical thought under consideration available for creative musicians looking for an informed basis on which to know[,] assimilate, model, or borrow from world musics. The authors [of each study in the book] are at pains to crystallize what is distinctive about the music they discuss."[14] In the same way, my analysis pursues an essentially utilitarian concern: what in pibroch is interesting, fresh, and potentially useful to creative musicians today? I hope to provide at least a partial answer by translating pibroch into a transparent and straightforward analytical language open to any interested reader.

To accomplish this translation, each chapter explores pibroch from a different angle. Chapter 1 takes the perspective of a listener who is unfamiliar with pibroch—particularly one trained in the traditions of

[14] Tenzer, *Analytical Studies in World Music*, 5.

Western classical music (my own background). But rather than claiming a universal understanding of rhythm for such a vast body of musicians, I approach pibroch specifically from the viewpoint laid out by Grosvenor Cooper and Leonard Meyer in their 1960 book *The Rhythmic Structure of Music*; the terminology, concepts and analytical symbols they provide form a basis for the translation I have undertaken.[15] Chapter 2 describes the way pipers in the mainstream pibroch tradition have taught, performed, and understood their music since the early twentieth century and before (many views current today were inherited from the nineteenth century), and introduces newcomers to many of the basic aspects of the tradition. Chapter 3 explores the findings of revisionist pibroch scholars who have recently offered new evidence about the way pibroch's early composers and performers may have understood the music. While these mainstream and revisionist perspectives are surely not the only ways of viewing this music—there as many opinions about pibroch as there are pipers—they are the most influential, and the most important for an outsider coming to the tradition to understand.

Together, the three perspectives build a comprehensive model for understanding pibroch rhythm that not only incorporates the way pipers themselves understand their music, but also accounts for the assumptions an outsider might carry into such an investigation. Chapter 4 draws together the evidence presented in the other three chapters, presenting a broad way of understanding pibroch rhythm. A final section briefly explores some possible implications of this study for the piping community, and then departs from the analytical approach of the rest of the study to address issues of particular interest to creative musicians in the classical tradition, especially composers. Taking a freer, less strictly analytical attitude, this final part explores ways of hearing pibroch that may depart from the analyses in the three chapters, though it is enriched and informed by them. Ultimately, I follow Tenzer and others in the belief that the best musical analysis is "essentially creative, with only tangential claims to being scientific."[16]

My treatment of pibroch resembles that of ethnomusicologists who have studied 'non-Western' musical traditions. While pibroch is a Western European art form, it nevertheless lies outside the canon of European-American classical music taught and heard in twenty-first-century concert halls and universities; as Peter Cooke points out, "the pibroch tradition has been largely ignored by our Western academies."[17] An ethnomusicological vantage point is also necessary for practical reasons. Because the written scores used by pipers do not accurately reflect the way the rhythms are performed (see Chapter 2), transcriptions are the basis for my analysis rather than existing pibroch scores, which provide secondary reference. Following a longstanding practice among ethnomusicologists, my transcriptions are not intended to be prescriptive for performers, and should not be understood as scores. Instead, they are purely descriptive, serving to explicate and clarify my interpretations of the music.[18] Though the use of precise transcriptions is not new in

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[15] There are several equally reputable—and more recent—studies of rhythm in classical music; I find Cooper and Meyer's terminology and the distinctions they draw to be especially straightforward and lucid.
[16] Tenzer, 6.
[17] Cooke, "The Pibroch Repertory," 93. Though his comment dates from 1976, it is still largely true today.
[18] See Charles Seeger's "Prescriptive and Descriptive Music-writing."

pibroch,[19] no scholar—to my knowledge—has undertaken a systematic analysis of the performed rhythms of pibroch. Instead, following the example of theorists in the Western classical tradition, most analysts of pibroch tend to rely on scores, leaving the precise nature of the rhythms we actually hear to performers. As one prominent pibroch scholar concedes, "niceties like rhythmic stretching [are] mainly at the discretion of the individual performer."[20] With this study, therefore, I hope to fill a gap I perceive in existing pibroch scholarship.

In addition to providing insights into the performed rhythms of pibroch—its immediately audible, surface-level rhythms—a study of rhythm encompasses the music's larger formal structures. Due to the 'architectonic' nature of rhythm in nearly all music traditions[21] (including pibroch), in which smaller units (motives) groups themselves into increasingly larger ones (phrases, periods, etc.), pibroch's large-scale formal and harmonic plans can be understood as aspects of rhythm at higher architectonic levels. By including this aspect of rhythm in this study alongside smaller-scale, surface-level rhythms, I hope to offer a useful framework for further study at all rhythmic levels.

There are aspects of pibroch rhythm I must unfortunately leave out of this study for the sake of focus. I limit the analysis to the theme (*ground* in English or *urlar* in Gaelic, meaning 'floor') of each tune, leaving aside the variations that take up the bulk of the overall duration of most tunes. Discussing the rhythms of the variations would require a separate study in itself.

The entire analysis I propose rests on a basic distinction I draw between two aspects of rhythm. First, musicians in nearly all world music traditions rely on mental maps of accentual patterns and rhythmic groupings in order to understand and perform music (exactly what this means will become clear in Chapter 1). I call this the *rhythmic organization* of music. Second, when a piece of music is performed, the performer brings a particular manifestation—a given set of actual performed durations, in physical sound—to that underlying rhythmic organization. In most musical traditions, a generally agreed-upon way of treating rhythm is an important part of the reason the music sounds idiomatic. I'll call this the 'rhythmic performance practice,' or *performance practice*.[22] Within a given tradition's performance practice, individual performers usually have some latitude to bring their own personal interpretation to the music.

Listening to pibroch without knowing which durations result from the underlying rhythmic organization, and which show the performer's way of expressing that organization, we are left to make guesses about how the music really works (for example, why two notes occurring in the same position in

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[19] Cooke's 1972 study of *Maol Donn*, "Problems of Notating Pibroch," makes use of transcriptions (see Chapter 2).
[20] Buisman, "Melodic Relationships in Pibroch," 18. This dismissal of actual performed rhythms as being an assumed, but not explicitly analyzed, aspect of music, and a total reliance on written scores, is not limited to pibroch scholarship: the same is true of much mainstream theoretical writing about classical music.
[21] 'Architectonic' refers to the nature of most musical—and linguistic—structures, in which smaller units are grouped into larger ones. See Cooper and Meyer's definition in Chapter 1.
[22] My use of the term 'performance practice' is more limited than its use in the classical tradition, where it usually refers to a whole collection of musical parameters—instrumentation, tempo, ornamentation etc.—which are altered to make the music sound a certain way. The term is often associated with the early music movement, as in the search for an authentic 'Baroque performance practice.'

different phrases have similar, but slightly different durations). The task of this study, therefore, is to separate rhythmic organization from performance practice so that we can understand each more clearly.[23]

I will devote considerable space to defining terms and drawing fine distinctions between musical concepts. Many of the terms used in pibroch have been borrowed from the English lexicon of musical jargon (stress, phrase, meter, etc). Some of these terms mean slightly different things in pibroch than they do for classical musicians. Clarifying the meanings of the terms—both the similarities and differences in their usage between traditions—not only helps to avoid confusion, but also provides an introduction to some of the key concepts I explore: because language plays an important role in the way we perceive and conceptualize music (and everything else), an appreciation of the terminology pipers use to discuss and teach their music will in itself provide access to the music itself. But because some of the terms pipers use might seem opaque to outsiders, I offer a new analytical language with which pipers and classical musicians alike can discuss pibroch. To create this new lexicon I borrow some of words from pipers (with their meanings carefully defined for classical musicians) and terms from Cooper and Meyer's book. I hope that pipers and non-pipers alike will be able to use this framework and terminology to clearly understand and discuss pibroch's rhythmic idiom.

More Ghosts, Present and Future: Pibroch in the Twenty-first Century

Pibroch has attracted increasing interest beyond competition halls. In Paris and Rome, pibroch recitals have drawn large and enthusiastic crowds.[24] Composers in Scotland have been writing pibroch-inspired music for standard concert ensembles since the late nineteenth century, and the idea is increasingly catching on elsewhere. In my own work as composer pibroch has been a key creative resource, and I am not alone: a recent concert in New York City featured a young American piper and composer who has written innovative pibroch-related music for string quartet, orchestra, and other ensembles.[25] The underlying motivation for my study of pibroch's unique rhythmic universe is to provide an impetus for more creative activity that draws on the pibroch tradition, whether within the piping community or outside it.

To translate pibroch to new musical realms, and even beyond the bagpipe itself, I offer two further visions to add to the images of seventeenth-century Skye and twenty-first-century Newark: It is 2008 at Carnegie's Zankel Hall in New York City, and the seats are packed for a pibroch recital, presented according to historically informed performance practice on reconstructed eighteenth-century Pìob Mhòr. The pibroch selections are programmed alongside other kinds of solo and chamber European music of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—perhaps the haunting harmonies of Purcell's' *Viol Fantasias* of the 1680s

[23] Since this distinction depends on how the person creating the music understands the rhythm—in other words, the composer's or performer's intentions—Chapters 2 and 3 (which concern the piper's perspective) will go further in clarifying the differences between rhythmic organization and performance practice in pibroch; in Chapter 1, we will not yet have the necessary knowledge to draw the line accurately.
[24] Barnaby Brown, Introduction to "The Future of Pibroch: Competition or Commerce?"
[25] Matthew Welch…see www.myspace.com/matthewtobinwelch (accessed 27 March, 2007).

(composed around the same time as many classic pibrochs), or some fine examples of Baroque German keyboard music.

Or: it is 2017 at San Francisco's Davies Symphony Hall, and a diverse crowd is enjoying a mixed program of pibroch-inspired orchestral works. With its almost minimalist aesthetic of understatement and insistent, hypnotic repetition, pibroch lends itself to a concert that also includes the amplified, pop-inspired sounds of the Bang on a Can All Stars. The program includes a few new pieces written by composers trained in the traditions of Western classical music, tinged to varying degrees by pibroch's widening influence in larger trends of global cross-pollination between music traditions of all kinds.

Chapter One: Pibroch According to Cooper and Meyer

Nighean, a nighean mo luaidh,
b' e aoibhneas a' chiùil mhòir t' aodann,
Beethoven agus Maol Donn
air magh lom cridhe sgaoilte.
… Thachd an fhiabhrais ioma truagh
is dh' fhàg i ioma athair breòite,
ach dh'fhàg ceòl cumha Phàdraig Mhòir
àmhghar a chloinne glòrmhor.
… Cha dèanar an cochur dhe 'n chas,
glòir agus ànradh na cruinne,
an eitig fhiabhrais 'a Pàdraig Mòr,
daorsa, Beethoven is thusa.

~ Somhairle MacGill-eain, 1938

Girl, girl of my love,
the joy of the big music was your face,
Beethoven and Maol Donn
extended on the bare plain of a heart.
… Fever has choked many a poor one
and has left many a father bruised, sore and frail,
but the music of Patrick's lament
left the distress of his children glorious.
… No synthesis will be made of fortune,
the glory and the distress of the universe,
the feverish wasting and Patrick Mor,
slavery, Beethoven and you.

~ Sorley MacLean, 1938
(from *A Synthesis,* verses 6, 10, and 13)

Let us find out what we can about pibroch simply by careful listening. In this chapter I suspend what I have learned about pibroch in the course of my research—presenting that knowledge will be the task of Chapters 2 and 3. Here, I analyze the music from the perspective of a classical musician who knows little or nothing about it.[26] To create a consistent analytical language, I adapt terms and concepts from Cooper and Meyer's *The Rhythmic Structure of Music* to pibroch's rhythmic idiom. This chapter primarily addresses rhythmic organization rather than performance practice (aside from a discussion of pulse and meter toward the end of this chapter), establishing a set of terms I will use in the other chapters to discuss the rhythmic organization of pibroch.

[26] Of course, I do not claim to speak for every classical musician: I offer my own way of hearing this music as a composer trained in the classical tradition.

To illustrate Cooper and Meyer's terms and concepts as they apply to pibroch, I use the tune[27] known as *Maol Donn* (or *MacCrimmon's Sweetheart*), a favorite among pipers. I have chosen a recording by Donald MacPherson, a widely admired piper who has repeatedly won all of the top pibroch competitions and is regarded by many as "the greatest piper of [the twentieth] century."[28] For the analysis in this chapter I use only the first three phrases of the theme (or 'urlar') of the tune—the main melodic part of a pibroch preceding the variations. As a basis for the following examples and analysis, I have created a precise transcription of the passage:

AUDIO SAMPLE 2 *(N.B. for all audio samples see attached CD)*

EXAMPLE 1-1 *(N.B. for all musical examples see separate booklet)*

Rhythmic Grouping and Accent

Cooper and Meyer (hereafter 'C&M') define rhythm in terms of the way the mind groups musical impulses together: "to experience rhythm is to group separate sounds into structured patterns."[29] Thus the analysis of rhythm is fundamentally about grouping, and it is primarily a matter of perception rather than of scientific proof: "Rhythmic grouping is a mental fact, not a physical one. There are no hard and fast rules for calculating what in any particular instance the grouping is. Sensitive, well-trained musicians may differ…Furthermore, grouping may at times be purposefully ambiguous…In brief, the interpretation of music—and that is what analysis should be—is an art requiring experience, understanding and sensitivity."[30] This point underlies the entire analysis that follows: nowhere do I claim absolute, verifiable certainty in my analysis of pibroch rhythm; rather, I present my own interpretation and exploration of pibroch's rhythmic idiom.

Examples 1-2 through 1-5 repeat the staff notation from Example 1-1, with analyses added to illustrate the concepts of rhythmic grouping and ambiguity that form the basis for this study, and the concepts underlying them: architectonic levels, accented versus unaccented, accent versus stress.

Architectonic Levels: How Rhythmic Groupings are Grouped

Cooper and Meyer state that most classical music—most music in general, in fact, pibroch included—is 'architectonic' in structure, where notes "become grouped into motives, motives into phrases, phrases into periods, etc." While this is "a familiar concept in the analysis of harmonic and melodic structure," it is "equally important in the analysis of rhythm and meter."[31] In our passage from *Maol Donn*, the listener can pick out phrases and motives fairly easily, thanks to regular patterns of durations and melodic shape:

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[27] The words 'tune,' 'piece,' and 'pibroch' are interchangeable. 'Pibroch' (or 'piobaireachd') can refer to the tradition as a whole or to one particular tune.
[28] *A Living Legend*, compact disc liner notes, 33.
[29] Cooper and Meyer, *The Rhythmic Structure of Music*, 1.
[30] Ibid., 9.
[31] Ibid., 2.

EXAMPLE 1-2

As the discussion of accent and rhythmic grouping will show, there is more than one way to divide the passage into motives and phrases; Example 1-2 merely shows one possible way. I have isolated what are, to me, the most immediately audible three-note motives, each with a similar rhythmic makeup (one quarter, one sixteenth, and one eighth) and a similar melodic contour. It is also easy to identify the phrases; the first phrase repeats almost verbatim except that an added B extends it by one note. The final phrase leaves out the initial E-A of the first, but then continues in a similar manner with the same two three-note motives from the first first phrase (0a/1b and 0b/1c), but finally ends differently, landing on the B. In the discussion of rhythmic ambiguity below, we will see that the phrase boundary between 1' and 0 could be moved back one note, so that the "extension" B could be heard as the beginning of phrase 0; this interpretation will be important in the discussion of rhythmic ambiguity below, and in our analysis of the passage from the 'insider' perspective in the next section. Example 1-2 raises another interesting point. Looking at the phrase structure, which can be heard easily due to the almost verbatim repetition of phrase A, one has the sense that each phrase is either being cut short, or elongated slightly from some standard length. The fourth C-sharp in the passage can be heard as the beginning of a new beginning-accented motive that is cut short by two notes.

C&M distinguish between three architectonic levels of rhythmic grouping: *Primary*: "the lowest level on which a complete rhythmic group is realized." In *Maol Donn* this is equivalent to the motivic division of the phrase: each motive shown in the example is a primary rhythmic group. *Subprimary*: "smaller note values which form a subsidiary, partial rhythmic motive." This level of analysis will not prove to be overly important in pibroch; however the subprimary level in this passage will be shown in the next example following the discussion of rhythmic grouping ('inferior' levels refer to more than one subprimary level; we will usually not encounter more than one in pibroch). *Superior*: when primary groups "are themselves organized into longer, compound patterns."[32] Before we identify these architectonic levels in the passage, a discussion of the internal construction of rhythmic groupings will be helpful.

Accent: Internal Construction of Rhythmic Groups

Cooper and Meyer's definition of the way the ear groups notes into rhythms is simple: one rhythmic grouping consists of one accented note with no more than two unaccented notes preceding, following, or surrounding it.[33] According to C&M, the perception of accent is influenced by "such factors as duration, intensity, melodic contour, regularity, and so forth," but they point out that we cannot demonstrate scientifically why a beat feels accented. Their simple definition is merely that an accent is a "stimulus (in a series of stimuli) which is *marked for consciousness* in some way," that accent can therefore not exist without "unaccents;" and

[32] Ibid., 2.
[33] Ibid., 6-7. C&M demonstrate why a grouping cannot have more than one accented or more than two unaccented notes; in pibroch, by contrast, groupings frequently have more than two unaccented notes (though no more than one accent).

finally that it is therefore an intrinsically "relational concept."[34] For my analysis, as for C&M's, there is no need for scientific certainty: it is enough to identify certain notes as accented based on subjective factors such as duration and melodic position.

Example 1-3 shows my interpretation of the accented and unaccented notes in the passage with primary and subprimary rhythmic groupings.

EXAMPLE 1-3

As a means of conveniently identifying and discussing groupings, C&M borrow terms traditionally used to describe poetic feet. The three basic types of rhythmic grouping they identify, with their subtypes, are:

end-accented:	iamb: ˘ -		anapest: ˘ ˘ -
beginning-accented:	trochee: - ˘		dactyl: - ˘ ˘
middle-accented:		amphibrach: ˘ - ˘	

Though these symbols are traditionally used to indicate meter and relative duration (patterns of long and short metric units), C&M use them to indicate accentuation *only*.[35] Nonetheless, differences in duration do contribute to our perception of accent and grouping, especially in contexts—such as pibroch—where dynamic intensification and changes of orchestration do not help the ear to determine groupings. For example, C&M point out that end-accented groupings will tend to dominate whenever there is a repeated pattern of two alternating durations, short-long-short-long, etc. Think of 3/4 meter where each bar contains a half note followed by a quarter—the ear will tend to group each quarter with the half note following it in the next bar, rather than with the half note preceding it in the same bar, simply because it is closer in time to the one that follows it (despite a similar pattern of durations in Example 1-3, I hear the passage as being dominated by beginning-accented groupings—this is certainly open to debate).[36]

Stress versus Accent

Cooper and Meyer draw an important distinction between accent and stress: "accent must not be confused with stress [which,] as used in this book, means the dynamic intensification of a beat, whether accented or unaccented. Thus a stress, no matter how forceful, placed on a weak beat will not make that beat accented."[37] On instruments such as the organ or the bagpipes where the mouth and breath have no direct contact with the sound-producing pipe, the performer cannot stress a particular note via 'dynamic intensification' (the same is true, for different reasons, of some other instruments such as the harpsichord). However, because the organ can break the sound momentarily, it can approximate the effect of dynamic intensification through articulation—by leaving a gap just before a note to emphasize it, or through other subtle shades of timing.

Although the bagpipes cannot add stress to a note, either through dynamic intensification or by breaking the sound, a note will sound stressed if it is preceded by a cluster of 'dividing notes' (extremely short

[34] Ibid., 8.
[35] Ibid., 7. While C&M confess this is "unusual," they feel that the usefulness and clarity of these terms outweigh any problems with their theoretical underpinning.
[36] Ibid., 13.
[37] Ibid., 8.

ornamental notes produced by a flick of the finger—see text below Example 1-1 for a fuller definition). The stressed notes in the passage from *Maol Donn* resulting from such clusters notes are shown in the examples with trill marks. I have ignored single 'dividing notes' in my transcription for now, since they take up almost no perceivable time.

In contrast to many other musical traditions, the notes that receive stress in this manner are almost always predetermined in mainstream pibroch performance, both in the written sources and in the oral tradition, so that stresses are built into the music: the performer usually does not spontaneously add or leave out ornaments to bring out one rhythmic interpretation or another. The implications of this will be useful below in the discussions of meter and rhythmic grouping.[38]

Difference and Similarity of Rhythm

C&M point out that "the difference between rhythms is more important than their similarity."[39] This is an important general consideration to keep in mind throughout the analysis. A brief example shows why I bother to mention it at this point: in Example 1-4, little of value can be gained by simply observing an unbroken series of dactyls or anapests marching across the page (or past the ear). The interest begins when something different and unexpected happens. In pibroch, such departures lead to a central aspect of this music from a non-pibroch perspective: rhythmic ambiguity.

Rhythmic Ambiguity

We now return to Cooper and Meyer's observation that "rhythmic grouping is a mental fact, not a physical one…sensitive, well-trained musicians may differ…grouping may at times be purposefully ambiguous."[40] Though we have not yet begun to explore the intentions of the performers and composers, it is certain that different interpretations of the same material can easily arise, and that rhythmic ambiguity is an important part of the listener's experience of pibroch. C&M describe two different types of ambiguity (though they don't contrast them explicitly): the first results from uncertainty of grouping, where all interpretations agree on which notes are accented or unaccented); the second results from uncertainty about whether a note is accented or not.

Pivots: Dominant versus Latent Groupings

To discuss the first type of rhythmic ambiguity, we can begin by defining rhythmic groupings in terms of

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[38] In Western classical scores stresses are also predetermined, in the sense that the composer writes a tenuto mark or other articulation marking over certain notes; however, since most instruments can apply stress through dynamics or orchestration, the degree of stress is at the discretion of the performers, who can also choose to leave out written stresses, or stress other notes. By contrast, on the bagpipes grace note clusters always have the same volume relative to the notes around them. The only possible variation in their sound would be in the realm of duration. On the whole, however, there is much less individual expressive freedom of stress on the bagpipes than on most other instruments.
[39] Cooper and Meyer, 28.
[40] Ibid., 9.

individual unaccented notes; in other words, if every rhythmic grouping has one accented note, we can define grouping in terms of the way we perceive the unaccented notes: are they grouped with the previous accent or the following accent? C&M call this type of unaccented note a *pivot*—a note where two adjacent interpretations of a particular accent pattern overlap.[41] Usually, the ear instinctively prefers one interpretation to another, attaching a pivot either to the accent that follows it or to the one that precedes it (with consistency between repetitions); this leads to the perception of the music's *dominant* groupings.[42] If the listener deliberately tries to hear alternate ways of grouping pivots with accents, or if something in the music occurs to cause the interpretation to change, *latent* groupings will become more audible.

Ambiguity of grouping occurs when the music does not clarify which of the possible rhythmic groupings are to be heard as dominant. This can result from a situation in which a previously latent grouping becomes emphasized and threatens the dominant grouping, or it can simply result from a situation in which none of the possible groupings are dominant. In the previous examples, I instinctively heard beginning-accented trochees and dactyls rather than end-accented groupings, and so in my interpretation the dominant groupings are beginning-accented.

Example 1-4 shows the end-accented, latent groupings that coexist with the dominant ones as a result of the pivot notes (also shown).

EXAMPLE 1-4

Choosing between dominant and latent groupings is not always simple. In much of the classical repertory, especially in the written scores C&M analyze (by Beethoven, Brahms, Debussy, and others), it is not difficult to identify which grouping the composer intends to be dominant: notational devices such as bar lines and beaming usually show upbeats, downbeats, and other accentual indications (recalling that 'accent marks' in scores show stress, not accent as C&M define it). The performer or listener may perceive a composition differently than the composer intends, but most of the time the perceptions of composer, performer, and listener align with each other in this regard. In pibroch, there is much less uniformity of perception among performers and listeners—in part because the composers were operating in an oral tradition and the existing scores are all second hand (or third, or twentieth). For the listener, it is often difficult to tell which grouping dominates, so rhythmic ambiguity is an important factor in listening to pibroch (especially thanks to the two acoustic properties of the bagpipes mentioned above—lack of dynamic stress, lack of break in the sound).[43]

As Example 1-4 shows, our passage from *Maol Donn* contains considerable ambiguity between rhythmic groups. On closer inspection, my initial designation of dominant and latent groupings begins to break down: in fact, the passage can be heard either as a series of end-accented (iambic and anapestic) groupings or as a series of beginning-accented (trochaic and dactylic) groupings (to encourage the ear to hear

[41] Cooper and Meyer, 23, 27, 62.
[42] Ibid., 13.
[43] As we will see in Chapter 2, the concept and perception of ambiguity is not an explicit part of the way many pipers conceptualize pibroch. But it will return as an important way of hearing pibroch in the composer's perspective offered in the latter half of Chapter 4.

it one way or the other, one could imagine a short rest after the second and fifth notes for trochaic grouping, and after the third and sixth notes for iambic, and so on). The beginning-accented groupings tend to dominate since, as Meyer and Cooper point out, once a pattern is established the ear continues to hear it even in the face of temporary disruptions;[44] since the placement and duration of the initial E make it accented, the subsequent music seems to give similar prominence to the C-sharp, the F, and so on. This supports my initial instinctive interpretation of the passage. However, as pointed out above, large differences between alternating durations tends to favor end-accented interpretation. By the second or third grouping, the end-accented (anapestic) hearing begins to threaten the dominance of the beginning-accented (dactylic) one. The 'takeover' of the anapests is confirmed by the fourth C-sharp in the passage, which fits the anapestic pattern but not the dactylic one. The arrival of the E sounds too soon, as if it has rudely reasserted the beginning-accented groupings of the opening. This sudden return to the grouping that dominated the opening contributes to a clear and immediate sense that the music is repeating material. These end- and beginning-accented ways of hearing the passage are continually striving for dominance throughout the passage. The final B in the passage might sound as though it begins another dactyl; but the ear instead favors an end-accented interpretation, for two reasons: first, the B is the longest note in the whole passage, and it receives the heaviest stress (the most extended preceding ornament cluster); second, the subsequent E which begins a repetition of the initial material (not shown) sounds accented. As a result, the passage arguably ends with an end-accented anapest, whereas it began with a beginning-accented trochee.

Uncertainty of Accent and Inverted Trochees

The second type of rhythmic ambiguity results from uncertainty whether a note is accented or not. This occurs less frequently than the first type (uncertainty of grouping), but its consequences are greater for the listener.

EXAMPLE 1-5

The B marked 'ambiguous note' in Example 1-5 appeared in the previous examples as an unaccented upbeat to the following C-sharp, which begins phrase 0. However, the ear may be tempted to hear this differently: because the repetition of phrase 1, beginning on the third E of the passage, is so precise, the ear naturally expects this repetition to be exact throughout. The fourth C-sharp in the passage was the last note of phrase 1, with the repetition being signaled by the following E; we therefore also expect the C-sharp in the corresponding position in the repetition of the phrase (the seventh C-sharp) to again be the last note the phrase, and whatever follows it to be the beginning of the next. In place of an E, the B marked 'ambiguous' follows the C-sharp the second time, landing precisely where the ear expects the next phrase to begin. Whereas I analyzed the B as an 'extension' of phrase 1' in Example 1-2, this way of hearing the durations might cause it to sound like the beginning of phrase 0. In a piece for orchestra or piano, for example, this ambiguity could be clarified somewhat by stressing the B through dynamic change (playing louder) or

[44] Cooper and Meyer, 13.

orchestration (adding more instruments on that note). Or, the previous interpretation, in which the B is an extension, with the final phrase beginning on the following C-sharp, could be emphasized through similar means. This is in fact what happens in this passage: the trill on the C-sharp encourages our initial interpretation.

Nevertheless, the placement of the B, described above, is forceful enough to audibly change the pattern of accents in the final phrase of the passage, as shown in Example 1-5: the B can be heard as an accent, leading to a series of trochees and dactyls in which the initial accented note is shorter than the unaccented notes that follow it. This situation, described by C&M as an inverted "trochee," is commonly perceived, in music generally, to have a distinctive and memorable rhythmic identity; as C&M point out, this type of rhythm is "sometimes referred to as 'Scotch snaps.'"[45] Perhaps not coincidentally, we will see that inverted trochees are common in pibroch, and this general, repertory-wide trend is an argument for hearing our ambiguous B as the first note of the third phrase. In this way of hearing the accent pattern, the inverted trochees continue to the end, except for a possible latent iamb leading into the final B, as shown in Example 1-5.

The way we interpret this B—either as the end of phrase 1' or the beginning of phrase 0—obviously affects our analysis of the phrases. The alternate phrase structure is shown in Example 1-5. As a result, the way we interpret this B has much larger consequences for the phrase structure of this piece: as we will see in Chapter 3, the harmonic (note-against-drone) identity of a phrase can sometimes be determined by one important note—frequently the beginning or ending note of a phrase. Since phrase 0 ends clearly on the final B, thus giving it its 'zero' designation, the 'ambiguous' B may not be ultimately decisive about the sonority of the phrase; however, the decision whether to hear the B or the C-sharp as the beginning of phrase 0 certainly has an important effect on our hearing of the sonority of the phrase. There is no need to decide at this point which interpretation to take; in fact, as I will argue in Chapter 4, the interest for the listener may lie partly in the presence of such ambiguity.

Problems of Pulse: Meter versus Rhythm

Cooper and Meyer identify the "three basic modes of temporal organization" as rhythm, meter, and pulse. *Pulse* in their definition is "a series of regularly recurring, precisely equivalent stimuli."[46] A pulse, "once

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[45] Ibid., 29.

[46] Ibid., 3. This definition requires careful qualification. C&M's analysis of rhythmic organization relies heavily on the scores they cite, and they avoid in-depth discussion of the complex issues of rhythmic interpretation that arise when a performer transforms a score into sounding music. Their conception of performance practice in classical music (the way written rhythms become manifest in sound through performance) seems to conflate the 'precisely equivalent' pulses implied by the score with the way the music actually sounds, implying that performed pulses are also equivalent. But an exact metronomic pulse is relatively rare in performance: musicians often use rubato, inégale treatment of eighth notes, or other alterations in timing that give the music a certain character—for example, slight departures from metronomic regularity make the Viennese waltz sound like the Viennese waltz. The departure from a strict pulse is even greater in *recitativo* and *parlando* styles.

established, tends to be continued in the mind and musculature of the listener, even though the sound has stopped." Pulses are grouped into beats, which are grouped into *meters*. Because C&M define pulses as 'precisely equivalent,' they define meter as "the measurement of the number of pulses between more or less regularly recurring accents…there can be no meter without an underlying pulse."[47] The relationship between pulse and meter thus parallels the relationship between accent and rhythmic grouping: as accents are "marked for consciousness" within a rhythm, beats are particular pulses that the listener 'marks for consciousness' within a meter.

For C&M, meter and rhythm are distinct concepts that can operate independently of one another: "rhythm can exist without there being a regular meter, as it does in the case of Gregorian chant or *recitativo secco*…indeed, rhythm is at least theoretically independent of pulse." Although a given meter may lend itself to particular kinds of rhythmic groupings (for example the iambic tendency of a 3/4 meter of alternating half and quarter notes mentioned earlier), those groupings arise from the way the notes interact within the meter, but are not intrinsic to meter itself. If you remove the regular pulse implied by the meter, the grouping and accentual pattern remains. The relationship between rhythm and meter is analogous to the distinction between rhythmic organization and performance practice: meter (as C&M define it) is bound up with pulse, which I define here as a performance practice issue, while rhythmic groupings exist whether the performer treats pulses with 'precisely equivalent' durations or in a freer, irregular manner.[48] Our excerpt from *Maol Donn* demonstrates that rhythmic groupings can be discerned despite the lack of the regular, metronomically precise ratios between durations C&M associate with beats and meters: in Example 1-4 above, a regular pattern of end-accented groupings can be observed, despite the fact that no two of them contain precisely the same combination of durations (see Example 1-1 for exact durations).

Apart from problems of precise-versus-free performance practice, scores are relatively unambiguous when it comes to rhythmic organization. Time signatures, bar lines, and note durations in the score provide the performer with an authoritative conceptual map, or blueprint, of the accents and groupings the composer intends (for example, if a note is placed on the downbeat of a bar, that usually shows that the composer intends it to be an accent).[49] This fact, and the distinction between rhythm (as pure grouping) and meter (as the result of the precise pulse implied by notation) will be important in Chapters 2 and 3 when we examine

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Nevertheless, I agree with C&M that a 'precisely equivalent' pulse is at least conceptually present as a cognitive norm in classical music to the extent that the tradition relies on written notation, since the notation, which implies a regular pulse, carries such authority. In any case, C&M are well aware that classical music includes performance traditions with every possible treatment of pulse, from the most free to the most metronomically precise. Despite C&M's seeming conflation of written and performed rhythms, their focus on the more regular-pulsed end of the performance spectrum is deliberate, and I accept it here as a general conceptual characteristic of the Western classical tradition.

[47] Ibid., 4.

[48] On the other side of the same coin, C&M spend most of their book demonstrating that many different rhythmic groupings can exist within a single meter; for example, in the 3/4 example just mentioned, a reversal of the half and quarter note, putting the latter on the downbeat of each bar, would lead to an inverted trochee (scotch snap) rather than an iambic grouping. C&M sum this up by pointing out that, since rhythmic groupings "can be found in various different meters," that therefore "they are not themselves the same as meters" (C&M, 7).

[49] Of course, there may be many levels of rhythmic complexity beyond what one sees on the page, as C&M demonstrate—but most often the accents and groupings most immediately evident in the score are regarded as primary.

pibroch scores. As we will see, many pibroch scores must be understood with a completely flexible, and often irregular pulse rather than the 'precisely equivalent' pulse C&M suggest.[50] And the 'true' intentions of the music's creators are much more elusive in pibroch than in the classical tradition.

Having examined the music from the perspective of a classical musician unfamiliar with it, and having defined important concepts and terms, it is time to move deeper into the music, hearing it with the ears of those who perform, teach, and research it.

[50] This problem underlies a debate between mainstream and revisionist views we will explore at length in Chapters 2 and 3: because early pibroch scores depart so dramatically from the performed rhythms passed down by the oral tradition, mainstream pipers often assume the early transcribers must have simply been incompetent; the revisionists maintain that the conceptual maps of grouping and accent these scores communicate are accurate guides to the way early pipers understood pibroch's rhythmic organization, and that to understand them we must approach them with the same free understanding of performed pulses those early pipers themselves had.

Chapter Two: Mainstream Pibroch

> Ach, man, everybody knows that when you leave the face of the note white it goes slow and 'Tiamhaidh, Tiamhaidh' [*'sheevy*, *sheevy,'* i.e. 'lovely'], and when you blacken her face she goes twice as fast, and when you tie her feet she goes twice as fast again, and the more you blacken her face and tie her feet the faster she goes, until she would leave Bran' himself [a swift deer-hound] behind her!
>
> ~ Pipe Major Niall Matheson (c.1850s)

> When Bob Nicol took you through a tune, he was so clear on it…he would often say, "I've given you the bones of the tune, now you put the flesh on it."
>
> ~ Donald Lindsay (from *The Voice*, 1999)

We now turn to the mainstream piper's perspective: this chapter explores the ways in which those who perform and teach this music understand its rhythm. Whereas Chapter 1 focused on rhythmic organization with only brief mention of performance practice, this chapter explores both parameters, clarifying the distinctions between them in pibroch. This separation is more difficult in pibroch than it is in classical music. In Cooper and Meyer's conception of the classical tradition—in which the music of composers like Beethoven, Brahms, and Debussy is the main object of analysis—the line between rhythmic organization and performance practice is relatively easy to draw: composers' scores provide an authoritative guide to the music's rhythmic organization while performance practice assumes that the performer will (almost always) apply regular durations to the pulse in the notation.[51] By contrast, pibroch's history of blended oral and written transmission makes it more difficult to identify and distinguish either the intended rhythmic organization or the performance practice through which rhythmic conceptual maps come to life.

It is not only difficult to separate rhythmic organization from performance practice in pibroch: identifying a consistent way of understanding each in its own right can also be challenging. To identify pibroch's rhythmic organization the way pipers understand it, we must rely on a motley collection of written scores, performers' and teachers' written and spoken accounts, scholars' writings, and, where possible, internal musical evidence. Among these sources, there is almost never a single, widely agreed-upon way of understanding either the repertory in general, or a particular tune. Instead, the analyst must simply choose what seems to be the most musical and most likely organization in each case, basing the choice on a combination of specific evidence for a particular tune and common trends and patterns across the repertory.

Likewise, there is no universal way in which performers understand pibroch's performance practice. Most pipers seem to agree that pibroch is 'non-mensural,' or 'unmetered'—i.e. that there is an irregular timing between accents. Whereas C&M's definition of rhythm assumes pulses are intrinsically equivalent, in pibroch

[51] Notwithstanding the difficulty of interpreting scores the further back one goes in music history.

there is not even an implication of regularity in the pulse.[52] Pibroch has, as C&M put it, "rhythm without meter."[53] Therefore C&M's distinction between rhythm and meter, described in Chapter 1, becomes crucial to the understanding of pibroch rhythm I will explore here. If rhythm can be independent of pulse, then it is also independent of meter, which depends on pulse. A series of in-depth examples will demonstrate that rhythm in pibroch, defined as groupings of accented and unaccented notes, operates outside C&M's definition of meter. Despite the irregularity of pulse in pibroch, however, this chapter will also show the peculiar inflexibility of mainstream rhythmic performance practice.

This chapter presents the important aspects of the 'mainstream' understanding of pibroch. Chapter 3 presents some of the important new evidence about pibroch's early composers that the revisionist scholars have introduced. In the course of the two chapters, the distinction between pibroch's performance practice and its rhythmic organization will become more nuanced and, I hope, more clear. Both chapters will also demonstrate the fact that a study of rhythm includes not only the surface level of note-to-note durations, but also longer durations at higher architectonic levels, encompassing pibroch's larger formal structures.

Building an Analytical Language: Extended Musical Examples

Developing the terminology and concepts from Chapter 1, the following examples will allow us to define more of the terms we will need to create the definition of pibroch rhythm that appears in Chapter 4. Before digging into the examples, a brief summary of terms will help to streamline the discussion.

Pipers use 'beat' and 'pulse' to refer to a musical impulse which is set apart in some way from the impulses surrounding it. Pipers often use the term 'stress' to refer to the same kind of specially marked musical impulse. Thus 'pulse,' 'beat,' and 'stress' in pibroch all refer to the same phenomenon which C&M call 'accent.' For the sake of consistency, I use *accent* for all three terms. From the smallest to largest architectonic levels: *grace notes* form subprimary groupings with *theme notes*. Groups of unaccented theme notes precede or follow one accented theme note, or *primary accent*. Each group consisting of one accent with its attendant unaccented theme notes make up a primary rhythmic grouping, or *primary grouping*. Two primary groupings make up one *phrase*. Depending on a piper's analytical stance, phrases are grouped into either two or three larger groups, which are called either lines or, as in the conception of rhythmic organization I will argue for, *quarters* (there are other less common divisions). Different ways of grouping the sixteen primary groupings represent important distinctions between mainstream and revisionist views.

Although the term 'scansion' will not be a central part of my analysis, it is useful to note that the word encapsulates pipers' conception of good, idiomatic pibroch rhythmic interpretation. Robert Brown, a respected twentieth-century teacher of pibroch, gives a sense of the importance of this concept in a 1972 interview, saying that that the student should aim "to get the proper lights and shades, or scansion of the bars

[52] Though some pipers perceive a regular pulse in modern playing (see Chapter 3).
[53] Cooper and Meyer, 4.

and phrases with which one can make a tune live [pronounced as the verb]."[54] The same concept is also sometimes referred to as *rubato*[55] or *timing*. Piper and scholar Barnaby Brown (no relation to Robert Brown) offers another definition of scansion: "what pipers call scansion—the irregular distance between beats essential to a musical, stylistic performance."[56] This definition relies on a different understanding of the word 'beat' than the one described by C&M, and so I replace 'beat' with 'accent;' using my terminology, Barnaby Brown's definition might say that for pipers, scansion is 'the irregular durations between accents.'

The Company's Lament

When I was first learning to play pibroch, my teacher recommended an introductory book/compact disc tutor published by the College of Piping, one of the main piping organizations in Scotland. In the introduction to the tutor booklet, Seumas MacNeill, a prominent figure in twentieth century pibroch, discusses the learning process: "we must learn to hear the song in each piece…of course expression in music is a very personal matter, and what pleases one need not necessarily sound so wonderful to another. Later on, when you have become a really fine piobaireachd[57] player, you will be able to make your own interpretation in the presentation of the tune. But for a long time you are going to have to accept somebody else's interpretations of the tunes you are learning, until the feeling for piobaireachd has entered your soul."[58] MacNeill's advice provides a very succinct description of the way pipers understand the difference between pibroch's performance practice (as I have defined it)—that is, "somebody else's interpretations"—and the performer's individual interpretation, which can only come about after a true "feeling for piobaireachd has entered your soul."

The booklet provides a score for the first tune it teaches, *The Company's Lament*, commenting, "You will notice that this tune is written without any bar lines, which makes it look at first just a bit peculiar. Piobaireachd however is what is called 'non-mensural' music, which means that it is not played with a regular rhythmic beat such as we use in the light music."[59] Example 2-1 shows the notation of the tune as it appears on the same page of the tutor.

AUDIO SAMPLE 3

EXAMPLE 2-1

The example also shows the sung teaching method known as *canntaireachd*[60] in syllables written below the

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[54] *Masters of Piobaireachd*, vol. 3, track 1 (transcription of spoken word).
[55] As we will see, the word 'rubato' in its classical sense—shortening and lengthening against a regular pulse—does not quite apply to pibroch in the same way, since there is usually no regular pulse to begin with.
[56] In an e-mail message to R. McClellan, 5 May 2006.
[57] Many pipers to prefer this spelling to 'pibroch'—there is no rule about which spelling to use.
[58] MacNeill. *Tutor for the Highland Bagpipe,* 4.
[59] Ibid., 8. "Light music" refers to *ceol beag*—the marches, airs, reels and other tunes we most often hear in the bagpipes. Pipers draw a sharp distinction between *ceol beag* and *ceol mor*, the 'great music' (pibroch).
[60] A Gaelic word related to 'chanting,' approximately pronounced 'kan-ter-och' (flipping the 'r').

staff. Canntaireachd is described in the tutor booklet as a "system of notation."[61]

Each form of 'notation,' sung and written, communicates the tutor's intentions for performance practice—that is, "somebody else's interpretations" of the rhythm. The durations of the written notes gives approximate durations, and the sung version on the recording gives them precisely—all that's left is for the student to aurally memorize the exact durations, using the written score as a memory aid. By contrast, the staff notation and the recording offer only incomplete information about rhythmic organization. Following the passage quoted above, the booklet goes on to say, "what we have done here is to separate the phrases of the music by leaving gaps between them. In this way we are not tied to having equal durations of music in each phrase, so that, generally speaking, we can give each note the value it should have."[62] In other words, the way the notes are spaced on the staff shows the intended rhythmic groupings, but the lack of time signature leaves us without information about accentual patterns (time signatures and bar lines can show rhythm, even in a meter-less, irregularly-pulsed context—see Chapter 1); instead, each note simply has a particular duration compared to the others. Despite the incomplete information, this example shows one of the terms that will form a basic building block for my definition of rhythm: by the word 'phrase,' the author of the tutor refers to what I call, following C&M, a *primary grouping*.

EXAMPLE 2-2

Each of the four primary groupings (which the tutor calls 'phrases') in Example 2-2, separated by spaces, is dominated by two half notes. As the writer of the tutor book points out, the notes within each of these primary groupings do not add up to "equal durations of music" and thus cannot be confined to bars of regular measurement; however, the example essentially consists of four pairs of rhythmic groupings, each with two prominent notes (prominent due to their longer durations). Each of these half notes is what I call a *theme note*, while the shorter intermediary notes, whether they are written as a sixteenth or as one of a cluster of grace notes, and whether they relate to a theme note as an anacrusis or an echo, I call a *grace note*.[63] Each pair of half-note-value theme notes, with their attendant grace notes, makes up one primary grouping; but without further evidence there is no way to know which theme note of each pair acts as the more important accent ('stress' in piping terminology), or what I will call the *primary accent*. In any case, while we cannot apply C&M's definition of meter to the passage, we can at least begin to organize it into rhythmic groupings, as shown in Example 2-2.

Beyond the rhythms of each primary grouping, my analysis of the rhythmic organization of *The Company's Lament* in Example 2-2 gives us an initial glimpse into one of the ways pipers conceptualize pibroch

[61] Ibid., 8. I will not discuss canntaireachd at length, but the brief description in Example 2-1 is needed because canntaireachd is central to the insider's understanding of pibroch.
[62] Ibid., 8.
[63] My definition of *grace note* has nothing to do with the way a note is written—it is a rhythmic concept that refers to the note's minor role within the rhythm; *grace notes* by this definition appear in pibroch scores in a number of ways—as written grace notes or clusters of them, as sixteenth notes, eighths, or even quarters. As mentioned in the text attached to Example 1-1, the extremely short notes, often written as grace notes, that appear individually or in clusters as ornaments, are called 'dividing notes' by pipers. I do not include these in my analysis of rhythm because they take up almost no perceivable time—only when they are grouped as a cluster do they take up noticeable rhythmic duration.

at larger architectonic levels. Example 2-2 copies only the first line of *The Company's Lament,* which is equivalent to the first quarter the theme, so there are three more quarters not shown. The example therefore makes up four primary groupings, and each of the following three quarters (not shown) has the same construction; so the whole theme of the tune contains a total of sixteen primary groupings divided into four quarters of four groupings each. This foursquare division reflects the way pipers conceptualize a large number of tunes in the repertory; many of the printed scores and several influential analysts write it as 4:,4,4—with the colon standing in for a repeat sign.[64] An even more common construction in mainstream analysis is to divide the sixteen primary groupings into three lines of 6, 6, and 4, primary groupings, as we will see in *Maol Donn* below.

The Big Spree

This tune offers a concrete demonstration of three basic aspects of mainstream pibroch's performance practice. First, for each tune there is a codified, normative performance practice that is very similar between different players—as MacNeill says, 'someone else's interpretation.' Second, within that performance practice there is a narrow range of stylistic difference of interpretation that different teachers will promote—and within that, a narrow range of individual interpretation. Third, since performance practice is taught orally, there is no written score that accurately reflects the accepted performance practice for a given tune with anything approaching the accuracy a classically trained musician might expect.

AUDIO SAMPLES 4, 5, 6, 7

EXAMPLE 2-3a-d

Example 2-3 shows transcriptions of performances of the first phrase of *The Big Spree*, by four pipers. Donald MacPherson (2-3a) is familiar from Chapter 1; the recording was made in 2002.[65] William McCallum (2-3b) is also a top player and winner of many important competitions; the recording was made during a concert performance in 1999.[66] Robert Nicol (2-3c) is a widely admired pibroch teacher whose lessons and demonstrations, along with those of another well-known teacher Robert Brown, are now commercially available on a multi-volume CD set; the recording was made around 1960.[67] Donald MacLeod (2-3d) was also one of the most respected teachers and performers of the twentieth century; the recording is from a teaching session released as part of a popular 21-volume CD series consisting of MacLeod's lessons on nearly every well-known tune.[68]

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[64] See *The Kilberry Book of Ceol Mor*, Haddow, and many other sources.
[65] Appears on *A Living Legend*, an album of MacPherson's performances available from Siubhal.com.
[66] Appears on *Ceòl na Pìoba – Pìob Mhòr*, a compact disc release of a 1999 Edinburgh recital of pibroch.
[67] Appears on *Masters of Piobaireachd, vol. 6, track 1.*
[68] Appears on *The Classic Collection of Piobaireachd Tutorials.* MacLeod is also noted as one of the twentieth century's greatest composers of pibroch (Donaldson, *Pipers*, 129); many pipers have continued to compose new pibrochs since the early nineteenth century, despite the widespread view that the art of composing new pibrochs had passed its height by the late eighteenth century. The Piobaireachd Society published a book of tunes composed between 1930 and 1980, *Commun na Piobaireachd*, which includes several of MacLeod's tunes. He also published his own collection of his compositions.

Example 2-3 shows that the four performers all hear the tune in a similar way, with minor differences in timing of certain notes, highlighted by boxes.[69] This seems to confirm what Robert Brown, a well-regarded teacher of the mid twentieth century, said about performance practice in the pibroch tradition:

> The first point I would like to emphasize is that all these old [nineteenth-century] players—John MacDonald [Brown's influential teacher] many times assured me—played exactly the same; their technique was exact in every way, the only difference being an odd note or phrase here and there. But—and this is the important point—their tempo or speed and portrayal of the tunes were exactly alike. Of course their playing all came from one source and they were taught by the singing or canntaireachd method.[70]

Though the 'one source' he refers to is almost certainly an oral one (presumably the MacCrimmons of the seventeenth century, or the influential nineteenth-century teacher Calum Piobaire, who taught Brown's teacher John MacDonald), I have created a written version of the passage representing the imagined version such a 'source' might have passed down. Averaging the four versions of Example 2-3, Example 2-4 offers an abstracted 'normative' performance practice for this passage.

EXAMPLE 2-4

Within this normative performance practice, I have indicated notes where one piper's interpretation differs from the others. Often, such discrepancies are the result of varying opinions, taught by particular teachers, between pipers about the durations of individual notes.[71] In MacLeod's brief spoken comment in Audio Sample 7 (Example 2-3d)—"I elongate the E and shorten the first parent note, low A"[72]—is an example of the kind of comment teachers will frequently make, emphasizing an interpretation one teacher may promote over another. In this case it is unclear exactly what MacLeod is contrasting his 'elongation' of the E against—especially since his stated preferences do not distinguish those notes from the other three interpretations I have presented. It may be the notated durations in the score he is teaching from, or the 'settings' of other teachers. Without knowing the teaching styles of several teachers in depth, it would be difficult to separate individual differences that result from varying strands of tuition from those that result from individual interpretation of the kind which can take place, according to Seumas MacNeill, when pibroch 'enters your soul.' Presumably, in the performances of virtuosos like those heard here, there would be some mixture of the two.

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[69] Cooke argues that practice chanter renditions and, presumably, canntaireachd versions as well (though he does not say so explicitly), are not an accurate guide to intended performance practice, since the lack of drones and the need to breathe will change the way a piper will render a tune ("Problems of Notating Pibroch," 44); more analysis would be required to assess his point fully, but the similarity of timing between MacLeod's and MacPherson's renditions shown in Example 2-3 suggests that singing probably gives a good sense of the intended performed durations (and thus practice chanter renditions as well); if it did not, how could pipers rely so heavily on them for tuition?

[70] *Masters of Piobaireachd*, vol. 3, track CHECK (transcription of spoken word).

[71] Although Donaldson cautions against considering there to be clearly defined 'schools' of interpretation, as many pipers have suggested over the years (*The Highland Pipe*, 211).

[72] MacLeod uses the term "parent note" to refer to the first low A in the passage. I have not heard this term elsewhere, (it is either his own invention, or I have simply not encountered it), but it suggests that MacLeod considers the A to have more importance while the E leads into the A. I believe this is the reason he clarifies that he 'elongates' the E and 'shortens' the low A, as though one might expect an important note to be longer than a less important note. This is not uncommon: the E which begins many tunes, and which is often notated as a grace note, is often played longer than the note which follows it. As we will see in Chapter 3, this creates problems in the rhythmic organization of the line, since the E sounds more structurally important than it actually is.

The four renditions are similar enough that a Western classically trained musician might reasonably assume that all four were playing off a score resembling Example 2-4. With such a score, we could then imagine that each performer would be applying a slightly different interpretation to it. Each performer's small departures from this imagined score would not sound strange to a Western musician; the result might be analogous to the differences of tempo and rubato between two keyboardists playing the same Bach invention (other rhythmic performance practices within the classical tradition, such as the style associated with Chopin's music, would perhaps have more durational deviation from the notation).

As Robert Brown argues, the high degree of similarity between different performers is the result of an oral tradition that preserves subtle shades of timing with remarkable accuracy. This oral tradition represents a kind of 'aural score' of the music that can be compared with the written scores of European classical music: both serve to transmit a particular, fixed rendition of a piece of music from teacher to student. A survey of all the available scores for pibroch shows that the oral tradition indeed plays a crucial role, since no accurate score—like the one an observer might imagine to be guiding these performers—actually exists. Comparing my abstracted 'normative' version of *The Big Spree* (Example 2-4) with the pibroch score that has been most widely used since the 1940s demonstrates the third important point *The Big Spree* helps to demonstrate: across the repertory there is a sharp incongruity of rhythm between the most widely used pibroch scores and actual performance.

The Kilberry Book of Ceol Mor, first published in 1948, is a collection of over one hundred of the best-known pibrochs in the repertory. Its author, Archibald Campbell of Kilberry, based his book on the notation style of earlier scores created by the Piobaireachd Society beginning in the early 1900s. This score has been the standard text since its publication (it was reprinted in 2002, and it was the score I first learned from). On my visit to the Isle of South Uist (in the Outer Hebrides) in 2006 to study pibroch, my Gaelic-speaking tutor, Calum Beaton, taught from this score. The author of the *Kilberry Book* does not claim to represent the music in the same way a written score might normally be understood in the European tradition: His score "makes no pretence to be scientifically accurate, or even intelligible to the non-piper. Call it pipers' jargon, and the writer will not complain. His [the writer's] desire is to make the music as clear as possible to the piobaireachd player, and not to instruct beginners."[73]

EXAMPLE 2-5

Comparing Example 2-4 with the *Kilberry Book*'s rendition of the same passage—while listening to Audio Samples 4, 5, 6 or 7—demonstrates that the notated rhythms of the written scores most pipers use have only a general relationship with durations as they are actually performed.

Black Donald's March

In my analysis of *The Big Spree*, we saw that a given tune follows a fairly uniform performance practice, and that this performance practice does not reflect what is actually written down in most pibroch scores. Given

[73] Campbell, introduction to *The Kilberry Book of Ceol Mor*, 17.

this situation, how can we determine the way a performer understands a tune's rhythmic organization? For some tunes, the rhythmic organization is relatively clear, and most performers will agree on a certain interpretation. In many others, however, there is a surprising lack of agreement between different people, and between different written sources, about the rhythmic organization. A comparison of two explanations of the tune *Black Donald's March*—one written in 1760 and one from a recorded teaching session from the twentieth century—and two different scores, offers a fascinating illustration of this kind of problem.

I begin with Joseph MacDonald's treatise on pipe music of 1760, written during the author's journey to India in a cramped ship's cabin when he was 21. Joseph subsequently died in Calcutta, but his manuscript was returned to his brother Patrick in Scotland, who published it many years later. Joseph was an accomplished performer on several instruments. Raised in a musical family deep in the Highlands, he was intimately familiar with Gaelic music traditions; at the same time, he received training in Edinburgh in the mainstream European art music tradition of the period, by Italian musicians teaching in Scotland.[74] His treatise, a *Compleat Theory of the Scots Highland Bagpipe,* was the first of its kind and it is still widely considered by scholars to be one of the most lucid and accurate guides to understanding pibroch as it existed in the eighteenth century. Example 2-6, copied from MacDonald's book, shows his rendition of the first two bars of *Black Donald's March*.

EXAMPLE 2-6

MacDonald writes the tune in 6/8; but the C-sharp and B on the second beat of each bar have dots that do not fit into the meter. This might seem reminiscent of the effort in the Piobaireachd Tutor (above) to avoid the need to correctly add note values within a bar. But MacDonald *does* place the music within bar lines, and even includes a time signature—so it might simply seem to reveal a poor understanding of notation. However, his way of representing the tune is not a mistake: his use of the added dot is in fact a clever way of representing the rhythmic stretching that is characteristic of pibroch. As he explains, the tune is in "a Species of Jig Time but different from others, by the Crotchet & Dote at the end of the 2nd Bar's being markt [dotted quarter with tenuto, slurred to eighth] which is peculiar to the Style of this Instrument, denoting that that Jumping force which the Dote gives to other Jigs is done away with here, & the Length plaid quite smooth & Slurred. This stroke [tenuto] over the note signifying that it must be drawn out to some Length or (could it be justly noted) the half of the Quaver taken away & added to the Crotchet. Where the Barr ends with a Crotchet & Quaver it is always playd so."[75]

In Donald MacLeod's conception of the tune, as he explains it in a recorded teaching session, we have a completely different view. Audio Sample 8 is a two-minute excerpt in which MacLeod discusses and demonstrates *Black Donald's March*:

AUDIO SAMPLE 8

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[74] Donaldson, *The Highland Pipe*, 21-24.
[75] Cannon, ed. *Joseph MacDonald's Compleat Theory of the Scots Highland Bagpipe*, 63.

> [*transcription of spoken word*:] There is a school of thought, to which I do *not* subscribe, which thinks that this tune should be played in a more or less compound rhythm [here his definition of 'compound' seems to match the conventional one, i.e. 6/8 meter]. This tune should be played, in my opinion, in 3/4 time, except for the doublings of the leamluath, taorluath, crunluath, and crunluath a mach [names of formalized variations, named after the ornaments which define them]. I have formed this opinion for two reasons: one, this is how I was taught to play the tune; and two, to play it in compound rhythm is to depart entirely from the Gaelic idiom in which the tune was composed. In the ground [theme], and variation one or 'thumb variation' of the ground, I do not consider the grips [a cluster of 'dividing notes,' making up a type of ornament, and corresponding to a note] to be a pulse. I use the grips as an 'and' movement [an anacrusis]; they are not to be cut away, but they certainly are not a pulse. A three-pulse rhythm, line one [first *quarter*] of the ground, might be: [sings]

Example 2-7 is transcription of what MacLeod seems to be describing, showing the tune in 3/4 meter.

EXAMPLE 2-7

A few points of terminology must be clarified. When MacLeod says 'pulse,' he refers to what I call a *theme note* (theme notes in pibroch always land on a pulse—there is no syncopation). In this example, MacLeod's timing of the theme notes does not fall into the 'precisely equivalent' durations Cooper and Meyer discuss, but exhibits pibroch's characteristic irregular pulse. MacLeod's 'and' note is what I call a *grace note*—that is, any intermediary note between *theme notes*.[76]

Example 2-8 shows the tune as it is written in the *Kilberry Book*, this time neither in 6/8 nor in 3/4, but in common time.

EXAMPLE 2-8

Here the first C-sharp, written as an eighth note with a trill, is equivalent to what MacLeod referred to as a 'grip' in the previous example. This is a common type of ornament, which in the *Kilberry Book* is understood as an independent note with a trill, while MacLeod considers it merely a passing gesture to the following note.

Examples 2-6 through 2-8, with the accompanying descriptions by Joseph MacDonald and Donald MacLeod, give ample demonstration of the interpretive problems that many tunes present. To point out just a few of the less obvious discrepancies: Joseph MacDonald, a Gaelic speaker raised in the heart of the old Gaelic culture before the devastation of the Highland Clearances, is often cited as a source for pibroch's 'authentic' roots in the eighteenth-century Gaelic way of life. So it might seem odd for MacLeod (also raised in a Gaelic-speaking area) to be so adamant that a 6/8 interpretation of this tune—the way Joseph MacDonald writes it—departs 'from the Gaelic idiom in which the tune was composed.' It is unclear how MacLeod arrives at his 3/4 version. Unfortunately I have not been able to identify which score he references (though I believe it was the *Kilberry Book*), but it may be that he is not referring to any particular score; as he says, that is simply the way he was taught the tune, and so the 3/4 interpretation may exist purely—or at least primarily—in the oral tradition he inherited. Nor do I know exactly how Archibald Campbell, the author of the *Kilberry Book*, arrived at his common-time interpretation.

I will not attempt to resolve these problems here or define the 'true' rhythmic organization of this tune.

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[76] My use of the term *grace note* is not related to any notational meaning—I intend it only as a cognitive category for rhythm, and the meaning here is distinct from its use to describe notes, often written smaller than others, that are decorative.

I present the example merely to demonstrate that it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine a 'true' rhythmic organization for many tunes. It also points out a fascinating aspect of pibroch's peculiar mix of oral and written traditions. Pipers like MacLeod may carry detailed conceptions of rhythmic organization in their heads, and pass these on to their students. Meanwhile, they are often using scores that communicate a significantly different rhythmic organization— perhaps 4/4 on paper versus 3/4 in their head.[77] This kind of discrepancy does not seem to bother many pipers. The conception of what a score means and what it is used for differs from that of the Western classical tradition, where oral learning takes second place— at least in terms of authority, if not in every learning situation—to the printed score.[78]

Maol Donn

The Company's Lament, *The Big Spree*, and *Black Donald's March* showed several important aspects of pibroch as mainstream pipers perform and teach it. These tunes also demonstrated some of the terms that will be part of my definition of pibroch rhythm in Chapter 4, including *grace note, theme note, primary grouping, and primary accent*. With this background, we return to *Maol Donn*, the tune we examined in Chapter 1, to further clarify and describe pibroch's rhythmic organization and performance practice. This tune provides a good opportunity to introduce one if the first things pipers often hear about a tune they want to learn: the story behind it. Most tunes come with a wonderful mixture of history, conjecture, and myth. Often, several conflicting accounts accompany the same tune. This tune is an especially rich case:

> *Maol Donn* has had many explanations: does it refer to a sixth-century prince of Dalraida, son of King Conal II of Kintyre? Was it a 'smooth Brown Sea-shell' picked up on the shore by Ronald MacDonald of Morar? Or was is a 'Hornless Brown Cow,' lost in a bog in Benbecula? [a town on the Isle of South Uist]. *Maol Donn* could even mean 'Bare Brown Hill,' but a Hebridean song with the same melody supports the brown cow story. In the late nineteenth century, someone told the amateur pibroch scholar General Thomason that *Maol Donn* was by Clanranald's piper, composed after a fruitless search for a widow's only and much admired cow. This cow would have been her most valuable possession, a vital means of feeding her young children. The whole neighborhood joined in the search, but to no avail. Its skeleton was found in a bog, by chance, over a year later. It has also been suggested that *Maol Donn* is a corruption of the phrase *Mo Ghaol Donn*, 'My Brown-haired Sweetheart,' which has the merit of explaining part of the title *MacCrimmon's Sweetheart*. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Gaelic bards referred to the bagpipe as the *leannan*, 'beloved,' *gaol*, 'sweetheart,' or *cèile*, 'wife' of the piper. Some pipers gave their instruments more suggestive names like *òinseach*, 'foolish woman,' and *maighdean*, 'virgin,' terms perhaps inspired by the close contact of the piper's body with the bag. In the old days, laburnum wood was used to make the instrument, so both *MacCrimmon's Sweetheart* and *Maol Donn* may have been names for MacCrimmon's 'Brown Bagpipe'. The name *MacCrimmon's Sweetheart* first appeared around 1850; before that, its title in English was *A Favourite Piece*. The present English title may be part of a nineteenth-century attempt to inflate the importance of the MacCrimmon pipers and their patrons, the MacLeod's of Dunvegan [castle].[79]

We now return to Donald MacPherson's performance from Example 1-1. This tune will allow us to dig more

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[77] My own teacher, John Bradley, uses the *Kilberry Book*, and his teacher studied with Donald MacLeod. I never studied this tune with John, but I had he might have demonstrated it to me in 3/4 while we both sat over a table with Kilberry's 4/4 score in front of us.

[78] A further example of this piper's less precise relationship to printed music is that pibroch scores never contain a key signature, despite the fact that C and F are always sharped. That the bagpipe scale is in a mixolydian mode with the tonic (and drones) on A (although most pipes now sound at about B-flat since, like orchestral instruments, the pitch has come up by about a half-step since its eighteenth-century level.

[79] Brown, in liner notes to *A Living Legend*, 9-10.

deeply into the problems created by the many conflicting sources, oral and written, which confront us when trying to separate rhythmic interpretation from performance practice. I will examine three types of sources: a scholarly study of the tune, a recorded teaching session, and a range of written scores.

A Scholarly Source

I have only one recorded performance of this tune, so I cannot directly show the uniformity of performance practice among different pipers. But a 1972 study of the tune by ethnomusicologist Peter Cooke demonstrates a uniformity of performance practice between different performers that conform closely to Donald MacPherson's performance of Example 1-1, confirming that for this tune, as for *The Big Spree*, different performers have near-identical rhythmic interpretations. Cooke transcribed a recording made in 1967 by Captain John MacLellan, Director of the Army School of Piping and according to Cooke, a "well known and highly respected piper." Example 2-9 reproduces Cooke's transcription of the passage I examined in Chapter 1:

EXAMPLE 2-9

Cooke explains that he compared his transcription "with the playing of three other informants to check for idiosyncratic variations. Apart from the notes 2 and 8…(all four performances varied considerably at these points) the differences were too small to be worth indicating."[80] Cooke's purpose for the transcription was to show the phrase structure of the tune, and so small differences are not important for his study; but his comment is helpful here, since it shows the same phenomenon we observed in *The Big Spree*: there is a remarkable uniformity of performance practice, with a very narrow range of individual interpretation most apparent on certain notes.

Cooke's example also sheds light on the question of rhythmic organization. Referring to the phrase marks in his transcription (my Example 2-9), Cooke explains that "the notes have not been linked up to suggest any grouping but have been arranged to indicate the similarity of motifs and phrases as perceived by the first performer [John MacLellan] as well as by the transcriber and two other musicians (Miss Morag MacLeod and Mrs Ailie Munro—both colleagues in the musicological section of the School of Scottish Studies)."[81] The "motifs and phrases" in Cooke's example shed light on the interpretation I offered in Example 1-2, where I acted as a listener without specific knowledge of the tradition: the three highly informed observers Cooke cites offer us at least two new pieces of information: first, the initial E that to me sounded like a prominent note of the first motive does not in fact belong to any motive; and second, my guess that the two motives I marked '1d' and '1e' might actually form a single motive is confirmed here.

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[80] "Notes 2 and 8"…such discrepancies are similar to those I marked in Example 2-4 for *The Big Spree*.

[81] Cooke, "Problems of Notating Pibroch," 50. Though I will not make specific use of the way Cooke and his colleagues divide the passage into phrases here, it will be useful to keep in mind as we examine the rhythmic organization of the tune.

An Oral Source

Donald MacLeod's recorded teaching session for *Maol Donn* reveals important aspects of both its rhythmic organization and its performance practice, and will help us distinguish between the two in order to better understand the nature of each. MacLeod's conception of the accents and rhythmic groupings in *Maol Donn* comes through clearly in his canntaireachd rendition of the tune:

AUDIO SAMPLE 9

EXAMPLE 2-10

In this example, MacLeod begins by singing through the passage, saying numbers as he sings to indicate the intended relationship between the beats. Reversing the way a classically trained musician might have rendered it, the beats that he seems to feel as downbeats are "two," while upbeats are "one."[82] He taps a regular pulse on the table as he sings, which is unusual in my own (relatively limited) experience as a student. But as we will see, this seemingly regular pulse transforms in performance. MacLeod's steady tapping on the table sets the stage for us to trace the 'stretching' of the pulse between his singing (Audio Sample 9) and subsequent playing (Audio Sample 10) of the phrase on the practice chanter (a quieter version of the melody pipe of the bagpipe, without the bag, used for teaching):

AUDIO SAMPLE 10

EXAMPLE 2-11

His practice chanter rendition seems to lie halfway between his sung version and MacPherson's rendition on the pipes: MacLeod elongates certain notes more on the chanter than in his sung version, but less than MacPherson does in Audio Sample 2.

It is clear that MacLeod hears the tune in something resembling 3/8 (or 6/8 if we put two groupings of 3/8 together). Compared with the notational durations of Example 2-11, MacLeod elongates notes on strong beats—C-sharp, F-sharp, E, etc. (as well as the eighth-note upbeats) and cuts sixteenth notes short. This conforms to Peter Cooke's transcription above, which falls roughly into a three-eighth-note pattern with elongation of accented notes. Cooke therefore favors the only published score, among the eight he cites, that is in 6/8: *Ceol Mor*, published in 1900 by General Thomason (Example 2-13e, below).[83] Returning to MacPherson's recording (Audio Sample 2, Example 1-1), we can now reasonably guess that he, like MacLeod, is probably hearing the tune in a kind of 3/8 or 6/8, with significant elongation on the accented notes.[84]

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[82] This appears to be MacLeod's own style of canntaireachd (every teacher has his or her own version of the syllables), useful to him in this particular instance to show the metrical organization of the music rather than pitches and ornaments, as we saw in *The Company's Lament*. I believe he conceives the music as an iambic grouping, and so the first component of that grouping is "one" and the second is "two" regardless of the fact that, in staff notation, "two" would arrive on the downbeat, or the "first" beat of the bar.

[83] Thomason's *Ceol Mor* was very influential when it was published, but was subsequently replaced by other collections such as the Piobaireachd Society's series, the *Kilberry Book*, and another collection I will show below, *Binneas is Boreraig*. These and other scores will be explored further below.

[84] This leap of logic rests on the assumption that MacPherson and MacDonald may share a similar conception of the rhythmic organization of the tune. But according to the compact disc liner notes (*A Living Legend*, 58), MacPherson uses the Kilberry book's version in 4/4, a far cry from his 6/8-like performance. I have not been able to interview

Combining MacPherson's performed durations from Example 1-1 with MacLeod's interpretation of the rhythmic organization, we can begin to discern a rhythmic organization shared by at least two prominent performers as well as one of the more influential scores of the early twentieth century, while preserving the exact durations that define the performance practice MacPherson is applying to the music.

EXAMPLE 2-12

Comparing this version to Example 1-1, we find that the pattern of elongated notes (shown by square fermatas that modify that written, not performed durations) has become more regular; in other words, if MacPherson hears the tune in a slow triple time, as he seems to, he pauses on almost every theme note.

Written Sources

Having explored an example from the twentieth-century oral teaching tradition for this tune—which, thanks to the commercially distributed CD series, places Donald MacLeod in every piper's living room—we now turn to the written sources. Generations of transcribers have represented pibroch in a wide variety of ways over the years, so that nearly every pibroch is surrounded by a host of differing scores. Example 2-13 shows the eight versions of *Maol Donn* copied from Cooke's 'Example I.'[85]

EXAMPLE 2-13

To clarify the rhythmic organization in these samples, I have followed Cooper and Meyer's method by adding symbols to show the accentuation and groupings implied by the bar lines and time signatures. I have not analyzed the examples that lack bar lines in the same way; this serves to emphasize that, with a mere sequence of notes, we have no way of knowing what rhythmic organization the transcriber intended. Indeed, the transcriber's omission of bar lines and time signatures may imply a conception of pibroch that deliberately avoids a defined rhythmic organization, conceiving the music as a series of unconnected durations (though the beams in Reid's manuscript do imply groupings).

Pibroch scores tell us more about the rhythmic organization of pibroch than they do about performance practice (though important clues to the latter can be found in these sources). We can recall Cooper and Meyer's distinction in Chapter 1 between meter and rhythm: if we remove the implication of a regular pulse from the written notation, a score can be read simply as a map of the music's accentual patterns and groupings. We can justifiably interpret pibroch scores with the irregular pulse characteristic of pibroch—demonstrated for us by MacLeod in the examples above (Audio Sample 10)—rather than with the more

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MacPherson to ask in what meter he conceives the tune, but for our purposes it there is no need to prove the point; the remarkable similarity between the sound of MacLeod and MacPherson's interpretations (also recall their similar renditions of *The Big Spree*), and the ability of pibroch's oral tradition to accurately convey rhythmic performance practice, means that two pipers can get the same result without necessarily sharing the same conception of the underlying rhythmic organization. It is also worth noting that Barnaby Brown gives a brief excerpt of *Maol Donn* in staff notation in the liner notes to MacPherson's recording, as a means of illustrating the tune's formal structure—perhaps not surprisingly, Brown casts it in 6/8.

[85] Example 2-13 includes the most important collections, offering a glimpse of nearly the whole two-hundred-year history of pibroch's written tradition. For a complete survey of the written sources, there are several good books—I recommend Donaldson's *The Highland Pipe and Scottish Society 1750-1950* and Cannon's *The Highland Bagpipe and its Music.*

regular pulse we might expect from a classical musician.

A closer look at two influential twentieth-century scores for *Maol Donn* offers a deeper perspective into the role of written transmission in the tradition. According to the liner notes, MacPherson's recording "observes the score published by Archibald Campbell in *The Kilberry Book of Ceol Mor*."[86] But as with *The Big Spree* in Examples 2-3 and 2-5, the performed rhythms here do not closely match those written in the *Kilberry Book*. If we were to accept the implication of MacPherson's 'observing' the *Kilberry Book*—that the rhythmic organization dictated by the score matches MacPherson's own conception—we would fail to account for the element of oral tradition that informs his playing. Nonetheless, because pipers often learn a tune from the score before going to a teacher to get the 'timings,' it is worth comparing MacPherson's playing with the score he uses. Example 2-14 places my transcription of MacPherson's performance alongside the Kilberry score.

Example 2-14a analyzes the rhythmic organization implied by the bar lines and time signatures in the Kilberry score. Example 2-14b then applies that rhythmic organization to my transcription of MacPherson's performance from Example 1-1.

EXAMPLE 2-14

Comparing the two, MacPherson's durations might seem to work against the rhythmic organization implied by the score: for example it is difficult to hear the long initial E as an anacrusis to the following A. Nevertheless, Example 2-14 helps us to resolve some of the uncertainties we encountered in Example 1-5: most noticeably, the Kilberry score in Example 2-14b implies that 'Phrase 0' begins on the B that we had marked 'ambiguous' previously.

Another prominent twentieth-century collection, published in 1959, confirms this phrase analysis. *Binneas is Boreraig*, named after a Skye farm where the famous MacCrimmon family of pipers had their legendary piping college (where Patrick Og MacCrimmon taught Iain Dall MacKay), contrasts interestingly with the *Kilberry Book*. The author of *Binneas*, Roderick Ross, transcribed the playing of his teacher Malcolm R. MacPherson in order to create authoritative performance scores that would reflect the tradition as it is played.[87] His goal went deeper than transmitting the contemporary performance tradition, however. Since Malcolm MacPherson claimed a direct line of tuition back to the MacCrimmons, and since Ross' transcription aimed to transferring the exact durations of each note as Malcolm MacPherson played them, Ross claimed to be representing the music "as the MacCrimmons taught it."[88] In short, his collection attempts to preserve the essence of a 'pure' oral tradition in written form.

Binneas is a fascinating document in itself, notable among pibroch collections for its unusual style of notation in which various conventions have been altered: the staff is reduced to three lines, time signatures, key signatures and clefs have been removed, and different colors mark the different variations that follow the

[86] Barnaby Brown, *A Living Legend* liner notes, 158.
[87] Ross presumably transcribed by ear, without the aid of devices such as the timer Cooke used in 1972, and definitely without the software I used.
[88] Ross, introduction to *Binneas is Boreraig*, 2.

theme. The foreword to the 2003 edition contrasts *Binneas* with the other well known collections, saying that its most "significant departure…was the dropping of bar lines and using a phrase structure in which the duration of the notes is indicated in the usual way without the constraint of 'bar' arithmetic."[89] Phrases in *Binneas is Boreraig* are clearly shown by spacing—though Ross uses actual breaks in the staff lines rather than simply leaving more space between phrases as in the tutor.

Example 2-15 shows *Maol Donn* as it appears in *Binneas* (with minor modifications that do not affect our analysis).

EXAMPLE 2-15

Although *Binneas* shows the relative durations of the notes, its omission of bar lines and beams seems to reflect an underlying assumption that the music lacks any rhythmic organization at smaller architectonic levels: it implies that pibrochs are simply strings of notes with various durations, loosely grouped into phrases. But like the *Kilberry Book*, *Binneas* does tell us how Ross understood rhythmic organization at higher architectonic levels. Example 2-15 shows that Ross agrees with the phrase divisions in the *Kilberry Book*: specifically, his score confirms the suggestion that the 'ambiguous B' of Example 1-5 is the beginning of 'Phrase 0.' That two prominent written sources agree on the phrase division of *Maol Donn* shows that while scores vary too widely to consistently represent performers' conception of rhythmic organization at the local level—as we have abundantly seen—they do often reflect consistent conceptions of rhythm at larger architectonic levels, such as line and phrase divisions.

The *Kilberry Book* is instructive regarding the way primary groupings are grouped into larger units: the score marks line divisions in *Maol Donn* as 6,6,4—meaning that the theme is divided into three lines of 6, 6, and 4 primary groupings each. In mainstream analysis this formal plan describes the majority of tunes—so much so that 6,6,4 tunes are called 'primary piobaireachd.'[90] How this applies to *Maol Donn* will be shown in Chapter 3 (Example 3-2) when I present a full formal analysis of the tune. *Binneas* and the Kilberry also show another important aspect of the tune's rhythmic organization: *Maol Donn* appears to have a different number of primary groupings per phrase than *The Company's Lament*: If we analyze Example 2-14b as we did Example 2-2, where we identified the half notes as theme notes, we can likewise identify the quarter notes in Example 2-14a as theme notes that have a defining role in the rhythm. Counting them, we find five theme notes in each repetition of phrase 1, and four in phrase 0. While changing meters do occur in Gaelic music, inconsistencies resulting from confusion between ornamental notes and 'main melody notes' are problematic for pibroch scholars trying to uncover the original intentions and performance style of pibroch's early

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[89] Dugald B. MacNeill, forward to *Binneas is Boreraig*, 1. *Binneas* provides an interesting comparison to my transcription of MacPherson's recording in Example 1-1. It is similar to my transcription both in its overall look—a series of unconnected notes of various durations without beams or bar lines (even the specific durations are similar)—and in its manner of creation (by transcription); but its purpose is entirely different. *Binneas* is prescriptive, a performing score intended as a way of showing pipers how to play the music—while mine is purely descriptive, meant only as a guide for the listener.

[90] 'Piobaireachd' here serves as a collective plural noun.

composer-performers.[91]

Oral and Written: Eggs and Chickens

In his article on *Maol Donn*, Cooke points out that the influential collection *Ceol Mor*, published in 1900 by General C.S. Thomason, comes closer than any other score to the performance style of one of the most influential pipers of the early twentieth century, John MacDonald of Inverness (1866-1953). I have not heard John MacDonald's performance, but as Cooke describes it "there is no dwelling on the A in question [the initial A, I believe] and there is clearly a slow pulse throughout. The performance is more like that of Thomason's setting [which is in 6/8—see Example 2-13] than any other."[92] Since Donald MacPherson's rendition, which seems to be in a kind of 6/8, also closely resembles Thomason's version, Cooke's comment means that MacDonald's early twentieth-century version was probably similar to MacPherson's 2002 recording. The likely resemblance between two performances almost a century apart seems to support one of the central claims made by mainstream pipers: that the tradition has been passed down since the seventeenth century in a 'pure' and unbroken oral tradition of careful and precise teaching. John MacDonald claimed a direct connection to pibroch's 'authentic' oral tradition, having had "a piping pedigree beyond reproach. His main source was Calum 'Piobaire' MacPherson (1833-1898) [the preeminent teacher of the late nineteenth century]. Calum Piobaire derived his teaching from the Bruces of Glenelg, pupils of the MacCrimmons [the legendary family of pibroch composers and performers going back to the sixteenth century]."[93] If we take this lineage at face value and compare it to Donald MacPherson's performance of the tune at the opening of the twenty-first century, it is easy to believe that an oral tradition could be passed down for two or more centuries with a high degree of accuracy.

But we could also argue against such continuity on a number of counts; for example, if John MacDonald's performance resembled Thomason's collection so closely, which way did the influence run? Was Thomason accurately reflecting the way the tune was played at the time, or did his widely-used written collection itself influence playing styles, including that of John MacDonald? To add another layer—even if MacDonald used Thomason's score, how strong could the influence have been, given the loose relationship pipers seem to have with written notation? Fortunately I don't need to answer such thorny questions here; my aim is not to prove the purity of the oral tradition one way or the other, but to make informed, if imperfect, guesses about the rhythmic organization of *Maol Donn*.

This chapter has provided an introduction to the treacherous world of rhythm in pibroch, and it has introduced important aspects of the mainstream tradition: performance practice is highly uniform between

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[91] The culprit here, and in many cases, is the initial E, which, according to some is not a true accent: removing its status as an accent would yield the four-times-four structure we saw in *The Company's Lament*. The problem of the 'introductory E' requires a deeper understanding of the early composers' conception of pibroch, and I will return to it in Chapter 3.
[92] Cooke, "Problems of Notating Pibroch," 52.
[93] *Masters of Piobaireachd, vol. 1*. Liner notes.

players with only minor individual differences, the standardized performance practice for a given tune does not closely match the standard written scores, and rhythmic organization is conceived in dramatically different ways for the same tune. We also distinguished between grace notes and theme notes, identified primary groupings, and briefly examined questions of phrase and line division. In the next chapter, all of these concepts and terms will come under further scrutiny as we explore the work of recent scholars who challenge many of the assumptions of the mainstream tradition.

Chapter Three: Revisionist Views

Air Sgurr Dubh an Dà Bheinn
Thàining guth gu m' chluais a' seinn,
Pàdraig Mór 's cheòl ag caoinneadh
Uile chlann a' chinne doanna.
Agus feasgar air a' ghàrsbheinn
Bha ceòl eile ann a thàining,
Maol donn agus ùrlar sàth-ghaoil
A' bristeadh cridhe nam fonn àlainn.

~ Somhairle MacGill-eain, 1939
(from *O Choille gu Bearradh*)

On Sgurr Dugh of the Two Hills
a voice came to my ear singing
Patrick Mor and his music mourning
all the children of mankind;
and an evening on the Garsven
there was another music that came,
'Maol Donn' and its theme of love-fullness
breaking the hearts of lovely tunes.

~ *Sorley MacLean, 1939*
(from *From Wood to Ridge*)

Questioning an assumption on the part of many mainstream pipers that pibroch has remained a 'pure' oral tradition with little change since 1750, a group of scholars and pipers has sought to understand pibroch's early origins. In the process, they have presented new insights about the nature of pibroch's rhythmic idiom. Chapter 3 sets out a few of the most important arguments of this group of 'revisionist' scholars. While they are not formally associated, many of these scholars have worked closely together and have built on one another's discoveries. They are united simply by a common urge to question the orthodoxies of mainstream practice that we learned about in Chapter 2.

The Problem: Motivations for the Revisionists' Work

In order to appreciate the work of pibroch's revisionist scholars, we must understand what has prompted them to seek alternate views. Throughout pibroch's history since the eighteenth century, there have been dissenting voices claiming that the tradition was being altered or corrupted. Frequently, these voices have come from Gaelic-speakers. In his 1972 article on *Maol Donn*, Peter Cooke quotes one of the most famous of these examples. In an 1893 letter to the Oban Times a reader signing as "Celt" complained:

> Sir—Can you, or any of the numerous readers of the Oban Times, inform me how it is that 'Piobaireachd' is the only species of the music of the Gael that has neither time, tune, melody or rhythm in it? Did the

> composers intend to puzzle and annoy, or is it the performers who vie with each other in prolonging unconnected, meaningless sounds?

Cooke goes on to explain that "when quoting this letter…in his preface to *Ceol Mor* 1900 (see Example 2-13e), Major General Thomason admitted that this kind of criticism was not altogether new. It is a criticism which one can still hear today [1972]—even from native Gaelic pipers of considerable skill and musical ability."[94]

Cooke neatly summarizes the impetus driving the search for the ways pibroch's original composers and performers understood its rhythmic organization. Referring to the discrepancies between the eight *Maol Donn* scores he shows, ranging from 1826 to 1959 (see Example 2-13), Cooke remarks:

> It could be argued that these differences are of minor importance and reflect nothing more than the fact that various styles of playing have existed during the last 200 years…But a difference in 'expression' or gracing…is of less import than what we have here—a total lack of agreement as to the phrase structure and metre [i.e. rhythmic organization] of the melodies. The archives of the School of Scottish Studies contain abundant examples of different renderings of the same Gaelic tunes. Texts, pitch, rhythm differ considerably in these variants but the melodic skeleton—the phrase structure—is nearly always preserved and clearly discernable; and, except for those written in syllabic verse, a regular musical metre, though a flexible one, underlies that structure.

In my terminology, Cooke here refers to a flexible pulse in the context of regular rhythmic organization. He goes on:

> Do these fundamental discrepancies exist because the early transcribers often lacked a real command over musical notation, or are they evidence of a greater collapse of the real *Ceòl Mór* tradition than is generally thought? If pipers have always known their music intimately and have taught in the traditional way—by chanting and patterning—surely the structure of pibroch melodies would not have become as open to doubt as is exemplified by these settings. If, as one suspects, the answer lies in some combination of both factors then the complaints of 'Celt' and others who are perplexed by modern performances are understandable.[95]

I quote at length because Cooke neatly summarizes the problem motivating the revisionists, especially with regard to the rhythmic organization of pibroch (his observation certainly matches what we found earlier regarding different sources' disagreements about rhythmic organization). Without a deeper familiarity with the musical politics of the mainstream piping world of the last one hundred or more years, it is difficult to appreciate that these fighting words; it is no small thing to suggest a "collapse of the real *Ceòl Mór* tradition" to pipers like Robert Brown (quoted above) who have been raised believing that their revered teachers were passing on the 'pure' teachings of the seventeenth-century MacCrimmons. While Cooke was not the first scholar to notice this problem—Robin Lorimer had begun to take a serious scholarly the early sources in the 1940s[96]—his article helped to encourage subsequent scholars. Since 1972, scholars such as Frans Buisman, Allan MacDonald, Barnaby Brown, and Roderick Cannon have built on this line of research, filling out a new understanding of pibroch's origins.

Brown's work, which builds directly on that of Cooke, Buisman, and Lorimer and the ethos and methods of the early music movement, will shed light on pibroch's rhythmic organization; MacDonald's work

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[94] Cooke, "Problems of Notating Pibroch," 42.
[95] Ibid., 49.
[96] Brown, "The Design of It," Part I, 50.

in rediscovering pibroch's seventeenth- and eighteenth-century playing styles will reveal new ways of understanding pibroch's early performance practice. Brown and MacDonald differ from the other scholars I will discuss in that they are also influential performers. Their research is partly directed toward the concerns of the performing community, and they are able to convincingly demonstrate the results of their findings in their own performances: their commercial recordings and recitals have introduced listeners to new performance styles which, as they claim, may come close to the way pibroch sounded in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Roderick Cannon, has also written convincingly in support of certain revisionist views.

Revisionist Approaches

To understand the ways these scholars have sought to solve the problem, it will be helpful to outline the general approach they follow. In general, MacDonald and Brown argue that the 'collapse' of the pibroch tradition Cooke cites was the result of a collapse of the Gaelic culture that had provided a healthy patronage system for professional pipers (following the decline of the old clan system after 1745), and its change of role from a ceremonial music of daily life to a rarified competition music. This profound transformation in Gaelic society and musical traditions resulted in a loss of the older understanding of pibroch, both with regard to rhythmic organization and to performance practice.

To reconstruct the early composers' intentions and conceptions for the music, these scholars tend to use two sources: they look to early notated scores and commentary, such as Joseph MacDonald's 1760 treatise, Peter Reid's collection of 1826, and others, and they cite extant Gaelic vocal traditions such as psalm singing and older song forms—particularly those that display qualities of rhythm that are known to have been characteristic of Gaelic music at the time pibroch was developing. The rhythmic style of the vocal music they cite is referred to as *sean-nòs*, or 'old style.' Although this style has survived better in Ireland's Irish-speaking areas (the Irish language is closely related to Scottish Gaelic) and is less common now in Scotland than it was in the eighteenth century, it is still heard in some Gaelic singing.

Combining early scores with extant vocal traditions, these scholars argue that an early score like Peter Reid's (Examples 2-13, 3-3) can be viewed as a reliable source for early performance practice, as long as the notation is interpreted in light of the flexible conception of pulse that was intrinsic to the performance practice of those older Gaelic song forms (which have survived in Gaelic-speaking culture). As the song is performed in a very free rhythm that follows the patterns of speech accents (or 'stresses'), the pibroch would also have been. Barnaby Brown, in the liner notes to the CD on which Donald MacPherson's recording of *Maol Donn* appears, summarizes this understanding of pibroch rhythm:

> An upbringing on popular, classical, or pipe band music fails to prepare us for the 'wild' timing or vast architecture of pibroch…after a century of marriage between Hebridean song and urban accompaniment, it is almost exclusively on archive recordings that one hears the *sean nòs* or 'old style'. This is the rhythmic universe that cradled pibroch. The difference is simple: in the earlier style, time flexes more liberally,

> honouring a regular number of stresses but not a train track of beats. Some stresses are further apart than others, so much so that when a Gaelic ear hears 3/4 metre, a Scots ear might hear 4/4.[97]

The following discussion and examples will help to fill out Brown's statement and to fully explicate the nature of pibroch rhythm as it is understood by revisionist scholars. I will address the idea of 'a regular number of stresses' by exploring these scholars' understanding of pibroch's rhythmic organization. With this underlying structure in mind, we can then discover a performance practice in which 'time flexes liberally' in the absence of a 'train track of beats.' As the following arguments will show, there are good reasons to believe that this kind of flexible pulse underlies pibroch's origins; however, we will see that this style differs in its basic nature not only from the metronomic, precisely equivalent pulse proposed by Cooper and Meyer in Chapter 1 (which is, as Brown argues, endemic to 'popular, classical, or pipe band' music), but also from the fixed (though irregular) performance practice of mainstream pibroch.

In presenting the revisionists' views I do not seek to evaluate the strengths and weakness of their arguments in a scholarly way; instead, I use their understanding of pibroch's rhythmic organization and flexible pulse (based in pibroch's origins as a purely oral tradition) as a further means of deepening our comprehension of the tradition as a whole. Their research also provides a filter through which to view late twentieth-century mainstream performance style: an inkling of the ways pibroch's early composer-performers may have understood the music shows us not only those aspects that may have changed, but also those aspects that have probably *not* changed significantly—those aspects that have likely been 'native' to the tradition since the beginning, and which are still present. Ultimately, I feel that the mainstream twentieth-century performing tradition represents a hybrid between its origins in an oral tradition and its subsequent interactions with written notation.

Evidence from the Early Composers, Part One: *Rhythmic Organization*

In an article published in three installments in 2004 and 2005, Barnaby Brown summarized the research he had done over the previous fifteen years. At the outset he explains that his goal is to "provide an overview of pibroch construction that is more accurate, more comprehensive, and more accessible to the general student than what was published in *The Kilberry Book of Ceol Mor* in 1948, and has been taught ever since."[98] In these articles he presents what is indeed a 'comprehensive' theory of pibroch's phrase structure based on an exhaustive survey, and detailed analyses, of almost every extant pibroch—over three hundred tunes—from more than twenty written sources.[99] From this mass of evidence, he has derived nine 'archetypal designs' to which every tune can be related more or less directly.[100]

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[97] *A Living Legend*, liner notes, 20.
[98] Brown, "The Design of It," Part I, 50.
[99] See Brown, "The Whole Pibroch Repertory."
[100] Brown, "The Design of It," Part I, 52. This seems as good a place as any to mention the different genres within pibroch. I briefly referred to them at the very opening of this paper: Gatherings, Salutes, Marches, Laments, etc. The distinctions between them are not always clear, but Marches tend to be more repetitive, while Laments often have more rhapsodic, lyrical passages.

Brown's background particularly qualifies him to undertake this kind of work. In addition to his work as a well-regarded scholar and performer of pibroch, he has an extensive background in the classical tradition—having studied music at Cambridge University and performing as principal flutist in the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain. He is the first scholar to apply the ethos and methodology of the classical early music movement to pibroch and has done valuable work not only with analysis and research into pibroch's musical substance, but also with its performance practice (in collaboration with Allan MacDonald). Brown plays a reproduction eighteenth-century set of Highland bagpipes he helped to reconstruct in collaboration with Julian Goodacre, an instrument maker. He has also researched and performed in the ancient living tradition of the Sardinian *Launeddas* (or triplepipe), which he believes to be a precursor to the Celtic bagpipe tradition and to have links with Celtic musical forms.[101]

Brown has built on suggestions from Joseph MacDonald (1760) and Robin Lorimer (1960s) that early composer-performers of pibroch conceptually divided nearly all tunes throughout the repertory into four quarters (understood as 'lines' in subsequent written representations), eight phrases, and sixteen primary groupings.[102] This construction contrasts with the line divisions given in Colin Campbell's 1797 *Nether Lorn* manuscript (which consists of canntaireachd syllables written out, rather than staff notation). Many of Campbell's somewhat haphazard line divisions were followed by many subsequent editors such as General Thomason (early twentieth century); several of these methods of diving tunes have become, in one form or another, the standard way of conceiving large-scale rhythmic organization in mainstream piping. As we found in Chapter 2, mainstream theory divides many tunes into three lines of 6, 6, and 4 primary groupings (*Maol Donn* is a good example). The logic behind this division is that, where two phrases share a similar closing (or opening) figure, they are both heard as the ending (or opening) of the line to which they belong. For example, the heavily stressed B that ends the passage from *Maol Donn* of Example 1-1 ('stressed' as in Cooper and Meyer's sense of the term, via ornament cluster) returns two more times, at the end of phrase 6, and at the end of the theme. In the 6,6,4 line division, each of these stressed Bs ends a line. This division is reflected in scores such as the *Kilberry Book* and *Binneas is Boreraig*. Dividing pibroch according to similarity of closing figures resembles end-rhyme in poetry: a similar sound—i.e. a particular combination of pitch and rhythm—ends each line of text; if the division is made according to similarity of opening figure, an analogy might be made to alliteration.

As I will show (see 'Implications of Foursquare Rhythmic Organization' below), a foursquare conception makes possible an appreciation of pibroch's 'structural hemiolas'[103] in which the underlying division of four quarters is overlaid with other structures, such as the 6,6,4 division—such irregular divisions, while not acting as fundamental organizing principles (according to Brown and others), are present to the ear.

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[101] See www.triplepipe.net (accessed 21 March, 2007).

[102] Brown has told me that as a performer he finds it helpful to mentally divide tunes into two halves; during performance pipers must keep track of which quarter, or eighth, of a tune they are in, but he finds it even easier to remember which half he is in—since there are only two choices.

[103] Alasdair MacDonald has suggested this term as a way to describe the overlapping structures Brown describes.

To appreciate the way two contrasting structures overlap in pibroch, we must fully understand the underlying foursquare division of pibroch. As evidence for this view, Barnaby Brown cites three main sources: Joseph MacDonald's 1760 treatise on pipe music (cited in Chapter 2), medieval Irish and Welsh harp music, and seventeenth-century Gaelic verse.

In 1760 Joseph MacDonald described pibroch's early compositional guidelines, referring to the way the music's "first Masters & Composers in the Islands of Skye and Mull" had understood its rhythmic organization:

> They were sure to have no odd Number in any piece the designed to be regular. Their Adagios [meaning the theme, as opposed the variations] when regular, commonly consisted of 4 Quarters. In each Quarter there were Such a number of Fingers (which we Count as Bars) 2, 4, or 8 as the Quarter was Long or short; or the Bar was subdivided into more Fingers, according to their Length; & thus they Counted upon their 4 Fingers & measured by their Ear, & when the Finger & Ear Corresponded all was well. The ordinary Length of a Pipe Adagio being 16 Fingers, computed about 16 Bars, 4 in each Quarter, The regularity preservd (only by the Help of this Rule) in all the Compositions, being truly Surprising. Its not in the least to be wonderd tho there Should be little Excressencies & Deficiencys in the Time, by this method of Composition; very few of which are to be found.[104]

He is emphatic about the uniformity of a foursquare structure across the repertory.[105] Brown follows this up by pointing out that "MacDonald makes no mention of the uneven arrangements '6,6,4' and '4,6,4,2 (or 1)' that have become part of the modern pibroch belief system. All of the evidence from before 1797 suggests that the composers saw their designs as 4,4,4,4."[106]

Brown cites further evidence for a foursquare structure from contemporaries of the seventeenth-century pipers who composed most of the classic standards of the current pibroch repertory. Since the pipers themselves left no written trace of their methods, a comparison with other musicians and poets working in the same Gaelic cultural context may shed more light than "the memory of pipers 100 to 200 years later."[107] The evidence of the extant poetry from the Gaelic bardic tradition provides interesting parallels with the way pibroch is constructed. Brown cites an explanation from a recent anthology of seventeenth-century Gaelic poetry to show the kind of strict set of rules within which poets worked at the time. The editor of the anthology, Colm Ó Baoill, offers the following excerpt of a poem composed around 1613:

Fiche meisge linn gach laoi—
nochar leisge linn ná lé;
fiú i neart ar mbeathaidh do bhí,
ceathair, a trí, a seacht le sé.

Ó Baoill describes the compositional rules within which the author of the poem worked, which

> require seven syllables per line, and there are rules for elision…the final words of lines 2 and 4 must rhyme together (as in all rhymes the vowels must be identical); and the vowels of the finals of all four lines must

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[104] Cannon, ed. *Joseph MacDonald's Compleat Theory of the Scots Highland Bagpipe*, 64.
[105] Foursquare (and sixteen-fold) structures are common in musical traditions around the world, such as Indonesian gamelan traditions.
[106] Brown, "The Design of It," Part I, 51.
[107] Ibid., 51. This comment seems to parallel one made one hundred years earlier by General Thomason in his 1900 introduction to *Ceol Mor*: "The divergences [between early scores and contemporary performance] go on increasing so markedly…that I am driven to depend on internal evidence rather than on living authorities" (Introduction, pp. vi-vii, quoted in Donaldson *The Highland Pipe*, 251).

> agree in 'quantity' (*i.e.* long or short), as they do here; *laoi* has a single long vowel. Internal rhyme (which in Gaelic means rhyme within the *couplet*) occurs twice in each couplet, giving us the rhymes *meisge: leisge* and *linn: linn* in the first couplet; in the second couplet the rhymes *mbeathaidh: ceathair* and *nert: seacht* are also 'perfect' because of complex Gaelic rules of consonant grouping whereby, in rhyme, *-dh-* and *-r-* belong to the same group, and consonant 'clusters' *-rt* and *-cht* (by even more complicated rules) rhyme together. (Anything as simple as the popular English rhyming system, where *bill* rhymes with *fill* but not with *fin*, would probably have been regarded by these poets as childish).[108]

We will see that the passage from *Maol Donn* that we have examined so far represents only three phrases of the four that make up the first half of the theme. The stressed B at the end of the third phrase therefore falls in the middle of the second pair of phrases (which together make up the second quarter of the theme). If the first two quarters are heard as a 'couplet,' the B cadence falls in the middle of the couplet, as do 'meisge linn' and 'leisge linn' in the poem quoted above; so the B cadence constitutes an 'internal rhyme.'

EXAMPLE 3-1

Perhaps the most intriguing evidence for pibroch's early composers' conception of its phrase structure (here understood as its rhythmic organization on larger architectonic levels) lies in pibroch's links with pre-eighteenth-century Irish, Scottish and Welsh harp music. Roderick Cannon, in his introduction to the music of the Highland bagpipes, suggests that pibroch may have its origins in Irish and Scottish harp music.[109] As evidence for pibroch's links with the wider Celtic harp tradition, Barnaby Brown cites a remarkable manuscript of Welsh harp music dating from 1623, known as the Robert ap Huw manuscript. The manuscript's unique tablature has only been recently deciphered and performed.[110] Brown points out that the aspect of it most relevant to pibroch is its list of "24 *mesur*…each *mesur* is a series of between 8 and 24 binary digits, and Welsh legend states that these compositional formulae were of Irish origin. This may in part be true, as at least four are closely related to pibroch, which has several Irish links."[111] Brown is here referring to sequences of ones and zeroes, laid out in rows, which indicate patterns of consonance and dissonance which structure the music. In harp music, this refers to two alternating chords; in pibroch, some of the same patterns appear in the way alternating phrases are either primarily consonant or dissonant against the drone. This provides compelling internal musical evidence for the link between pibroch and harp music, and offers a glimpse into the kind of structures early pibroch composers may have had in mind (whether taught rigorously or simply picked up intuitively) when composing these tunes.

In order to understand the nature and importance of this internal musical evidence to the link between pibroch and Welsh harp music, we must depart from the question of rhythm per se, and briefly discuss the way sonority relates to pibroch's phrase structure. In his introduction to a recent scholarly edition of an important early collection of pibroch scores, pibroch scholar Frans Buisman discusses the importance of sonority in pibroch and Irish and Welsh harp music: The

> nature of accompaniment that supported tonal alteration in a melody is implied by the Welsh harp terms *cyweirdant* ("string of concord") and *tyniad* ("inflection"). One may compare the Irish names of strings,

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[108] Ó Baoill, 20.
[109] Cannon, *The Highland Bagpipe*, 101.
[110] See William Taylor's recent recording, *Two Worlds of the Welsh Harp*, and PaulDooley.com.
[111] Brown, "The Design of It," Part I, 52.

> *crónán* ("buzzing") and *téad leagtha* or *téad leagaidh* ("string of falling/inclination"). *Crónán* must have the sense of "consonance" or "concord," and the string is tuned an octave below what may be called the system note of the harp; while the *téad leagtha / leagaidh* is tuned a major second or a minor third below *crónán*. The Welsh evidence indicates that the idea of alternating between two tones is older than the beginnings of classical pibroch. In the event, this early concept of tonal alteration is perhaps better preserved in pibroch than in any other surviving musical form; but this should not obscure the fact that composers of pibroch modified it significantly, so that the alternation of tone was set against the continuous and unchanged notes of the drones, rather than being supported by the accompaniment of an alternating bass.[112]

Brown relates these concepts specifically to the formulae in the ap Huw manuscript: "in the 24 *mesur*, the '0's are known as *tyniadau*, providing tension, and the '1's as *cyweirdanau*, giving resolution."[113] To understand specifically how a phrase in pibroch can be either consonant or dissonant, we must treat the notes in a phrase as a collection of pitches which, together, form a particular sonority against the drone, which is always on the pitch A. Brown analyzes *Maol Donn*'s sonority thus:

> "The final pitches are underlined, and their relative intensity suggested by type style":
> Sonority "1" Sonority "0"
> *- A (b)* **C-sharp** *- E F* *- A* **B** *C-sharp - E F* [114]

Returning to Brown's comment that "at least four [of the ap Huw *mesurs*] are closely related to pibroch," the remarkable parallels become clear: The mesur called *Alban Hyfaidd* in the manuscript is given as: *1011'0100'0100'1011*. If we isolate the first half of this structure—1011'0100—we find that it corresponds precisely to the phrase structure of *Maol Donn*. Audio Sample 11 and Example 3-2 give the full theme, with an analysis of the phrase structure indicated by the sonority of each phrase. For comparison, the example also shows the mainstream analysis of this tune as a three-line (6,6,4) 'primary piobaireachd.' At this stage I do not show the primary groupings that are divided either as 4,4,4,4 or 6,6,4—rather, I show corresponding phrase divisions of 2,2,2,2 and 3,3,2 (with two as-yet-unspecified primary groupings per phrase). This example should make clear why I chose to use the 1s and 0s to designate phrase structure in Chapter 1.

AUDIO SAMPLE 11

EXAMPLE 3-2

Such a distinctive pattern appearing in two musical traditions in Scotland and Wales seems more than coincidental, especially given the communications between Ireland, Gaelic Scotland, and Wales during pibroch's formative period.[115] To drive home the point, Brown has found—through close analysis of hundreds of tunes—that this particular structure (or close variants of it), which he calls the "woven" design, describes about half of the whole pibroch repertory.[116]

The evidence from early Gaelic poetry, Celtic harp music, and Joseph MacDonald's treatise all seem to agree on the 'fourfold' view of pibroch's structure. In his 1995 thesis on the influence of Gaelic song and

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[112] Buisman, introduction to *The MacArthur-MacGregor Manuscript*, xxxii.
[113] Brown, "The Design of It," Part I, 52.
[114] *A Living Legend*, liner notes, 21. I have slightly altered Brown's example, adding 'sharp' and omitting the high A that appears later in the tune.
[115] See Allan MacDonald's comments in "Peter Browne talks with Allan MacDonald" and Brown in "The Design of It," Part I, 52.
[116] Ibid., 52.

speech-rhythm in pibroch, Allan MacDonald also offers compelling evidence for this view. Although much of MacDonald's thesis is concerned with pibroch's early rhythmic performance practice (I will return to his ideas below), his study also offers important insights about the way the early composers may have understood rhythmic organization. MacDonald's thesis uses several case studies to show specific Gaelic songs that can be matched with particular pibrochs. He also discusses the common structures of Gaelic song more generally, and the ways they relate to the pibroch repertory.

For MacDonald, as for this study, the task of identifying and even discussing performance practice necessitates clarifying rhythmic organization (though he does not use these terms to describe the process); for MacDonald's purposes, this task must apply to the Gaelic songs that coexisted with and informed the pibroch tradition. Discussing this issue, MacDonald states that "the Gaelic language, being stress based, is crucial as a guide for stressing and a note can usually be found in the pibroch version that corresponds to the stress position of the song."[117] He finds that "song lines usually consist of phrases of four stresses and when these positions are identified in the song, this allows for easier identification of the phrase in the pibroch form. Often, when there is a doubt as to whether the phrase is in one bar of the tune or in two or more [i.e. how various scores have chosen to represent the underlying, orally-derived rhythmic organization], it is easily solved by means of identification with the song. Even without the song as a reference point, the identification of four stresses within the two bars usually informs [us] where the stress positions are. The identification of musical rhythm is also easier when one considers the pibroch score in the context of speech-accented phrases."[118] Barnaby Brown, summarizing MacDonald's view regarding pibroch's rhythmic organization, says that there are almost always "just four stresses in each line [quarter], and a regular number of beats to each stress."[119]

Translated into the terminology I have built here, Brown and MacDonald argue that each of the four *quarters* in every pibroch theme contains four of what I am calling *primary groupings* (two per phrase) usually corresponding to one or two bars in scores, each of which is dominated by what I call a *primary accent* ('stress'). Within each grouping, the number of theme notes (each of which falls on a 'beat')—including the accented one and a group of unaccented ones—is constant. Most often, primary groupings consist of three or four theme notes; however, this is not always the case: Brown cites some examples of five-note groupings and the number of theme notes in a grouping sometimes changes within a tune (analogous to mixed meters). In addition, there are frequent examples of groupings and phrases being elongated or cut short by a note or two. There are many possible reasons this might occur in a given tune, which Brown accounts for in his analysis.[120]

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[117] MacDonald, *The Relationship Between Pibroch and Gaelic Song*, 62. Note that by 'stress,' MacDonald refers to what Cooper and Meyer call 'accent.'

[118] Ibid, 82. Elsewhere, MacDonald points out that "most of the melodies to the songs that are identified in pibroch are found in the first four phrases of the pibroch ground, where the song phrases are commonly equivalent to two bars of pibroch with four stresses. The four phrases that follow seem to represent a thematic development of the four phrases of the song." (*Pibroch and Gaelic Song*, 31).

[119] In an e-mail message to R. McClellan, 5 May, 2006.

[120] Brown, "The Design of It," Part II, 45.

In the process, he criticizes earlier editors of score collections—especially those in the Piobaireachd Society in the early twentieth century who, perhaps responding to an influence from European classical music, often rewrote such 'irregular' groupings to conform with regular meters such as 2/4, 3/4 an 4/4.

The foursquare structure Brown and MacDonald promote is easy to understand, but it is not always easy—or even possible—to identify where the early composers understood the accents and groupings to lie a particular tune. To identify the rhythmic organization in the song/pibroch pairs that MacDonald uses as case studies, he relies on a combination of early written scores with extant versions of the songs (following a general research approach that characterizes the revisionists, mentioned at the opening of this chapter). Following MacDonald's method, we can now attempt to identify the rhythmic organization of our original passage from *Maol Donn* as its early composer (or composers) and performers may have understood it. Allan MacDonald does not include this tune in his case studies, but Peter Cooke's 1972 article provides us with the tools we need to make an attempt: Peter Reid's manuscript of 1826 of Example 2-13, and a transcription of a closely related folk song of the same title—'*Maol Donn*.' Comparison between the two reveals a different view of the accentual patterns and groupings in this pibroch than those we identified in Chapter 2.

Beginning with Reid's score, we have an interpretation that differs significantly from Donald MacLeod's interpretation in his recorded teaching session.

EXAMPLE 3-3

Here the initial E, rather than being a downbeat as MacLeod's singing seemed to suggest, is merely one of three grace notes leading to the downbeat A. Whereas in modern performance (and in many of the previous examples) the A is a short note, here it is long and seems intended as a downbeat. Reid's score lacks time signatures and bar lines and thus remains somewhat ambiguous in terms of rhythmic organization. But with the exception of the second eighth note B, which seems to form an after-beat to the F-sharp, all of the notes landing on the quarter notes might reasonably be interpreted as accents.[121]

Looking at Cooke's transcription of the extant song, as sung by Kate MacDonald of South Uist (my example is a facsimile of Cooke's example), we can see the accents ('stresses'), required by the text, that are carried through musically in the song (I have added indications of rhythmic accent as indicated by the text).

EXAMPLE 3-4

This is a good example of the tendency in Gaelic song, cited by Allan MacDonald, to achieve a balance between textual and melodic accent, with neither overriding the other. As Cooke describes it, "as with…all [Gaelic] songs not sung for dancing, the accents do not follow in rigidly timed succession. The singer takes time between phrases without destroying the gentle onward flow of the melody."[122]

Armed with this understanding of the Gaelic rhythmic idiom of regular but unequal accents, we can compare the early written source with the extant Gaelic song.

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[121] If we had a version of *Maol Donn* written down by Joseph MacDonald, we could perhaps assess the degree to which Reid was either misinterpreting the way the piece was performed in his time, or the extent to which he accurately portrayed an oral tradition that had already changed since MacDonald's writing sixty years before.

[122] Cooke, "Problems of Notating Pibroch," 56.

EXAMPLE 3-5

This example places the first lines of the song and the pibroch (from Examples 3-3 and 3-4) side by side, and then applies the rhythmic organization deriving from them to the durations of MacPherson's performance from Example 1-1. Such an analysis is imperfect and cannot be said to reflect a true historical link between the song and the pibroch; however, the connections between pibroch and song are strong enough, both from internal musical and external historical evidence, to justify the comparison.[123] Taken with a grain of salt, this example reveals a new way of hearing *Maol Donn*, and can lend valuable insight into the early Gaelic perspective on the rhythmic organization of the tune.

The Problem of the 'Cadence E'

Comparing *Maol Donn* to the tune *The Company's Lament* at the end of Chapter 2, I pointed out that the initial E, as a result of its rhythmic prominence in MacPherson's performance, seems to add a fifth theme note to the first primary grouping—which we might otherwise expect to have four. Many scholars, Allan MacDonald foremost among them, believe that the 'introductory E,' a common feature in many pibrochs, was historically always just that—introductory—in most of the tunes in which it appears (though, confusingly, some tunes begin with a full E theme note that can be hard to distinguish from an 'cadence E') and that it was likely played as a short appoggiatura or grace note, often with other even briefer grace notes added to it (Example 2-9 confirms this, since it shows the *canntaireachd* version of the song, which includes the E only as a grace note: 'hin' indicates the pitch A, or 'en,' with a grace, 'h,' as a prefix: 'h-en' becomes 'hin'). In the course of the various stages in which pibroch was transcribed in staff notation over many decades, however, these Es gradually became longer in written scores, ranging from written grace notes to quarters.[124]

MacDonald argues that this gradual change in the notation subtly influenced performers, so that introductory Es began to be played with longer durations, and likewise began to be perceived as a more integral parts of the melody, than was originally intended by the seventeenth and eighteenth century composers and pipers.[125] Over time, this subtle change led to a much more significant—and more corrupting—change in the understanding of rhythmic organization: Because cadence Es were played longer, they received more melodic importance; their presence began to obscure the fundamental rhythmic structure of many pibrochs, adding an extra 'stress' or primary accent, which disrupted the previous regularity of four theme notes per grouping. Referring to this problem in reference to the tune *In Praise of Morag*, Allan MacDonald says that

> Although the Es do not receive a melodic stress [accent], the time allocated to them distorts the rhythmic pulse of the tune, setting its rhythm apart from the [fourfold] rhythmic scansion of the song. This hiatus

[123] Ibid., 54.
[124] Cooke, "The Pibroch Repertory," 99.
[125] One could argue against this point on the grounds that we don't know which way the influence flowed: perhaps Es were always played long but understood as introductory and therefore written as grace notes—and it merely took time for the notation to catch up. This would imply a change in the understanding of rhythmic organization, but not in the performed durations.

> provides another good example of a pibroch that has changed its rhythm to create a quite different melodic and rhythmic scheme from the melody on which it was probably based. This development, which involves a change of rhythm and slowing of tempo, to the extent that the rhythm and points of stress become difficult to identify, is typical of what has occurred throughout the pibroch genre.[126]

Overlapping Structures: Implications of Foursquare Rhythmic Organization

We have now seen the four-times-four structure of pibroch, and we understand that the early composers probably considered the initial E in *Maol Donn*, and in many other tunes, to be an ornamental note rather than a melody note. Returning to my definition of pibroch's architectonic levels, we find that this theory seems to align with the mainstream understanding more than it differs. For the most part, both views agree on the same phrase divisions, and the fact that every tune is divided into sixteen primary groupings. Another look at the *Kilberry Book* shows that it preserves many of the aspects of *Maol Donn* we have explored here: for example, the use of a grace note for the initial E matches Reid's. The relative durations of many of the following notes match the song version and the early scores, and the accented notes in *Kilberry*, shown by their location on downbeats, for the most part match the accents of the song.[127] On the other hand, other pibrochs reveal more noticeable discrepancies between the mainstream and revisionist understandings.

The main analytical difference seems to lie in the fact that Brown and MacDonald argue for a consistent foursquare underlying interpretation of the vast majority of tunes in preference to a 6,6,4 or other division. Why would such a standardized conception of a body of over three hundred tunes help us to understand the music better?

Returning to Brown's commentary on Joseph MacDonald's 1760 treatise, I pick up his argument where I left off. With our understanding of the foursquare structure, we can see Brown's real point: the early composers "turned their genius to subverting that fourfold regularity. By superimposing an alternative structure of musical rhymes, the composition is rendered more sophisticated and pleasing. Henry Purcell (1659-1695) was doing much the same thing in his compositions where he built upon repeated grounds."[128] In other words, if you are a seventeenth-century pibroch composer, and you and everyone around you shares the same basic understanding of every pibroch as four groups of four primary groupings (it is possible that this may even have been a rigorously taught basis for a 'compositional method,' as the Welsh harp *mesur* likely were)—then the structure does not need to be explicitly articulated in the music for listeners to perceive it, and you are granted great freedom to experiment within, around, and against it.

As an example, we are now in a position to make an educated guess about the way the composer of

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[126] MacDonald, *Pibroch and Gaelic Song: Case Studies*, 97.

[127] This also raises an interesting point: if modern performers such as Donald MacPherson use the Kilberry book to learn from (as we discussed in Chapter 2), then perhaps the alternate durational and accentual interpretations it presents are latent in his performing and understanding of the music. For example, though his initial E is twice the length of the A, causing the E to sound to the listener like a downbeat, perhaps he actually understands the A as the downbeat—albeit a very short one with a 'disproportionately' long upbeat/appogiatura. It may be that for a great performer like MacPherson, steeped in the tradition, all of the ways of hearing I present here are present in his feeling for the music—whether consciously or not.

[128] Brown, "The Design of It," Part I, 51.

Maol Donn, presumably went about his task:[129] taking a favorite song, which may have resembled the one I learned in 2006 from Rona Lightfoot and which Peter Cooke transcribed in 1970, the goal was to fit it into the standard four-times-four structure, perhaps extending it. This could be done in many interesting ways. The internal rhyme described above, with the B ending cadence landing in the middle of the second quarter, and again at the end of the third and fourth quarters, 'subverts' the 'fourfold regularity' by overlaying another structure—perhaps 6,6,4, over it. In fact, both structures are present at once: it is the interplay between them that must have provided much of the musical interest for a listener of the seventeenth century, steeped in the Gaelic song and piping traditions of the time. In this way, the rules of composition among pipers may have resembled the complex rules of the poetic traditions of the Gaelic culture of the time, representing a sophisticated artistic tradition. For a musician today, immersed in the vast musical tradition of Western classical music stretching from Palestrina to Bach to Beethoven to Schoenberg to Ferneyhough, such compositional methods may seem relatively simple—and compared to some music, the rhythmic organization of pibroch is not complex. But sophistication and complexity are two different things: simplicity does not make a thing less interesting or musically compelling.

From a practical standpoint, we must remember that few tunes were written down until at least fifty years after they were composed; during pibroch's formative years, in which many of the greatest tunes were composed, the music was learned and passed on exclusively by ear and memory within an oral tradition. The way music and epic poetry in many traditions are designed to make them easier to memorize—and the implications that has for structure and sound—has been well documented by Parry, Lord, Treitler and others. In pibroch, this process involves frequent repetitions of phrases, returning in patterns that are predictable without being monotonous. Such compositional methods have been the subject of many books, so suffice it to say here that this quality is a crucial aspect of Brown's argument for the regular fourfold structure of pibroch.

Apart from the concerns of early composers, Brown's way of understanding tunes has direct implications for pipers learning pibroch today: Brown and MacDonald both point out—and I can vouch for this in my own experience—that if one first understands how a tune is divided into sixteen, eight and four parts, the task of memorization becomes far simpler. A three-minute pibroch theme, and the other eight minutes of variations, becomes a simple set of three or four brief segments, each returning in a regular though intricate pattern resembling the Welsh *mesur* shown above: if you learn each constituent segment, and remember the pattern, you can memorize a tune in a fraction of the time in might otherwise take.[130]

Of course, as Brown readily acknowledges, this concept is not lost on mainstream pipers, and a 6,6,4 structure could be as helpful as a 4,4,4,4 structure for remembering repeated patterns of melodic segments. Brown emphasizes that we can't really know how the early composers really understood the organization of

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[129] Or *her task*—there have always been many women involved in piping; or *their task*—as part of an oral tradition pibroch tunes may have been continually 'composed' over the course of successive generations.
[130] Similar methods are used in teaching other traditions that have been passed on mainly by oral means.

these tunes. But a fourfold structure ultimately serves best the purpose to which he puts it: to reveal multiple overlaid formal plans and to pick out trends in the organization of many tunes across the whole repertory. Though I do not dwell on the results of that work here—Brown's 'nine archetypal designs'—a study of it gives a fascinating view into the ways pibroch's early composers may have understood their vast body of music.[131]

Evidence from the Early Composers, Part Two: *Performance Practice*

With these insights into the ways the early pipers may have mentally structured the accents and groupings of pibroch, we can now discuss the ways they turned that structure into music in performance. To show this, I will follow three steps: First, I will introduce Allan MacDonald's ideas about the links between pibroch and older kinds of Gaelic song; I will then offer a few examples of early Gaelic vocal music to give a sense of the way the pulse is treated in this style; finally, I will show the way this conception of early performance practice can affect modern playing styles.

Gaelic Song and Pibroch

In the mainstream style described in Chapter 2, students carefully learn to copy specific performed durations for a given tune from the demonstration of a teacher. As Seumas MacNeill told us in his introduction to the Piobaireachd Tutor, the beginner must simply accept 'someone else's interpretation' at first; later, he or she can add a personal touch to the music. As we saw in my analysis of *The Big Spree*, however, the degree to which even highly accomplished pipers actually depart from the carefully taught, standardized performance practice is small. A highly uniform oral tradition provides a common source from which all seem to draw.

Allan MacDonald proposes a different source for pipers to determine the way they will perform a tune: the speech rhythms inherent in older Gaelic vocal traditions. His study "sets out to demonstrate how the pibroch tradition in Scotland has changed since the early eighteenth century, when the art of pibroch was probably at its zenith. This study recognises that pibroch evolved in Gaelic society and therefore had a close association with the Gaelic song tradition, as well as other instrumental genres…because of its close relationship with song, the performance style of pibroch should be based on an awareness of traditional Gaelic song and the language rhythms therein."[132] Roderick Cannon points out that "if a listener compares *ceòl mór* directly with the ordinary pipe music [*ceòl beag*, or 'small music'—i.e. the more familiar marches and reels with a regular foot-tapping pulse], or with songs of the type sung by modern Gaelic choirs, he will not find it easy going. But if he knows traditional ballad singing, or *òran mór* ('big songs'), or the psalms sung in Gaelic church services, he will find the pipe music relatively clear."[133] So Allan MacDonald is not alone in

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[131] A diagram of Brown's '9 archetypal designs' can be found in "The Design of It," Part I, page 52, and at www.pibroch.net.
[132] MacDonald, *Pibroch and Gaelic Song*, 1.
[133] Cannon, *The Highland Bagpipe*, 70-71.

observing pibroch's relationship to these older kinds of Gaelic vocal music; but he has taken the problem much further than other scholars through in-depth historical research and close analysis of the music itself. While Cannon cites these vocal traditions as a means of understanding the mainstream style—which they do inform to a degree—Allan MacDonald presents his findings as a critique of the mainstream style, and argues for a change in the way pibroch rhythm is performed (which he demonstrates in his recordings and performances[134]).

As a successful competitive piper who grew up in an isolated Gaelic-speaking community with deep roots in the culture's musical traditions, MacDonald (whose first language was Gaelic) rightly claims a deep knowledge of his subject. It is important to understand the particular way in which MacDonald came to pibroch. During the course of the nineteenth century, pibroch playing died out to an extent within the Gaelic community, and the primary milieu in which pibroch was heard—the competition—mainly belonged to the wider English-speaking culture. Though important remnants of older pibroch performance styles remained in Gaelic-speaking areas in the twentieth century, the mainstream tradition was 'reintroduced' to Gaelic culture by members of the mainstream competitive pibroch circuit in the twentieth century—as when the Piobaireachd Society recruited John MacDonald of Inverness and others to teach pibroch in South Uist in the early decades of the twentieth century.[135] The mainstream pibroch style as it exists today has felt foreign to many Gaels, and to the extent Gaelic speakers perform and practice pibroch, most do it in the mainstream style—which is distinctly un-Gaelic, according to MacDonald and others. I was surprised to discover, on my trip to South Uist in 2006, that many of the Gaelic speakers I met seemed ambivalent about pibroch; while they do consider it a part of their tradition, many simply don't enjoy pibroch, preferring lively dance music and slow airs.[136]

Like most pipers of his generation, Allan MacDonald came to pibroch from the mainstream side of things: he was trained by well-known tutors such as Robert Nicol, and was successful in competitions. But, as he explains in a recent radio interview, he was never 'fired by pibroch."[137] For him, as for 'Celt' whose 1893 letter I quoted above, there was no compelling sense of rhythm in it. Instead, MacDonald preferred other kinds of traditional Celtic music. He played in Scottish and Irish folk bands such as the Bothy Band where, as he says, his understanding of his own Gaelic tradition deepened, and he began to learn to play Scottish music in a new way, based on old performance styles from Ireland that had lived on—in particular the *sean-nòs* style—but had died out to a greater degree in Scotland. In addition, MacDonald knew about links

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[134] See *Allan MacDonald: Dastirum*, a new release from Siubhal.com, or two recent releases on the Greentrax label, *Fhuair mi Pòg* (see excerpt later in this chapter) and *Colla Mo Rùn*.
[135] Dickson, *When Piping Was Strong*, 124.
[136] This alienation may be a result of changes on both sides: in pibroch and also in the styles of traditional Gaelic music that have evolved since the eighteenth century; or the current ambivalence about pibroch may relate to the aura of exoticism that has been attached to it since the eighteenth century, thus perhaps removing it further from the ongoing Gaelic culture. Donaldson objects to the insistence on the part of many pipers that pibroch is somehow fundamentally different from all other Scottish music, or all 'normal' music in general (*The Highland Pipe and Scottish Society*, 461).
[137] "Peter Browne talks with Allan MacDonald" (transcription of spoken word).

between pibroch and old Gaelic songs. Such connections had always been known,[138] but few scholars or pipers had pursued them seriously. MacDonald began to investigate these links in more detail by comparing the extant 'pibroch songs' with the pibrochs to which they were linked. His thesis is one part of the culmination of that effort;[139] the other part is his new performance style that puts his theories into practice. In recitals and several popular recordings, MacDonald links old pibrochs to the songs with which they seem to share a common history.[140]

MacDonald's proposed performance practice implies a fundamentally different understanding of pibroch than what we encountered in Chapter 2. His approach draws part of its inspiration from the oral traditions of Irish and Scottish folk music, rather than from traditions—like our Western classical one and, to a large degree, like the mainstream pibroch tradition—that rely on written scores. Frequently, one of the core ethics of folk traditions is the freedom of the individual performer within a defined style. Whereas the classical tradition, and mainstream pibroch, rely on a fixed concept of a 'piece of music,' with a definite sequence of predetermined pitches, preserved on paper and reproduced by the performer, oral folk traditions like those in Ireland and Scotland instead rely on a vast reservoir of melodic material. James Cowdery, in his study of Irish melodic traditions, cites Cecil Sharp's description of folk culture: "performers of folk music are most highly respected when they introduce changes or variations into their music, provided that they ultimately satisfy the demands of the forces of continuity (of general style) and selection (by the musical community)."[141]

Allan MacDonald believes that pibroch in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries resembled the Irish folk tradition Cowdery describes. A piper would not simply play a 'piece' that had been memorized note for note—instead, performers would draw from a vast reservoir of known tunes and melodic formulae; a piper's own particular take on it—the ingenuity of the variations introduced into a known framework—in large part defined talent. In this musical environment, there were probably loose networks of similar melodies resembling 'tune families' as Cowdery has explicated the term[142]—but no fixed tunes. Part of the evidence for this in pibroch is the existence of pairs of tunes which seem to be variants of each other (such as *Too Long in this Condition* and *The MacFarlane's Gathering*): perhaps both derived from some generalized 'tune family,' and the two versions we have today, similar but not the same, are merely 'snapshots,' taken down by two different transcribers—who probably didn't realize that, in the act of transcription, they were fundamentally changing the conception of their material, from a generalized field of melodic possibility to a fixed 'piece' of music.[143]

In his writing and performance, Allan MacDonald suggests that while there is no way to reconstruct an

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[138] Some pibroch scores, such as MacKay's influential 1838 publication, placed snatches of lyrics below the notes. See Example 3-8.
[139] See MacDonald, *Pibroch and Gaelic Song.*
[140] *Dastirum*, a 2007 compact disc release from Siubhal.com, showcases him demonstrating this style.
[141] Cowdery, *The Melodic Tradition of Ireland*, 1.
[142] See Cowdery, *The Melodic Tradition of Ireland.*
[143] MacDonald refers to this in *Pibroch and Gaelic Song* (55, 57, 114, elsewhere).

entire oral tradition based on written remnants of it, we *can* reconstruct the performance style of the written tunes we have, in two ways: First, we can reassess the way the durations of those notes are performed, based on a familiarity with the kind of singing styles and language rhythms that dominated the musical culture in which pibroch performer/composers worked—and that are still extant today, having been passed down through an ongoing song tradition (which has evolved but preserves older styles as strands within the current corpus of songs). Second, we can reintroduce the ethos of individual performer freedom, allowing for a greater degree of difference between two performers' renditions of a given tune—or even one piper's rendition from one performance to the next—than still exists now in the mainstream tradition. With this framework in mind, we can examine a few examples of the vocal style he cites and then hear the way they can apply to pibroch performance.

Flexible Rhythm in Gaelic Vocal Music

The best way to understand the rhythmic universe within which pibroch developed is to hear it. On the Isle of Lewis, the northernmost of the Outer Hebrides, an old style of Gaelic psalm singing is still practiced. With regard to the secular song tradition also, the old style has not entirely died out in the Outer Hebrides, which constitute the heartland of Gaelic-speaking culture in Scotland. In recent years there has been a revival of these older 'sean-nòs' styles. During my visit to the Isle of South Uist in 2006 I heard several freely flowing and highly ornamented songs typical of this style (often sung unaccompanied before a large room full of members of the community of every generation).

The salient feature of these songs—and the feature MacDonald highlights in his study as being particularly relevant to pibroch—is the way the language rhythms drive the musical rhythm. The important thing about these older Gaelic song styles, according to MacDonald, is the way in which musical accent and speech accent (or 'stress') coincide, with neither overriding the other. As he explains in the liner notes to *Fhuari mi pog*, "the very existence of words dictates the rhythmic character of the piece. The melody is the passenger of the language rhythms, rather than the carrier."[144] W.B. Yeats noted a similar phenomenon in old Irish song styles (the Irish language, sometimes also called 'Gaelic' was once nearly indistinguishable from Scottish Gaelic, and remains closely related; older musical styles of Ireland are close cousins of those in Gaelic Scotland). Describing an old woman singing in Irish, Yeats wrote that "every word was audible and expressive, as the words in a song were always, as I think, before music grew too proud to be the garment of words, flowing and changing with the flowing and changing of their energies."[145]

Examples of the *sean-nòs* song style and Gaelic psalm singing from Lewis show how this manifests in Gaelic vocal music. Flora MacNeil, one of the best-loved traditional singers of the twentieth century, was well known for leading a return to older styles that had become marginalized in Scotland by the early twentieth century. Audio Sample 12 and Example 3-6 show her rendition of an old song typical of the

[144] MacDonald and Stewart's compact disc, *Fhuari mi pog*, liner notes for track 11.
[145] Yeats, *Mythologies*, 23-24.

style.[146]

AUDIO SAMPLE 12

EXAMPLE 3-6

While a fairly steady—though very slow—pulse is evident in this song, the words are clearly given a dominant role in determining the note-to-note rhythms.

An example of Gaelic psalm singing, as it is still practiced on the Isle of Lewis, will further clarify the rhythmic feel in question. There are good reasons to believe this style of singing the psalms in the Presbyterian church has remained largely unaltered since the sixteenth century or before,[147] and that it therefore embodies a way of hearing rhythm that was prevalent in the Gaelic-speaking world in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—which 'cradled' the development of pibroch (it is likely this style was widespread in Europe and colonial America at one time).

AUDIO SAMPLE 13

EXAMPLE 3-7

The top staff of Example 3-7 is a transcription of Audio Sample 13. One can hear the congregation lingering on certain pitches (white notes) and passing through others more quickly (black notes), with individuals adding many other ornaments of their own. The bottom staff shows the music as it is written in a 1720 psalter like the one an eighteenth-century Gaelic congregation might have sung this psalm tune from, if they weren't simply singing by ear. I have included the psalter version because it parallels, in a fascinating way, the relationship which Brown, MacDonald and Cooke believe to have existed between early written pibroch scores and early performance styles: aside from passing notes that appear to be semi-improvised or part of an oral tradition for the tune, the sung version matches the written sources note for note: each beat of the written version receives an accent in the sung version. The difference is only in performance practice as I have defined it here: most non-Gaelic church congregations, singing from this psalter, would render it with a basically regular pulse, every quarter note being about equal to every other; but as we can hear, the Gaelic congregation gives considerable flexibility to each pulse. It must be clarified that the distance between the accents is not always irregular: one can hear a somewhat regular pulse, albeit a very slow one between the accented notes. Thus part of the sensation of irregularity results from the music being so slow. Nevertheless, flexibility is a fundamental part of the rhythmic paradigm.

Gaelic psalm singing and the *sean-nòs* song style offer a glimpse of the way early transcribers may have approached the task of writing down pibroch—especially those who used conventional time signatures and bar lengths. It seems likely that they understood pibroch to have a clear underlying rhythmic structure, and

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[146] Barnaby Brown recommends a recording made by the late William Matheson, a well-known scholar of Gaelic music (see *Scottish Tradition 16: Gaelic Bards & Minstrels*). Matheson, who was fluent in Gaelic, assembled every type of oral, manuscript and printed source for old Gaelic poetry and learned to sing the ancient styles following the examples of his informants. He then reconstructed and performed many of these songs. As in other ancient epic poetry such as the Norse and Icelandic sagas, old tales having little to do with modern, or even eighteenth or nineteenth century life, have been preserved in the Gaelic tradition.

[147] See www.gaelicpsalmsinging.com (accessed 21 March, 2007).

that they knew that the underlying pulse was inherently flexible and frequently irregular.[148] This understanding of early pibroch scores is essential to Allan MacDonald's argument: a piper today is fully justified in relying on these scores to determine the notes and the way the patterns of accentuation and grouping organize the rhythm—as long as that piper is familiar enough with the Gaelic vocal style to bring a truly Gaelic sound to the performance practice of the music (he allows that one does not need to be a native Gaelic speaker to achieve his proposed style).

Theory into Practice

Allan MacDonald—like William Matheson and Barnaby Brown—is able to demonstrate his proposed performance style in his own playing. Though I find the results compelling, I will not attempt to evaluate the success of his work in a scholarly sense; ultimately, proving the 'authenticity' of any of the revisionists' research is not the concern of this study. To show how his ideas apply to the actual performance of pibroch, we will study an example of a pibroch Allan MacDonald has performed in his proposed style, alongside a performance in the mainstream pibroch style, with a comparison against his performance of the Gaelic song associated with the pibroch.

On the 1998 album *Fhuair mi Pòg*, a collaboration with singer Margaret Stewart, MacDonald performs a pibroch that is popular among pipers, called in English *I got a kiss of the King's hand.* Margaret Stewart got the Gaelic song version, known as *Fhuair mi Pòg,* from scholar and singer William Matheson.[149] It is a typical 'pibroch song'—a small group of songs within the larger Gaelic vocal repertory that are linked with particular pibrochs. These songs are usually characterized by a regular foursquare structure and a relatively simple melody, often corresponding to the scale of the pipes. I have not been able to trace Matheson's sources for it, but it is certain that it was known in the nineteenth century: words of the tune appear below the notes in Angus MacKay's 1838 version of the pibroch.

EXAMPLE 3-8

Oddly, MacKay's text does not always align with the notes and there are gaps in the text of several measures—as if MacKay had some inkling the pibroch related to a song, but could not, or did not, find out more.[150] Example 3-8 is copied from MacKay's score.

On Allan MacDonald and Margaret Stewart's recording, MacDonald first plays the song version on the bagpipes, in the rhythm in which it would be sung. Margaret Stewart then sings the song with MacDonald doubling her on the pipes. She then drops out, and MacDonald proceeds through the theme of the pibroch, playing it in his proposed rhythmic style (and omitting the variations). The precise process through which this takes place is determined by his intuitive sense as a native Gaelic speaker, and his or her knowledge of the

[148] This understanding of scores from the late eighteenth century may not have been limited to pibroch transcribers: many in the mainstream European classical tradition of the time understood scores in a similar way. Our concept of strict metric regularity, described by Cooper and Meyer as a fundamental aspect of Western music, and the way we assume written scores to communicate that regularity, may be a product of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
[149] Stewart, *Fhuair mi Pòg* liner notes.
[150] Cannon also cites MacKay's imperfect reference to the words in his 1838 collection (*The Highland Bagpipe*, 56).

Gaelic song idiom. I have included, as Audio sample 14, an excerpt in which Stewart and MacDonald sing and play the song, followed by MacDonald's rendition of the first part of the pibroch theme.

AUDIO SAMPLE 14

To get an aural sense of the contrast between MacDonald's style and the mainstream style, Audio sample 15 presents the opening of this pibroch as played by Robert Nicol, a well-known mid-twentieth-century teacher whose teaching sessions and performances, along with those of his friend and co-teacher Robert Brown (quoted above), were recently released in a popular series of recordings (much like that of Donald MacLeod). Audio sample 16 is the corresponding segment from the song as played by Allan MacDonald, excerpted from the beginning of the track we heard in Audio sample 14. Finally, Audio sample 17 is MacDonald's rendition of the pibroch (again from the same track as Audio Sample 14). This ordering allows the listener to follow an imagined progression: the mainstream version by Nicol comes first; MacDonald hears the song, and then transforms Nicol's version into his proposed performance style, using the song as a sort of filter. The resulting transformation of the pibroch is Audio Sample 17.

Example 3-9 shows transcriptions of each rendition, with precise durations shown to aid in comparing the two.

AUDIO SAMPLE 15 - 17

EXAMPLE 3-9a-c

Interestingly, Robert Nicol was one of Allan MacDonald's teachers. In his book, MacDonald has this to say about Nicol: "The phrase 'get the song out of the tune' is a piece of advice that has been transmitted from teacher to pupil…and one which Bob Nicol of Ballater used when giving pibroch lessons to this writer. The particular features that allowed one to find this song, were, in the writer's own experience, never adequately defined, or described."[151]

The Revisionists: A Critique of the Mainstream

Although pibroch is a single tradition with 'mainstream' and 'revisionist' merely representing alternate angles, it should be clear from this discussion that the revisionists' work represents a sharp, if constructively intended, critique of the mainstream style. As we saw, Barnaby Brown is critical of Piobaireachd Society editors working in the early twentieth century, whose notational style and conventions were largely imitated in the *Kilberry Book*, which then became the standard teaching score up to the present. In particular, Brown objects to the tendency he cites among these editors to change the older scores they used as sources in order to make them conform to regular time signatures—to delete 'extra' notes and to rewrite where they felt it necessary. In the process, he says, some of the more interesting irregularities and idiosyncrasies in the repertory, which enrich it, were ironed out to conform to an early twentieth-century, industrial-age aesthetic

[151] MacDonald, *Gaelic Song and Pibroch*, 33.

of predictability and standardization, rather than a late-medieval one of variation and intricacy.[152]

Brown seems to agree with Allan MacDonald's assessment of the corruptions that have entered pibroch's performance practice since the eighteenth century: "What we do today has been simplified to make judging easier, and thanks to the processes of publication, we accept the ascendancy of one printed score which becomes the 'authority.' Over time, as people increasingly use the same printed score, aspects of its notation enter the oral tradition…we end up with stereotypical playing and a tradition that is less rich in its expressive capacity and musical breadth than that contained in the early manuscripts."[153] I believe Brown refers here to the whole phenomenon I have described, both with reference to rhythmic organization and performance practice (though these terms are not Brown's way of framing it), as well as to particular issues such as the 'Introductory E' (which MacDonald and Brown play with a shorter duration than mainstream pipers).

Regular pulses, Faster Tempos

Allan MacDonald's book contains two further critiques: he argues that mainstream pibroch demonstrates a noticeably un-Gaelic regular pulse, and that it is more often than not too slow. With regard to the first of these problems, MacDonald argues that the use of staff notation as a teaching tool—with its implied metronomic regularity—has gradually introduced a more regular, metronomic pulse than pibroch presumably had in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For MacDonald, this regularity of pulse represents a corruption of the freer, vocally informed style of pibroch performance that was part of its original development. This criticism of the mainstream style underlies the proposals in his study: to counter the tendency to regularize the pulse, and to restore the idiomatically Gaelic sense of flexible pulse (as described above), MacDonald seeks to place pibroch back in its native habitat of Gaelic speech rhythms and traditional song, where a different sense of musical time—and a different understanding of the performer's role—can still be found.

For a piping community that prides itself on its 'nonmensural' music, claiming the presence of a regular pulse is a severe criticism. In his book MacDonald does not give concrete, in-depth examples of a regular pulse in the mainstream style—as I think he would need to in order to fully substantiate his claim—but my sense in listening to mainstream performances is that he is probably correct in many cases. Aside from MacDonald's suggestion in his as yet unpublished book, I have found very little discussion in pibroch scholarship of a regular pulse in mainstream performance practice; but he is not entirely alone in having noticed this phenomenon; a fascinating account in Roderick Cannon's book on the Highland bagpipe, suggests something similar:

> The tune *The Massacre of Glencoe* is printed by the Piobaireachd Society essentially as follows:
> **EXAMPLE 3-10a**[154]

[152] Brown, "The Design of It," Part II, 47.
[153] Brown in Paterson, *Iain Dall MacKay's Chanter*.
[154] Copied from Cannon's "Ex. 4.24" (*The Highland Bagpipe*, 71).

> A piper who had learned the tune from the famous John MacDonald was anxious to convey to me a particular point of expression which MacDonald had taught, and he described it as a way of coming quickly off the third F [sharp] note in the third bar and off the third E in the fourth bar. We went over the phrase many times on the chanter, but I could not satisfy my informant until I realised that the effect was approximately as follows, in effect a switch from 4/4 to 6/4 rhythm:
>
> **EXAMPLE 3-10b**[155]
>
> My friend was familiar with the printed text, and he remembered clearly the sound of the music as he had heard it, but he was not at all concerned to relate the two.
>
> My attempt to rationalise traditional phrasing in terms of conventional time signatures would probably not be accepted by many pipers today. They would be more inclined to agree with a writer in the 1890s who argued that *cèol mór* was different from other music in the way that prose is different from poetry (quoted, C.S. Thomason, 1893, v); or with Seumas MacNeill who has written (1971) that 'any tune which has a regular swing is not piobaireachd'. I must say from my own listening, however, that the best players, while certainly adopting very free rhythms, nevertheless usually do convey something of the underlying pulse—the line, so to speak, from which they are deliberately straying.[156]

MacDonald's second critique is that the pulse in the mainstream style is not only too regular, but also too slow. Based on various accounts of early competition performances, both MacDonald argues that pibroch has gradually become slower over the course of two centuries. Part of the evidence for this comes from early prose accounts indicating that the theme was often repeated between many of the variations—in contrast to the current practice of repeating it only in part after the final variation; at a faster tempo, more frequent repetitions of the theme would be possible without causing the tune to go on for a half hour or more. The tempo difference in *I got a kiss of the King's hand*, shown in Example 3-9 by the difference in overall duration of the passage (MacDonald's 27 seconds to Nicol's 35), is tangible and in the temporally conservative environment of mainstream pibroch performance, these differences can sound drastic. But consider another advantage of a faster tempo: in Example 3-5 we saw that in the course of eleven notes there are only two accents. At a slow tempo, the two accents are too far apart for the listener to mentally relate them easily. A faster tempo brings accents closer together and in many tunes might allow for easier perception of the forward flow of the music's rhythmic organization.

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[155] From Cannon's "Ex. 4.25."
[156] Cannon, 71.

Chapter Four: A Definition of Pibroch Rhythm, and Further Directions

> Out of the West Highlands and Islands of Scotland now
> What a symphony should come, more ghastly and appalling
> Than Sibelius' gaunt El-Greco-emaciated ecstatic Fourth!
> Far beyond *Squinting Peter's Flame of Wrath*
> Or *Too Long in this Condition*
> But like the great jigs, whirling electrons of musical energy…
> Fantastic, incredible, all but impossible to human fingers.
>
> ~ Hugh MacDiarmid
> (from *Good-bye Twilight*, 1943)

This study has two main audiences: those already familiar the pibroch tradition, and those approaching it for the first time. For pipers and pibroch scholars, I have tried to address a gap in the existing scholarship by using transcriptions to examine the way rhythms are performed apart from the way they are written down. For those new to pibroch, I have sought to outline the important aspects of its rhythmic idiom in order to make it more approachable. Together, the three chapters have built an analytical language that will, I hope, allow for easier comprehension and comparison of rhythmic concepts between various perspectives. This final chapter summarizes the key terms and concepts, offering a broad definition of the way rhythm functions in pibroch and exploring some of the implications this study might have for the two groups it addresses.

The central analytical task of this study has been to separate pibroch's underlying rhythmic organization—the patterns of accented and unaccented notes and the ways they are grouped into rhythms—from the rhythmic performance practice through which those underlying structures manifest in the music we hear. By clarifying the underlying rhythmic organization of the tunes I have studied, I have tried to clarify which of the rhythms result from accentual patterns and groupings, and which from the performer's interpretation of the rhythmic structure. Following a brief summary of what we learned about each of these analytical parameters, I will present a general definition of pibroch rhythm at various architectonic levels. From among all of the terms we have encountered, both in Cooper and Meyer's analysis and in mainstream and revisionist usage, I have chosen those that seem to offer the clearest and most universally accessible meanings; these terms appear below in italics.

What We Have Learned

Rhythmic Organization: In the mainstream view, pibroch's rhythmic groupings are regular at some levels and irregular at others: different tunes have different numbers of theme notes per primary grouping, but the

number is almost always regular within each tune (usually three or four per primary grouping, often expressed as 3/4 or 4/4 meter in pibroch scores). The number of primary groupings is regular in every theme—there are always sixteen; however, the way they are grouped into lines is irregular: many tunes are divided into three lines of six, six and four, others into four lines [*quarters*] of four, and yet other divisions are not uncommon. The revisionist view, citing precedent in Gaelic song and early pibroch manuscripts, allows for different numbers of theme notes per primary grouping, but the number of primary groupings is regular: every tune has sixteen primary groupings. At larger architectonic levels, the revisionists promote a more regular line division than the mainstream: the repertory is almost universally divided into four lines of four primary groupings each. Dividing pibroch themes this way shows the interplay of multiple simultaneously overlaid structures (6,6,4 over 4,4,4,4, for example) and reveals relationships between tunes across the repertory.

Performance Practice: In mainstream piping the pulse is often irregular, but fixed—each piece has a certain pattern of durations that is remarkably consistent between different performers and different performances. But interpretations are not absolutely standard: different teachers promote minor differences in the timing of particular tunes, and within a given style some narrow latitude remains for individual interpretation. By contrast, for the revisionists pulses are intrinsically flexible and may be irregular or regular. The individual performer has a wide range of freedom depending on taste and informed by knowledge of the Gaelic idiom.

Although the distinction I have drawn between mainstream and revisionists represents a real debate within the tradition, it is nevertheless a simplification; despite differences of opinion within the piping community, it is important to emphasize that pibroch is a single tradition. There are many nuances of opinion among individuals covering many specific aspects of pibroch's history and musical substance.

A Definition of Pibroch Rhythm

Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrated the uneasy marriage of written and oral sources that has guided the performing tradition since scores were first created in the late eighteenth century. As we have seen throughout, the tradition is full of difficulties and gaps of knowledge, and many of the claims about the rhythmic organization or the performance practice of any given tune can be argued away or disproved in a number of ways. As a result, the analyst is at a loss, in most cases, to make definite claims. Anyone trying to understand the tradition, whether performer or analyst, must eventually choose a way of hearing and mentally organizing pibroch rhythm that seems to make sense both logically and musically. Based on everything I have presented, I now offer a way of understanding pibroch rhythm that to me best represents the tradition. While this can be no more than my own interpretation, it draws directly on everything I have presented in this study.

Two qualifications are in order. First, for most tunes it is difficult or impossible to know with certainty which notes correspond with categories such as 'primary accent,' 'theme note,' etc. (especially if we are trying to identify how the early composers would have understood the tune). As we saw in the bottom staff of

Example 3-5, my identification of theme notes and grace notes in *Maol Donn* was the result of mere informed guessing, and a different observer might well disagree. Second, due to pibroch's nature as a dual oral/written tradition and the conflicting nature of different written sources, the definition I offer below conceives the music apart from any form of written notation. Although for clarity I make reference to scores below, it is important to understand that terms like 'grace note' and 'line' do not refer to any notation system, but to a mental category of rhythmic unit that can be fully understood and employed without the use of a score.

Laid out from the largest to the smallest architectonic levels, I offer a unified summary of the terms and concepts I have defined in this study, incorporating both the rhythmic organization and the performance practice of pibroch:

Quarters: Every pibroch theme is divided into four roughly equal proportions, often referred to, and represented on paper, as lines (each of which is a 'system' of written music). Over this regular fourfold structure, other structures, such as 6,6,4 groupings of primary groupings, may add layer of 'structural hemiola' that can lend interest to the music.

Phrases: Each line is divided into two phrases (every pibroch has eight phrases). The quality of each phrase as either primarily consonant or dissonant against the drone determines the formal harmonic structure of a tune.

Primary groupings: Each phrase is divided into two halves, each of which is one primary grouping (equivalent to one bar in many written scores[157]). Nearly every pibroch has sixteen primary groupings. The harmonic quality (consonance or dissonance) of these groupings provide a more detailed pattern within the larger pattern of phrases that adds nuance to the overall harmonic structure.

Theme notes: Each primary grouping contains a number of theme notes (one of which is the primary accent—see below) that is regular within a given tune. Donald MacLeod's term 'pulse' is equivalent to a theme note. Each theme note corresponds to a rhythmic pulse (no pulses that do not land on a note—i.e. there is no syncopation). The timing between theme notes is often irregular, and somewhat flexible—the amount of flexibility depends on the degree to which the performer is following an accepted performance practice for a tune or, conversely, presenting his or her own freer individual interpretation, perhaps based on knowledge of the Gaelic idiom. In pibroch scores, the number of pulses in each primary grouping is supposed to correspond to the number of beats indicated by the time signature. However, teachers will often teach a different number of 'pulses' to a 'bar'—theme notes to a primary grouping—than the written notation they are using actually indicates.

Primary Accents: Each primary grouping is contains one primary accent, which falls on one (and only one) of the theme notes in that grouping. A primary accent is equivalent to a 'stress' as many pipers use the word, and is preceded, followed, or surrounded by a number of unaccented theme notes; in contrast to Cooper and

[157] A few scores (for example, *You're Welcome, Ewen* in the *Kilberry Book*) divide each phrase into four written bars, so there are two written bars for each primary grouping instead of one.

Myer's definition of rhythmic grouping, primary groupings in pibroch can contain more than two unaccented notes.

Grace notes: Intermediary, notes can occur between theme notes, often serving a decorative role; usually these less important notes are short anacruses (called 'and' notes by MacLeod) leading into a pulse, or 'echo' beats following a pulse; often a written grace-note[158] or a cluster of 'dividing notes' acts as a *grace note*, with one note of the cluster dominating (as we saw in *The Company's Lament*). Pipers would say that *grace notes* are not 'true melody notes'—which are, in my terminology, *theme notes*—though it is not always possible to distinguish which notes the early composers intended to be essential parts of the melody and which served as *grace notes*.

Dividing Notes: I have omitted these from the analysis, apart from a brief mention. Pipe music is full of extremely short notes, usually written as eighth or sixteenth value grace notes (in the notated sense), that serve either to divide two iterations of the same pitch (since tonguing and other articulation cannot be accomplished on the pipes) or to emphasize a transition from one note to another. These notes also serve, in clusters, as ornaments. Such clusters can act as 'grace notes' in the way I have defined it above—but individual 'dividing notes' take up almost no perceivable rhythmic time—one hundredth of a second or less—that I have not included them as part of this definition.

The tradition as a whole shares two other important concepts of rhythm that have not been a central part of my analysis but that must be mentioned. First, pipers and scholars rarely mention feeling a sense of rhythmic ambiguity as I have described it in Chapter 1 (and, as we'll see, in Chapter 3). Secondly, for its practitioners there is no syncopation: every note either lands on a pulse, or acts as an anacrusis or echo note to a pulse.

It is important to reiterate that this definition of pibroch rhythm describes *only* the theme (which pipers call the urlar (literally 'floor' in Gaelic) or ground of a tune). The pitch structure of a given theme—i.e. the outline formed by the theme notes—is usually repeated in each variation with ornaments added.[159]

Implications for the Pibroch Community

How might this study be useful to pipers and scholars? It should be clear from this study that scholars have already accomplished a great deal in the analysis of pibroch rhythm, especially with regard to the formal structures that make up its large-scale rhythmic organization. Nevertheless, I believe more could be done with pibroch rhythm, especially at smaller, note-to-note architectonic levels. Following Cooper and Meyer's way of identifying rhythmic groupings and accents, a thoroughgoing analysis of many tunes across the repertory could identify types of rhythmic organization that predominate in pibroch. For example, inverted

[158] When reading scores it is important to understand that many notes written as 'grace-notes' are actually dividing notes rather than *grace notes* as I formally define it for pibroch here.

[159] Often, theme notes repeat in each variation, with the grace notes removed and replaced by ornaments. In each subsequent variation the ornaments become increasingly complex. The nature and sequence of ornaments is standardized, and each variation is referred to by the name of its ornament.

trochees—the 'Scotch snap'—appear frequently (this perhaps unsurprising); it is likely that a broad survey across many tunes, using the kind of transcriptions and analysis of rhythmic organization I have presented here, would reveal other trends and interrelationships that would deepen our understanding of pibroch rhythm.

Meanwhile, pibroch's rhythmic performance practice has not been analyzed thoroughly in its own right. Allan MacDonald's analysis of Gaelic song rhythms and pibroch (see Chapter 3) goes much further in this direction than any other study I am aware of, and his proposal of a performance practice more attuned to Gaelic vocal rhythms accomplishes a great deal. But MacDonald addresses his thesis more to the practical concerns of performing pipers than to those who approach the music primarily as listeners or analysts (though of course much of his audience is probably both). A listener-oriented analysis of the kind I have begun here—using recorded performances of many pibroch tunes spanning the repertory, supported by detailed transcriptions—might reveal further insights into the rhythmic idiom that makes pibroch so distinctive.[160] Full-scale analyses of rhythmic organization and performance practice for well over three hundred tunes would require lengthy studies in themselves, and so I am content here to merely suggest these possibilities.

In their claims about pibroch's past, all of the scholars and teachers I have cited rely to varying degrees on informed guesses rather than absolute certainty; it goes without saying that we can simply never know how this music actually sounded in 1700. Therefore, as many pipers and scholars are well aware, the debate between mainstream and revisionist is not really about pibroch's past, but about where pibroch is going as it moves into the twenty-first century: will the pibroch community continue to follow views of pibroch inherited from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, or will it accept and incorporate new information gathered from careful research about its earlier past? Will pibroch continue to exist almost entirely within a closed circle of piping competitions, or will it participate as an active, vibrant musical genre within the wider intermingling of world music traditions? As the pibroch tradition finds its way forward, its richly layered blend of researched historical evidence and sentimentalized mythology should continue; but pipers must also fully embrace what the music has become in the course of its two-hundred year entanglement with written notation: today, pibroch is a thorough and permanent blend of oral and written traditions.

Implications for Creative Musicians Beyond the Pibroch Tradition

While I hope this study will be of interest to non-pipers of every kind—ethnomusicologists, music historians, theorists, and performers alike—I will close the study by addressing composers in particular. As a composer, I have been inspired and instructed by my experience with pibroch, and I offer this study in hopes of

[160] Creating systematic transcriptions and making universal claims about the flexible performance practice MacDonald proposes could be problematic, since they might seem to impinge on the performer's prerogative. Systematic analysis might apply better to the mainstream style in which durations are more consistent from one performer (and performance) to the next.

encouraging new creative uses of pibroch: in what ways can this music provide a source for musical ideas? Of course, the whole study has been creatively motivated to a great extent; and I hope that the previous chapters provided interesting creative insights in themselves. But in this final part I will no longer ask whether a particular idea about pibroch's musical substance is 'true' according to the pibroch tradition—that was the concern of Chapters 2 and 3. I am now interested in any musical idea that seems *interesting,* creatively speaking—even one that results from only a passing impression, or even one that is downright 'wrong' from an informed piper's perspective. Having presented pibroch's rhythmic idiom in a scholarly mode, it is now time to take a freer approach.

Weightlessness: Rhythmic Ambiguity in Pibroch

To begin, I offer my own way of hearing pibroch rhythm, ignoring much of what I have learned and instead thinking purely as a free-associating, creatively-oriented listener. To me, much pibroch—especially as it manifests in the relatively fixed rhythmic style of most mainstream pipers[161]—can be heard in sequences of short rhythmic units in which two or three notes at a time temporarily establish a regular, metronomically precise pulse. Each short series of pulses is soon replaced by another pulse in a different tempo, and then another, and so on—creating a constantly shifting and endlessly restless rhythmic fabric. As an example, let us listen again to Donald MacPherson's performance of *Maol Donn* in Audio Sample 11. The kind of shifting sequences of regular pulses I describe can be heard in the first five notes of the theme.[162]

see *AUDIO SAMPLE 11*

The first three notes set up a regular triple meter: quarter note, eighth note, quarter. The short duration of the following B causes the C-sharp to come sooner than the listener expects, given the tempo of the regular pulse that was established in the first three notes. As the phrase goes on, the music continually sets up such expectations of regularity for the ear, and then minute adjustments in the timing of notes (cutting a note short or holding it just a bit longer than the listener expects) repeatedly throw off those expectations. As one composer I spoke to put it, the music continually seems to 'sabotage' the anticipations it sets up.

The tendency of the music to deny the listener's expectations causes a great deal of rhythmic ambiguity. In Chapter 1 I distinguished between two types. The first results from uncertainty of grouping: the pattern of accented and unaccented notes is unambiguous, but the listener is unsure which unaccented notes belong with which accented ones. This kind of ambiguity is only mildly disruptive to the overall flow of the music—in other words, the listener is easily able to adjust to this kind of ambiguity and may not even notice it. The second type results from uncertainty of accent: the listener is unsure whether or not a particular note is accented. Such ambiguity tends to be more disruptive (and often more interesting), confusing the listener's

[161] I focus on the mainstream performance style rather than on the performance style promoted by the revisionists, which is more rhythmically flexible. It seems antithetical to the revisionist viewpoint to codify their playing in the way I attempt here.

[162] Example 4-1 is intended, as the previous transcriptions have been, as a purely descriptive rendition of how I hear a recorded performance, rather than a prescriptive 'score' to be performed from.

sense of the underlying rhythmic organization. When I listen to pibroch I find rhythmic ambiguity everywhere, of both kinds.[163] The music rarely settles into the predictable grooves it keeps suggesting, seeming always to evade a simple interpretation The ear can never rest but is always carried forward. To me, the effect is weightlessness. A beautiful tune that I have not yet discussed in this study, *Ronald MacDonald of Morar's Lament*, may help to show the kind of ambiguity I hear in the music.

AUDIO SAMPLE 18

EXAMPLE 4-1

Listeners other than myself will hear the tune—and pibroch in general—differently than I present it here, perhaps with lesser—or greater—degrees of ambiguity, perhaps with varying degrees of syncopation, or perhaps in some other way I have not heard myself. The written representation of Example 4-1 must be understood not as a prescriptive guide to listening (and certainly not to performance), but merely as one further perspective, alongside those of pipers and scholars offered in Chapters 2 and 3, meant to invite the listener more deeply into this music.

Beyond the Bagpipes

The process of applying what we have learned about pibroch rhythm to other instruments presents practical problems for the composer: how might the subtle ambiguities of pibroch's surface-level rhythms, learned by ear by pipers within an oral tradition, transfer to performers trained outside that tradition? Since most composers in the classical tradition rely on written notation to communicate their rhythmic intentions precisely, the minute nuances of pibroch's performed rhythms must pass through notation—as it is used an understood by classical musicians (as opposed to the looser way in which pipers use and understand it)—on their way to the classical performer.

To show how this process might affect the end-result, I offer pibroch tunes that have been written in conventional notation as part of classical compositions, and then played by classical musicians unfamiliar with the pibroch idiom. Each example presents a recording of the original pibroch performed on the pipes, with a precise transcription; followed by a score created by the composer, representing the composer's interpretation of the pibroch melody. A recording of the composer's score as performed by classical musicians, shows the result. Both pibroch tunes are familiar from Chapter 3. The first is an arrangement I made of the tune *I got a kiss of the King's hand*, and the second is from a piano concerto based on our familiar *Maol Donn*, written by twentieth-century Scottish composer Erik Chisholm.

I got a Kiss of the King's hand, arr. Robinson McClellan

In early 2004 I had recently heard pibroch for the first time. I had immediately fallen in love with the music

[163] Allan MacDonald points out that "when there is no poetic text [corresponding to a particular pibroch], an identification of stress positions will remain a moot point. This is not necessarily a failing and may actually contribute to the richness of a piece" (MacDonald, *Gaelic Song and Pibroch*, 62). Though he refers to the way song rhythms can help us define the rhythmic organization of pibroch, he may be noting something akin to the ambiguity I hear.

and soon began to think about using it in some way in my own compositions. Despite having little background knowledge at the time beyond what I could hear on recordings I found at Tower Records, I set out simply to make an arrangement of a tune I liked (fortunately I did know that scores did not reflect performed rhythms, and therefore used a recording rather than a score as my source). I settled on Robert Nicol's recording of *I got a kiss of the King's hand* that we heard in Chapter 3 (I had not yet heard Allan MacDonald's rendition) and arranged it for three oboes, English horn and drone. I wanted to evoke the original without simply copying it, and my procedure was simple: I transcribed the theme of the tune, presented my transcription (shortened for practical reasons) as the theme of my arrangement, and then subjected it to a series of variations of my own invention, based generally on the sound of pibroch variations—thus following pibroch's theme and variation format but not mimicking it exactly. Example 4-3 shows only the opening passage, which is merely my transcription of the first part of the theme of this pibroch, distributed between the four instruments.

see *AUDIO SAMPLE 15*

see EXAMPLE 3-9a

AUDIO SAMPLE 19

EXAMPLE 4-2

Maol Donn in Erik Chisholm's Piano Concerto No. 1 'Piobaireachd,' movt. I

The second example returns to the tune that has guided us through this study: Erik Chisholm's *Piano Concerto No. 1 "Piobaireachd"* of 1938 borrows *Maol Donn* as the theme for its first movement. Chisholm (1904-1965) was a fascinating figure in twentieth-century music, and requires an entire study in his own right.[164] He was a leading figure in Scotland's classical music circles, and organized important premieres and other musical activities (on two occasions he invited Béla Bartók to Glasgow for performances[165]). Chisholm was an accomplished pianist and composer, and produced a large body of work; all of it shows considerable technical mastery and much of it is very beautiful. Being a pianist, his output is dominated by piano works, including this concerto (Appendix 3 includes a full listing of his pibroch-related works). In addition to his interest in pibroch, he studied Hindustani music and the music of Czech composer Leoš Janáček. Chisholm left Scotland in the 1930s and spent the rest of his life teaching in South Africa.

Chisholm's *Piano Concerto No. 1 'Piobaireachd'* borrows from *Maol Donn* in the first of its four movements. Unfortunately I am not familiar with the extent of Chisholm's research in pibroch or the ways he approached and understood its rhythm. It is likely that he derived his rhythm not from performances but

[164] John Purse is undertaking in-depth research on Chisholm's life and work.

[165] Béla Bartók stayed at Chisholm's home during his visit. On one of these visits, Chisholm introduced pibroch to Bartók, who apparently took an interest in it and purchased pibroch scores (Malcolm Gillies in *Bartok in Britain*). Two of the scores Bartók took home are still in his archives in Budapest: Logan's *Complete tutor for the highland bagpipe and a selection of marches* (Paterson, n.d.) and David Glen's *A collection of ancient piobaireachd* (Glen, n.d.) (according to an e-mail message to R. McClellan from László Vikárius at the Budapest Bartók archive, 23 February, 2007). Bartók also heard a pipe performance during his stay that presumably, though not certainly, included pibroch. If he did not hear pibroch performed, we have seen how little the scores he bought would have helped him to understand its rhythmic idiom.

from David Glen's *A Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd* (1899), with which he was almost certainly familiar (Chisholm apparently recommended Glen's collection to Bartók, who purchased it during a visit with Chisholm in Glasgow in the 1930s—see footnote above): Chisholm's rendition in the opening oboe solo in his concerto closely resembles Glen's version (compare the oboe in Example 4-3 with 2-13d; the only departure in Chisholm's version is in the change of the initial E from a grace note to an eighth). If, alternatively, he based his version on performance, it seems likely that he would have heard performances of the tune that resembled that of John MacDonald, a leading performer and teacher of the time. As we saw in Chapter 2, MacDonald's rendition was described by Peter Cooke in Chapter 2 as falling roughly into a 6/8 pattern—much like the performance by Donald MacPherson's I have analyzed here—it therefore seems less likely that Chisholm relied on performed rhythms. In any case, Example 4-3 shows Chisholm's interpretation of *Maol Donn's* theme, first in the oboe and then, beginning with 'Phrase 0,' in the piano at rehearsal A on page 2 of the score.

see *AUDIO SAMPLE 11*

see EXAMPLE 1-1

AUDIO SAMPLE 20

EXAMPLE 4-3

In these examples, what aspects of the original rhythmic idiom are preserved? What part of the feeling of the music is lost? I do not mean to suggest that a loss of something of the original should be avoided—I believe that in the process of musical borrowing and cross-pollination, much is inevitably lost, and that this is acceptable as long as the original source—the pibroch tradition as it is practiced by pipers—can continue unfettered on its own terms. With our conscience thus assuaged, we can then also ask: what has been gained in the journey of this music from pibroch performer, to listening composer, to paper, to classical performer, and finally to the listening audience of this new creation?

Beyond Rhythm: Borrowing from 'Non-Western' Music

The examples from my oboe piece and Erik Chisholm's concerto show some of the ways pibroch rhythms might be transformed in the process of being adapted outside the pibroch genre. But the examples represent only the thinnest slice from the vast realm of possibilities open to a composer interested in pibroch. There is much more that one could do with rhythm, both at the surface level of performed rhythms and with rhythm at the larger architectonic levels we explored in Chapters 2 and 3—pibroch's formal structures. And there is even more that one could do with other aspects of pibroch beyond rhythm. I will not attempt to account for all of the possibilities; exploration of this phenomenal music is best left to composers whose collective ingenuity will bring possibilities I could never summarize. But it will be helpful to place my creative, acquisitive approach to pibroch in the wider context of composers who have undertaken analogous kinds of 'borrowing' from traditions outside their own. In this study I have treated pibroch as a 'non-Western' music,

akin to Hindustani music or the Armenian Duduk to the extent that it lies outside the classical tradition as it is taught to conservatory students today. It is not difficult to identify a few broad categories among the many ways composers have found to draw ideas from every imaginable 'non-Western' music through the centuries.

At the most immediate level, composers often borrow musical material (melodies, rhythms, harmonies) with little deliberate alteration, resulting in arrangements of the original material—like the two examples above. Even more directly, others have electronically incorporated existing recordings into their compositions—for example, the Kronos Quartet incorporated an existing recording of a Mexican street musician performing on the musical leaf, adding their own electronically enhanced string quartet music.[166] Frequently, composers use "indigenous" instruments in Western ensembles—there are many bagpipe-with-orchestra works—or they use Western instruments in non-western styles and ensembles; the Silk Road Project makes much of both of these possibilities.[167] Others create original musical material that seeks to imitate or evoke non-Western music; Sibelius is known for his made-up folk melodies, and Stravinsky claims to have followed a similar procedure in many of his 'Russian' works.

By contrast, others have sought more profound encounters with the music they want to draw from. As Ryan Howard points out in his study of African and Asian rhythmic idioms on American minimalists, Steve Reich is well known for promoting this deeper approach, writing that

> One can study the rhythmic structure of non-Western music and let that study lead one where it will, while continuing to use the instruments [and] scales…one has grown up with. This brings about the interesting situation of the non-Western influence being there in the thinking, but not in the sound…instead of imitation, the influence of non-Western musical structures on the thinking of a Western composer is likely to produce something genuinely new.[168]

Ultimately I hope composers will not constrain themselves by categorical preference for one kind of influence over another. Whether the influence is in the 'thinking' or in the 'sound,' no single approach necessarily leads to a better musical result. In his introduction to the collection of world music studies I cited in the introduction, Michael Tenzer offers a beautiful summation of this point:

> It is music's nature to fuse, recombine, and proliferate like genes. Musicians and composers, witting or unwitting, acting independently or constrained by beliefs and institutions, are the matchmakers in these reproductive sonic trysts…
>
> The courtship that produced rumba was centuries long. Our accelerated era is wholly different from old Cuba's slow hotbed of West African and Spanish entwinement. That pace seems if anything luxurious in today's landscape. By comparison, contemporary music fusions are often like quick and casual arrangements, mail order bride services, or Las Vegas honeymoons, any of which may or may not work out in the end. A jazz trio fronted by koto, Gambian kora with string quartet, an orchestral work modeled on North Indian musical form, gamelan with electronica for *manga* sountrack, the proverbial sitar in the rock band—these are all post-late-twentieth-century alchemies arching across histories and cultures and designed by peripatetic musical geneticists. We become inured to such juxtapositions and the resulting hybrids, until recently felt to be radically novel, are common.
>
> These comments…are not intended as criticisms of the creators, whose actions as fusionists may range from inspired pilfering based on brief acquaintance to careful planning supported by years of immersion and reflection. *Neither way guarantees better music: mishearing can be as creatively productive as intensive engagement*, and it is unwise to argue for one or the other approach…The key realization is that the

[166] Kronos Quartet, *Nuevo*, Nonesuch, 2002.
[167] See www.silkroadproject.org (accessed 26 March, 2007).
[168] Reich, *Writings on Music,* 71.

> proliferation proceeds apace with tremendous energy and *it requires sympathetic consideration not just to try to understand it, but to participate.*" (italics mine)[169]

I hope readers with a creative interest in pibroch will draw their own conclusions about the aspects of this music they find most intriguing. As I hope this study has demonstrated, I believe in understanding new things as deeply as possible, and an important goal of this paper has been to present as full and as accurate a picture of pibroch's inner workings as I could.[170] But most importantly, I present this astonishing music to you in hopes that some productive inspiration, whether from a 'mishearing' or a 'genuine' one, might come of the encounter.

> If you get involved too much, and start thinking about piobaireachd too much, you could end up going off your head!
>
> ~ Willie Ross, c. 1950
> (*Piper and Drummer Magazine,* 1995)

[169] Tenzer, *Analytical Studies in World Music*, 17-18.

[170] Despite the effort I have made to understand pibroch deeply, my three years studying it probably constitutes more of a Las Vegas honeymoon than a profound courtship. I hope it will become more profound in the years ahead.

LIST 1: A Few Other Interesting Aspects of Pibroch from a Compositional Perspective

- Pibroch's overall aesthetic of understatement/emotional restraint over profound feeling.

- Timbre of the Highland Bagpipes: the clean, bright, ringing quality; the sense of forward movement in each tone due to shifting crisscrossing harmonics; also pitches as related to harmonic series. (John Purser recommends the work of acoustician Murry Campbell at Edinburgh University; also see Baines).

- The Highland pipes' sharp timbral and dynamic contrast between its high and low register causes its range, a major ninth, to seem wider than it 'really' is.

- Each pitch is a complete associative universe unto itself, with names such as 'the note of love,' etc. (see Roderick Cannon's *The Highland Bagpipe and its Music,* p. 43). Also consider the eighteenth-century conception of each sonority, or combination of pitches/harmonies in a melody, as a 'taste' (cite Joseph MacDonald).

- How does the drone fit in? Because of the continuous drone, each pitch is more correctly thought of as a diad rather than as a single note, and as a distinct harmony: this is the bagpipe's harmonic language. Also see the 'bimodalism' of Welsh harp *mesurs*. Interestingly, some tunes focus so heavily on a note one step apart from the drone that the drone itself begins to sound like the dissonant 'secondary' pitch.

- Following research by musicologists John Purser and Ann Buckley: possible connections between the sectional structure of both pibroch and Welsh harp music, and the 'cellular' melodic form found in early medieval Irish and Scottish plainchant. (see Purser's book on the Inchcholm Antiphoner—and google "Incholm" for jpgs online). There is the possibility of the pitch sequences of the variations being a 'cantus firmus'—perhaps derived from Roman Catholic or ancient Celtic Church chants (see connections with tunes: *Dastirum* and *The Big Spree* (and the other two *Sprees*).

- One could create complex notated ensemble music that is easily memorizable, using similar structures to pibroch's. See Parry and Lord's *The Singer of Tales,* Treitler, etc.

- Formulaic rhythms of pibroch variations, within patterns, giving rise to rhythmic alternation/ displacement (as in the *crunluath a mach* variation).

LIST 2: PIBROCH-RELATED WORKS IN THE CLASSICAL LITERATURE

An incomplete survey of pibroch-related works of composers in the Western classical tradition. The selection is based on simple criteria: for each work listed, the composer evoked pibroch or used it as an inspiration in some way. The list is also limited simply by the fact that there are almost certainly more works I have not found yet. Many thanks to John Purser for helping me to make this list as complete as it is (there are many more works out there!). Many of these scores are held at the Scottish Music Center.

- Sally Beamish:
  - Symphony No 1
  - Piobaireachd for violin, cello and piano
  - Lost Pibroch
  - Max's Pibroch
- Erik Chisholm:
  - Piano Concerto No 1 'Piobaireachd'
  - Pibroch Sonatina
  - Two Piobaireachd Laments for piano
  - Piobaireachd for Piano
  - Airs from the Patrick MacDonald Collection
  - Sonata in A (An Rioban Dearg)
  - Pictures from Dante (ballet)
- Ann Heymann:
  - Lament for the Harp for harp
- Christopher Hobbs:
  - McCrimmon (*sic*) Will Never Return, for electronically altered instruments
- Laurence Hughes:
  - A Flame of Wrath, for orchestra
- David Johnson:
  - Piobaireachd for solo treble recorder
- Melinda Maxwell:
  - Pibroch: for oboe and drone
- Robinson McClellan:
  - Beware the Sasannach! for concert band
  - Farewell MacCrimmon for SSA or SAB choir
  - I got a kiss of the King's hand for 3 oboes English horn, and drone
  - Organ Mass, for organ
- Edward McGuire:
  - Calgacus for bagpipes and orchestra
- Tony McManus:
  - Bantock
- Chris Norman:
  - The Duke of Athol's March

- Andrew Peggie:
  - Piobaireachd for solo clarinet
- John Purser:
  - Piobaireachd for solo flute
  - Stone of Destiny
- Bonnie Rideout:
  - Kindred Spirits for fiddle
- FG Scott:
  - St. Brendan's Graveyard for soprano and piano
- William Sweeney:
  - Nine Days for clarinets
  - An Rathad Ur (saxophone concerto)
- Matthew Welch:
  - Siubhal Turnlar for string quartet
  - The Self and the Other
  - Cherede Otroenhe

Other composers who (as far as I know) have taken an interest in pibroch:

- Julian Anderson
- Pierre Boulez
- Ronald Stevenson
- Judith Weir

LIST 3: Track Listing for Accompanying CD

Most of these recordings have been used without permission of the publishers or performers (with the exception of the Donald MacPherson recordings). All examples are performed on the Highland Bagpipes except where noted. All tracks are excerpts of the original recordings, except where noted. Each line shows: track number, title, performer, track duration.

To purchase these recordings, visit:
Siubhal.com/shop (for Donald MacPherson)
AllCelticMusic.com
MusicScotland.com

1. Lament for Patrick Og MacCrimmon – Greg Wilson *(full track)*	12:22
2. Maol Donn – Donald MacPherson	0:39
3. Lesson 2: The Company's Lament – Angus MacLellan and Robert Wallace	1:38
4. The Big Spree – MacPherson	0:19
5. The Big Spree – William McCallum	0:20
6. The Big Spree – Robert Nicol	0:23
7. The Big Spree – Donald MacLeod, sung	0:31
8. Black Donald's March – MacLeod	2:03
9. Maol Donn – MacLeod, sung	1:07
10. Maol Donn – MacLeod, practice chanter	0:44
11. Maol Donn (whole theme) – MacPherson	1:35
12. Thig Tri Nithean Gun Iarraidh – Flora MacNeil, sung	0.57
13. Walsall (text: Psalm 13) – Gaelic Psalms from the Isle of Lewis	0:35
14. Fhuair Mi Pòg – Allan MacDonald (pipes) and Margaret Stewart (voice)	1:32
15. I Got A Kiss of the King's hand – Nicol	0:38
16. I Got A Kiss of the King's hand/Fhuair mi Pòg – MacDonald	0:29
17. I Got A Kiss of the King's hand – MacDonald	0:28
18. Ronald MacDonald Of Morar's Lament (theme) – Alasdair Gillies	1:52
19. Robinson McClellan: I got a kiss of the King's hand, oboes and English horn	1:27
20. Erik Chisholm: Piano Concerto No. 1, Movt. I – Murray McLachlan *(full track)*	13:15

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