

## CEOL MOR.

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### RHYTHM IN SECTIONS.

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If we are ever to make any progress in CEOL MOR playing, it seems necessary to finally deal with the absurd dogma that what is commonly spoken of as the "Piobaireachd" is the music of prose and not that of poetry. To the more intelligent pipers, who have been carefully following the progress of events in the last decade, recurrence to this theme may seem very much like whipping a dead horse; but, only very recently I have heard this very lame argument for bad music used, and it is high time it and its users should be relegated to their proper places as guides to the rising generation of Pipers.

I know that a good few look upon what I have published in CEOL MOR book as my music and therefore a safe butt. In fact I am accused of *fudging* my records into poetic form. To all such critics I would simply recommend the experiment of taking any four lines of prose and converting them into poetry of the same length with as little alteration as in a corrected piece of CEOL MOR. If they succeed, they will have proved themselves cleverer and more entitled to a hearing than I have given them credit for.

If the music were not that of poetry it could never have been restored to its old form with any pretensions to accuracy, and still less in the regular rhythmic form shown in the accompanying Index.

Let us first consider what constitutes a "Section." I have shown in my analysis of metres at the end of the letterpress descriptive of the new Notation, that with two unimportant exceptions the metres in CEOL MOR prove to be one of the three following, viz. :—Equal barred of two or four lines; three lined of metre 3,3,2, and three lined of 2,3,2 metre.

I know of no absolute rule for determining the number of bars in each section of an equal barred air, but a very little study will show that two or four is generally the number throughout each measure.

In the case of a three lined air it will be found that the figures representing the metre in bars, if divided by 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5, as the case may be, will give us a result of 3,3,2, or 2,3,2, and this divisor will be the number of bars in each section. Thus in "The Laggan Salute," page 9, we find that the bar metre 15,15,10 divided by 5 gives us 3,3,2, therefore 5 bars constitute a section. Again, in "Lord Lovat's Lament," page 198, the bar metre 8,12,8 divided by 4 gives us 2,3,2, and 4 as the number of bars per section—and so on. In "The Little Spree," page 104, we find in the Section column AAB-A, Cb, B-AB. The "Cb" between commas means that the section C is very like, but not the same as section B.

A colon after a line means that the line should be repeated. Thus AB: means AB-AB.

If we refer to pp,iv of my Introduction to CEOL MOR, we will find there a distinct challenge to me by a "recitationalist"—if we may so call him—to write down the music of "You're drunk and had better sleep" from any one's playing. To this I may now reply that, without difficulty, I took down what I have given from D. MacKay's playing. Again, the same opponent says:—"You might as well attempt to give the scansion of a passage in Demosthenes or Cicero as the ground of a Piobaireachd." Well, I have in the Section column of this Index given the scansion, not only of the air named but also of nearly 300 others forming the collection.

So much for the Recitationalist of whom I hope we have now heard the last. He has done an incalculable amount of mischief in his day. The piper who now plays unscannable Ceol Mor music on a public platform should be turned off without mercy. He is a far greater sinner than the perpetrator of countless "chokes" and "screechs."

It will be found that in very many, if not in most airs, the Section is capable of a similar subdivision into two phrases. I am not sufficiently versed in the theory of music to be able to define with accuracy the terms "Section" and "Phrase," but I think "I got a kiss of the King's hand" affords a good illustration of what represents these two terms in my mind, and will serve to show how absolutely essential as a revising editor I have found them.

The metre of "I got a kiss of the King's hand," given in bars is 12,12,8, and in sections ABC-BDC-BE. The music of the "Urlar" given by A. MacKay is, I believe, quite correct, but when we come to the first variation we find the metre to be 11,12,8. There is evidently a bar missing in the first line, but what is the bar? Analysing the first section of the "Urlar" we can distinctly trace two phrases in it, each phrase consisting of two bars, the first of which bars is identical in both phrases, and

it should be the same in the variation, but the third bar is wanting. If, therefore, at this point we insert the first bar, we shall get the metre correct, otherwise we ought to find ourselves in the quandary of a man losing step in a marching column.

To illustrate the value of sectional division, "Lord Lovat's Lament," page 198, furnishes a good example. I have never heard this played, and my appeals to piper friends for correction met with no success; but a record of D. Cameron's correction of the first two lines, as given to me by D. MacKay, saved us. D. MacKay could not remember the correction for the third line and I had given up the air as lost. The corrections, as far as I had them, gave me a metre of 8,12,4, which left a deficiency of 4 bars in the last line to bring it into the 2,3,2 category. To discover the four missing bars I carefully studied the third lines of all the three line airs in my collection with the following result. Out of 189 pieces thus studied I found in 99 the first section of the third line the same as in the first line, in 38 more this was approximately the case, and in 44 the first and third lines did not conform at all. Under these circumstances I determined to supply my deficiency from the first line, and was not a little surprised when I began dealing with the Taorluath that A. MacKay had supplied half the deficiency, and from the same source. So I have every reason to be satisfied with that correction.

It was only the application of the sectional test that enabled me to eliminate a superfluous bar from each of the three lines of "The Cameron's Gathering."

Again it was the application of the sectional test that, in the case of "Donald Duaghal MacKay's Lament" proved MacKay wrong and D. Cameron right—as to sections,—as the latter always has shown himself in all his corrections that I have recorded. And yet D. Cameron was as innocent of sections and phrases as I was when I began my labours on Ceol Mor. It is, in fact, the old story over again of Hadyn, the great master of harmony and counterpoint, who had no scientific knowledge whatever of music, and still never went wrong; and so it probably was with our old composers of Ceol Mor.

It is a great mistake to suppose that Ceol Mor, as the production of uneducated Highlanders long ago, must be barbarous and unscientific. Those forebears of ours composed airs which pleased them, which was quite sufficient for them; and it is wonderful how true their musical instincts prove to have been, now that scientific tests can be applied to their work. For instance,—Why are B and the low G cut from D, when feasible? Why is there no double echo on C? Whence the peculiarity of the first repeats of Leumluath, Taorluath and Crunluath beats on D, and so on, *ad infinitum*. There are scientific answers to these, and a host of similar questions, and still these composers had not the ghost of science in them,—no more than Hadyn had. They succeeded in pleasing, but they couldn't tell why, and it is only the progress of science in the last century which has disclosed this secret.

It is wonderful how many minute refinements are discoverable in Ceol Mor which were introduced by the composers instinctively (as it were), the neglect of which pass unnoticed by players of the present day. The reason probably being that Ceol Mor is not now the national music of the Highlands that it once was. It is constant practice alone that retains the sensitiveness of the ear, as any piper may easily know by not handling his pipes for a year, or even for six months, and then beginning tuning them. A piano tuner once told me that after a six months' rest he felt as if he had to begin his apprenticeship again.

I have diverged from my main argument so far to point out that Ceol Mor is in every respect subject to the ordinary laws of music. The dawn of music was rhythm, when the savage began drumming; next came melody, probably with some reed instrument, and finally harmony with some improved instrument. Every piper bows to the importance of harmony as he tunes his pipes;—as to melody, he shakes his head knowingly at the slightest divergence from what he considers the correct grace notes, one or all, of a pipe turn; but as to rhythm—the foundation of the whole structure—he is as ignorant as the babe unborn. The simple Taroo in the depths of the Terai jungles of Northern India, or the wild Bheels in the jungles of Central India,—as a pretty extensive experience of camp life in those parts convinces me—could give points to 19 out of 20 pipers that we see competing for Pìobaireachd at our Highland Games, otherwise, why has the absence of so many missing bars remained so long undetected?

The sight is a familiar one at every Gathering when we see the would be champion piper descending from the platform with a smiling face, conscious of "having made no mistakes," and of having played exactly as he was taught by his father or by Donald Bain, and proud, above all, of the Trebling of his Cruiluath. After all this, when he has failed in getting a prize, he launches out into untold abuse of the judges, whom he accuses of partiality, prejudice, ignorance, and so on to the end of the chapter. He has not the faintest idea that he left out, perhaps, bar after bar, thereby playing havoc with everything pertaining to rhythm, and making his whole performance as void of sense and reason as it is of rhythm. From this blunder at least the "Section" column of the Index will save him, if he will take the trouble of studying it, and not throwing it aside as a stupid, new fangled idea.

- It will also enable him to cultivate his taste with advantage in studying the meanings in the playing of masters of the art to whom he may be fortunate enough to get access; and eventually it will help him in giving a meaning of his own. It must be borne in mind, however, that the piper has not the advantage of distinctions of "piano" and "forte" in his instrument. He can only give such expressions to a limited extent by changing his position with reference to his audience, by advancing, retiring, or

going round a corner as may be necessary. For expression it is chiefly on his pauses that he must rely, not necessarily on all that he may find in *Cool Mor* book, as many of these are only impressions of my own feelings, which may differ from his. As a rule, we may suppose every section to be marked by a pause of greater or less extent; but this rule must not be slavishly followed or we may get a sing-song style as painful as that heard in the reading of poetry by those who are not adepts. Such pauses are found essential to *Ceol Mor*—hence the frequent grace note cadences; and it is in the management of his pauses (almost entirely) that a piper can show his taste. He should, in fact, treat his *Piobaireachd* as a song, giving point with his pauses (in which he must not omit unwritten ones, generally the dues of sections),—even for this purpose temporarily quickening or slowing his time, but always of set purpose, and reverting to the ordinary as soon as the object of such exceptional departures from rule shall have been attained. Every player must recognise the advantage of having the construction of his music placed so distinctly before him in sections, not to mention the recommendation due to them as aids to memory.

C.S.T.

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