

Why can't you dance to the piper?

Patricia H. Ballantyne

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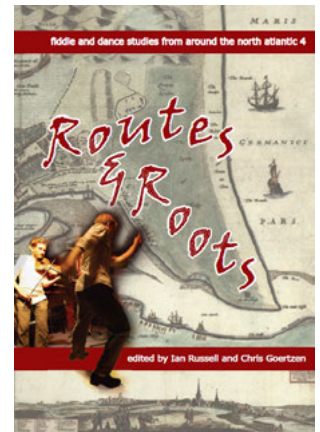
Routes and Roots

Fiddle and Dance Studies from around the North Atlantic 4

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Why can't you dance to the piper?

PATRICIA H. BALLANTYNE

In this paper, I shall consider the question of why it can be difficult to dance to bagpipe music, and will examine the effectiveness of recent initiatives to bring dance and music closer together in Scotland, from a dancer's perspective. Piping and Highland dancing have been inextricably linked since at least the beginning of the nineteenth century with the establishment of the early piping and dancing competitions. As an instrument for dancing to, the Great Highland Bagpipe has immense power and can cut through the rowdiest of crowds, unlike the fiddle, which does not have the same natural amplification. When the dance music is played with the right tempo, a strong and steady pulse, and is entirely suited to the dance being performed, whether a solo or a group dance, the bagpipe is capable of stirring the most reluctant dancer into taking part.

A large part of the body of pipe music is dance music, but the way in which this music is played currently means that it is not always easy to dance to it. There is a strong competition culture in bagpipe music today, such that the prevailing ethic is that training for and taking part in piping competitions promotes technical excellence. This is the route that many pipers tend to follow during the course of their musical development. It is not uncommon for competition pipers, who have a great technical command of their instrument, to stretch the pulse of the music. This allows the player time to insert the many, multi-note gracings and ornaments that characterize Scottish pipe music. This elastic pulse, combined with slow musical speeds of playing what was originally dance music, means that competitive pipe music has become so stylised that it has become increasingly difficult to dance to. This applies to any form of Scottish dancing other than the highly specialized competitive Highland dancing. Ask any competition piper if there is a connection between piping and dance, and the response will be an emphatic 'yes'; but why should the competition piper believe this when the evidence appears to point to the contrary?

The dance tunes, commonly known by pipers as *ceòl beag*, or 'light music', comprise mainly of marches, strathspeys, reels, jigs, and hornpipes. These are all used for social dances in Scotland. If the link between the dancing and piping

traditions is weak then the long-standing cultural connection between much of our dance and its associated music is in danger of breaking. But why should this be the case? As a dancer myself, I am particularly interested in this problem.¹ In researching this paper, I have spoken to a number of prominent pipers, all trained in the conventional competition style of playing, each of whom has a different view of the problem.

Background

In 1805, Francis Peacock, the official dancing master employed by the town of Aberdeen, wrote that certain 'Scotch Reel' dance steps were 'best adapted to those lively tunes to which they gave birth'.² This concept of lively steps fitting lively music lasted well into the twentieth century until the influence of the various official regulatory bodies, set up during the last hundred years or so to preserve and authenticate the piping and dance traditions of Scotland, became pervasive.³ These bodies fiercely guard their perceived heritage, or what Richard Blaustein has termed their 'selective reconstruction of tradition'.⁴ They are uncomfortable with attempts to challenge their beliefs as they have constructed forms of music and dance which they deem to be based on historical fact. It has been suggested that the bagpipe Piobaireachd Society, the oldest of the regulatory bodies, was 'in search of a personal authenticity in historical forms, constructing rather than finding tradition', and that this constructed form of tradition was intended to have different functions and audiences than the earlier style of playing would have had.⁵

Adherence to standards prescribed by experts as well as to a climate of competition, has led to a globalization of these music and dance forms. As a result, it could be argued that they have become somewhat disassociated from their host country. A competitive Highland dancer from South Africa, for example, should be indistinguishable from a Highland dancer from Scotland; the Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing (SOBHD) does after all liken itself to 'a very large family'.⁶ Billy Forsyth, former chairman of the SOBHD, suggests that as a result of the introduction of the Board's textbook, which attempted to standardize Highland dancing, it is no longer possible 'to label a competitor as Australian, South African, Canadian, or American because of the steps used or differences in technical approach'.⁷ The same could also be said in relation to the competitive piping world, in which it is common for pipers from many parts of the world to compete in the same competitions as native Scottish pipers, and on the same terms. Strict controls imposed by the competitive piping regulatory bodies mean that regional stylistic variations are minimised.

Piping Embellishments

The College of Piping was established to 'raise the prestige of piping and the status of the piper and to improve the overall standard of piping, particularly by systematic instruction'.⁸ The Piping and Drumming Qualifications Board runs a series of graded examinations in much the same way as the dance examining bodies do

with Highland dancing. The Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association (1930) performs a similar function for pipe bands.

The College of Piping's grade examinations include the use of embellishments from the very first of its series of eight grades. The ornaments found in Grade 1 include single grace notes, GDE grace-note groupings, the *throw* on D from low A, strikes on E and F and half double F. Single grace notes are usually formed by lifting and quickly returning the relevant finger to the chanter. The important part is to ensure that the grace note sounds *with* the note and not before or after it. The *strike*, also of short duration, is more complicated. In general, it is formed by striking the chanter firmly and lightly with a finger which is already off the chanter and therefore not needed to form the melody note being sounded. A different movement is used depending on which note the strike relates to. Meanwhile the *throw*, which is a very common ornament, produces a rippling effect and tends to be the domain of the lower hand on the chanter. For right-handed players, the 'bottom hand' as it is commonly termed, is the right hand. The *throw* is a triple gracing consisting of three notes which immediately precede the melody note. A *doubling* also has three grace notes which alter according to the note they precede. A *half doubling* has two.

These gracings are complicated and much emphasis is placed on assimilating them right from the start of a novice piper's journey. Unlike other instruments, all four of the bagpipe's reeds – the chanter reed and each of the three drone reeds (two tenors and a bass), are sounded by air from the bag which sits under the player's arm. This bag is kept continuously filled by a reservoir of air blown through the mouthpiece. For the piper to get a consistent and musical tone, the pressure on the bag, which is controlled by the piper's arm, must be kept as constant as possible. In order to stop the sound, the pressure on the bag has to drop, but in performance, this would only happen at the end of a set of tunes. It is not easy to drop the pressure, stop the sound and then resume mid-melody, and in addition, dynamic contrasts are extremely difficult to obtain, as are fast repetitions of certain notes. The complicated gracing system exists therefore, as the piper's musical punctuation. However, in some areas of the piping world, so much emphasis is placed on the correct assimilation of gracings in the early stages that such intrinsic considerations as the importance of setting and maintaining a steady pulse often appear to be overlooked.

Donal Brown, a piper, pipe tutor, and dancer, who plays for Highland dancing competitions, has concerns about this aspect of pipe tuition as he believes that if he had not had a background in dance, he would not be equipped to play for dancing.

Because I had a background in dance anyway, it seemed fairly obvious. But if piping was the only thing that I'd done, and competition piping, then I would have found it quite hard because you're moulded into one thing with piping, and quite often, because of the way piping is taught, there's a big focus on the rudiments and the ornamentation before the music. So you're teaching [...] for example, you could be teaching a kid ornaments before they even had an idea of keeping a beat. If you're a piper that's learned ornaments, you've been

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pounded with all that stuff before you've even developed an idea of musicality or playing to a beat.⁹

There are many more gracings than those already mentioned; each has a different function and each displays a varying degree of complexity. A *throw*, for example, is most commonly used to emphasize a longer melody note. The three-noted *grip* provides a powerful emphasis to a melody note. It alters according to the grace note preceding it. A *taorluath* builds on the *grip* by adding a further grace note at the end of the movement. The *birl* is a difficult ornament for the beginner. It consists of a four notes grouping which can itself be preceded by a further grace note which can change the notes required to make up the ornament. What makes this ornament difficult to learn is the precise shape of the finger movement required to execute it. There are five-note ornaments, such as the *darodo* or *bubbly note*, and the closed and open *shakes*. *Shakes* are commonly used in hornpipes, but are not to be confused with the baroque ornament known as a shake. A *closed shake* often has the span of an octave between first and last notes, and the *open shake* can resemble the baroque ornament known as a turn, but is preceded by the note a fourth higher than the melody note.¹⁰

These are by no means all of the gracings used by pipers, but it is usual for many or most of these to be learnt by pipers in the early stages of learning to play the instrument. Although the pipes have only a single, nine-note scale, acquiring dexterity in ornamentation is an onerous task, for the complete opus of competition pipe music is very highly ornamented.

Over the last one hundred years the use of grace notes has gradually increased along with a more pronounced dotting of melodies and slower tempi. One of the pioneers of this heavily ornamented style of piping was George S. MacLennan (1883–1929). George and his elder cousin, the piper, dancer, and theatre impresario Willie MacLennan (1860–1892), were taught to play by George's father, Lieutenant John MacLennan. Like George, Willie favoured the highly ornamented competitive style of playing.¹¹ Willie and his younger brother Donald G. (1869–1965) were champion Highland dancers and both studied ballet: Willie in Paris, and Donald in London. Between them, the brothers introduced numerous balletic movements and influences into Highland dancing.

The Military Background

Allan MacDonald, a piper and lecturer for the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama's Traditional Music BA course at the Piping Centre,¹² has pointed out that until relatively recently, if anyone wished to make a comfortable living as a piper, the only route open to them was to join the army. This meant that:

Anyone who learnt pipes, learnt pipes with people who were in the army or had been in the army. That goes right back to the nineteenth century, and so the styles that were created in the military became the standard format and the standard

performance style, so much so that all the texts and all the music written was written by people who had gone through this school of standardization. I'll say there are some advantages, in that with standardization, and focus through competitions, you get a higher technicality. That theory may be rebuffed, but I don't think so, because even in the uilleann [Irish] piping tradition, which never went through that process of militarization, and other piping traditions, you don't get the same exact precision as you do get in the Scots bagpipe tradition. So it's very ornate and highly structured.¹³

John G. Gibson also suggests that the British army has had a major influence on the development of piping, and that this influence has been, 'intense, innovative and eventually harmful to the little that remained of tradition'.¹⁴ The intense, innovative pursuit of a greater degree of technique, formed through participation in competitions, is one of the main reasons that the regulatory piping and dancing bodies set themselves up, and this, as Gibson suggests, had an effect on local styles of playing and dancing.

MacDonald observes that the once-close links between piping and dance have been broken, not just through the nineteenth and twentieth century Gaelic diaspora, but also because the community aspect of piping – that is, playing for dancing, has disappeared, as everyone is taught according to the rules of the regulatory bodies. In addition, he states that the dance music genre itself has changed through a separation of dance from the competition and separation of the competition from the community with the result that, 'Pipers don't play for dancers; they don't know what that is'.¹⁵

	Mackenzie 1910	SOBDH 1993	SOBDH (web) 2011	Pipers current tempi (2011)
Highland Fling	152 (allegro)	124 (allegro)	112-124 (moderato – allegro)	106-108 (andante) but can be between 102 (andante) and 112 (moderato)
Sword Dance	144/168 (allegro/presto)	116/144 (moderato/allegro)	104-116/120-144 (andante-moderato/allegro)	72/96 (andante)
Sean Triubhas	Not given	104/124 (andante/allegro)	92-104/112-124 (andante/moderato-allegro)	96/108 (andante)
Strathspey	152 (allegro)	124 (allegro)	112-124 (moderato-allegro)	106-108 (andante)
Reel of Tulloch	140 (allegro)	108 (moderato)	100-108 (andante)	120 but can be 132 (allegro)
'Scotch' or Highland Reel	136 (allegro)	108 (moderato)	100-108 (andante)	120 but can be 132 (allegro)

Figure 1 Changes in Highland Dancing Tempi (showing beats per minute)¹⁶

A Change in Tempo

Over time, competitive pipe tunes and competitive Highland dances have become very much slower in tempo. In 1910 Donald Richard Mackenzie (1847–1931), a dancing master based in Stirling, suggested suitable tunes and metronome speeds for each of the Highland dances he described in his instruction manual.¹⁷ 'The Marquis of Huntly', he suggested, should be played at a speed of 152 beats per minute to accompany 'The Highland Fling'.¹⁸ In 1993, the Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing's textbook, suggests that the same dance should be performed at 124 beats per minute. This is significantly slower and suggests a change in the style of dancing.¹⁹ The same organization's website currently suggests 112–124 beats per minute.²⁰ Pipe Major Bruce Campbell, a piper and former dancer, who has spent many years playing exclusively for Highland Dancing and has published a music book for pipers on the same subject, recently carried out a survey of the speeds pipers normally play for Highland dancing.²¹ He notes that 'The Highland Fling' is most commonly played at the remarkably slow speeds of 106–108 beats per minute, and notes that whilst the dance may be played, 'as slow as 102bpm, some [pipers play] as fast as 112bpm'.²²

In one hundred years then, the dance has slowed down from a sprightly 152 beats per minute (*allegro*) to the significantly more sedate tempo of 102 beats per minute (*andante*). The style of 'lively music' and associated lively steps noted by Francis Peacock two hundred years ago seems to have disappeared.²³ Naturally, the style of dancing has altered significantly within that time to suit the slower tempi. The lively dances which varied according to region have been replaced by a much altered, highly technical form of dancing which takes many years to learn. There are no regional or stylistic variations as the method of execution is closely controlled. In that respect it has become very close to stage dancing, in that it is a sophisticated form of dance, with graded levels and exams. The stage aspect happens in formal performance situations, at exclusive Highland dancing competitions and on the open stage at Highland Games. Contemporary Highland dance is performed more slowly to allow the dancer time to elevate or jump, as high as possible on every beat, which also informs the dancer's technical ability.

It is not merely 'The Highland Fling' which displays this tendency toward a slower tempo: Mackenzie taught 'The Sword Dance' at 144 beats per minute (*allegro*) rising to 168 (*presto*) for the final, 'quickstep'.²⁴ According to Bruce Campbell, pipers now play it at 72 beats per minute (*adagio*), and the quickstep at 96 (*andante*).²⁵ Again, this is now significantly slower and suggests that the dance, over the years has assumed a different character, having lost the excitement that fleet-footed speed imparts into the dance. This is in spite of the dance retaining its first step which circles around the outside of the swords, known as 'Addressing the Swords', and the final quickstep which is danced at a faster pace. In describing the quickstep, Mackenzie says that the dancer should begin the step by clapping to signify the tempo change, remove his bonnet with the right hand and commence the step. This would all have been carried out without any break in the pulse and the gesture

would have provided an exciting flourish to the dance. It also suggests that 'The Sword Dance' was not a woman's dance.²⁶

Mackenzie was writing in 1910, at the same time as D. G. MacLennan was making radical changes to Highland dancing with the adoption of balletic movements, carrying on what his late brother Willie had started in the 1880s.²⁷ The MacLennan brothers influenced the course of Highland Dancing in much the same way as their cousin G. S. MacLennan had influenced piping and were largely responsible for the way 'The Sean Triubhas', another of the competition Highland dances, is performed today. D. G. MacLennan stated that the first, circle step:

was composed by myself many years ago, and in my own day no dancer ever copied it, likewise, 'high cutting' and 'side cutting', double beats back and front. My brother [William] was the only one to use *entrechat* in his day. The first step was always 'pas de basque' from side to side.²⁸

The accentuation of the 'pas de basque from side to side' as opposed to the softer fluidity of the brushing circle step that replaced it can be heard in James Scott Skinner's 1920 fiddle recording of 'The Sean Triubhas', in which he plays in a faster and more strongly accented manner than would be heard today.²⁹

In spite of these developments, Mackenzie believed that the Highland dancer should, 'beware of affectation, and of theatrical or ballet styles of movement. The manly, civilian style of dancing is more characteristic of the Highlander'.³⁰ Francis Peacock had made a similar suggestion one hundred years earlier when he stated that beginning a step with 'the point of the toes' had 'an air of theatrical affectation'.³¹

The reel is the only dance type that appears not to have been significantly affected by a slower tempo. Mackenzie suggests 140 beats per minute – a lively *allegro*, whilst pipers currently play it at speeds of between 120 and 132 beats per minute.³² Although this tempo is still *allegro*, it contradicts SOBHD tempo guidelines: they advocate a speed of 100–108 beats per minute, which constitutes a very much slower *andante*.

Just as the dances have slowed down to accommodate a more balletic and elevated style of dancing, the pipe tunes have slowed down to allow complex *gracings* or ornaments of anything from six to eight notes, which precede the melody notes. Pipe melodies also have a very pronounced 'dot and cut': dotted quavers followed by semiquavers, where the dotted note is exaggerated in length and the short note is made even shorter or more 'pointed', to use piping terminology. This often results in a stretching of the pulse in competitive playing. Gone is the regular, steady pulse which is so necessary to the dancer; in its place is, as one of my respondents so eloquently put it, 'a sink and sag'.³³

Piping for Dancing

In Highland dancing, which was traditionally associated with piping, we see many similarities to competition piping. This includes its strict control by the SOBHD,

set up in 1950 to regulate dancing. The Board's Technical Committee includes representatives from each of the Dance Examining Bodies that hold Highland Dancing examinations: the British Association of Teachers of Dance, the Scottish Dance Teachers Alliance, and the United Kingdom Alliance Ltd. It also includes Highland Dancing associations in Australia, the United States, South Africa, Canada, and New Zealand as affiliated members.³⁴

As we have seen, a competition piper may come from any country in the world and play in a very similar style to a Scottish piper, and a Highland dancer may do likewise. As with piping, the dance tempi have slowed down over the years, ostensibly to allow for higher leaping by the dancers, but this does raise the question of the extent to which competition piping may have influenced Highland dancing. As with piping, technical execution is what gains a dancer marks in Highland dancing, so a dancer will often attempt to elevate, or jump as high as possible with almost every movement. The dancer's foot must be sharply in position with the musical beat, although this commonly results in a jerky, unmusical style of dancing. Dancers practice to recorded music, so are used to hearing the same music played in exactly the same way for every dance. Donal Brown finds that dancers are not always dancing *with* the music because often one dancer is trying to jump higher than the person dancing next to them. He believes in trying to help dancers to dance *with*, rather than against the music, and for that reason will go to great lengths to tap his foot strongly in an effort to help them to dance with the beat:

Playing a strathspey for a Highland Fling – it's a very slow tempo. I think part of that is the competition side of things because I believe that the dancers are always just a little bit off the beat and that's because they're trying to get a bit of extra height and they look like they're jumping higher than the person next to them. If you get someone who takes dancing very seriously, who's dancing next to someone who maybe dances once a week or is just doing it for a bit of fun, quite often they'll be dancing behind the beat – the one that's taking it very seriously and is very good, very technical. And then the person next to them is actually sometimes a bit in front of the beat which is very difficult to play for.³⁵

'The Reel of Tulloch' and 'The Highland Reel' can also be difficult for the piper to play for in Highland dancing competitions. This is largely because four dancers must dance together, rather than individually. The dancers are soloists and not used to working with other dancers as part of a unified group. As they are unlikely to have rehearsed together and are competing against one another, this can create a problem for the piper, especially if the piper is watching the dancers' feet in order to keep the beat steady. This is one dance where the dancers are not always closely synchronized with each other. As Brown stated in the same interview:

If you've got dancers dancing at different tempos, it's hard to get an average speed because I really like to play my best, and give them nice music and play

at a good tempo for them. But that's really tricky, so there's more skills than technical skills. You have to be able to try and suit different needs.

He raises concerns about the excessively slow tempo of the dances because he feels that the essence of the actual music is lost as a result. To this end, the dancing becomes a mere exercise:

It's slow. I think it's too slow and you lose the music. I'm trying to pipe and put some music into the tunes. And if it's too slow, the tunes become a bit of a dirge – like the sword dance. But a lot of people say the same about the sword dance – it's their least favourite dance. It's difficult to do; it's a bit of a dirge if the tune is that slow as well.³⁶

Bruce Campbell takes this same consideration somewhat further. Like Donal Brown, he believes that pipe tunes must be played differently for competition and for dance, and feels very strongly about using suitable pipe music for dance:

I never found it good enough just to do what anybody else was doing – that's just to rattle out a tune. I wanted to play *the* tune that fitted the dance, at the tempo that suited the dance, with the expression of the big, back notes that suited the dance [...] If you're looking for a tune to go with, say, the Hornpipe, and you've got six dancers up and each of them is doing something totally different, right from start to finish, it's really, really hard to get the tune that fits. So I spent a bit of time trying to work my head through how to present that as a piper in the best possible fashion before I finally came up with a solution.³⁷

Campbell's solution was to produce a book of what he felt were suitable tunes for the various Highland dances, along with recommendations for pipers about playing for dancing. Like Donal Brown, he stresses the necessity for the piper to maintain a steady beat whilst accompanying dancers. He also explains why some tunes are more suitable than others for certain dances: he feels they should not have too many notes as this can confuse the steady beat so necessary for dancers.³⁸ He suggests that:

The good piper is more than somebody who can twiddle his fingers. A good piper is somebody who understands how to accent a tune properly and that's what you try and do for a dancer. It's not just playing a reel, it's playing a reel to suit the kind of dance step that in some reels should be open and flowing and at other times should be staccato and heavily accented. So you've got to try and decide because the books don't tell you [...] And it even goes worse in that the SOBHD tries to teach people that a strathspey has a strong, weak, medium, weak accent. Well, it doesn't. It does if you play a trombone, but it doesn't if you play bagpipes. So the dancers are thinking, 'Well, that gives us a lift, but how

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can we do it?' And they don't understand because you can't do it. You can't do a medium accent. A dancer can't do it; a piper shouldn't be trying to do it.³⁹

This same consideration, about choosing music to fit the dance, is made by another piper when discussing piping for percussive step dance:

You might want to get rid of some of the melody notes to simplify it [the tune], but I think generally, you just want to take out the gracings and the ornaments that are on those notes. They just tend to make it far too busy when it's a faster tune. When it's a slower, more deliberate strathspey, then these ornaments can be used because there's space and time to use them, but for step dancing there's no point in putting them in. That's something I think a lot of pipers need to learn a little bit more about so that they appreciate a different style of playing strathspeys, and don't think of it as this kind of regimented and very strict competition way. We shouldn't all have to follow the same guidelines for performing a piece of music. If there's a really good reason, such as a traditional form of dance, to play it differently, then you'd think musicians should know about it. Pipers need to learn about that.⁴⁰

Piping for Percussive Dance

Individuals or associations who attempt to challenge the authority of the regulatory bodies, perhaps by altering their own performance style or by attempting to introduce a different method of performance to the accepted standards, do tend to meet with strong opposition. This is particularly the case with regard to piping for percussive step dance; a dance form that has been revitalized in Scotland during the last twenty years. Hamish Moore's original experiment between 2003–2005 to reinterpret a form of piping for dancing, based on the traditions of South Uist in the Scottish Outer Hebrides and the associated style of emigrants from there to Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, has been discussed recently by Joshua Dickson, who took part in the project as a piping participant observer.⁴¹

Moore has spent many years honing his skills as a pipe maker, basing his pipes on eighteenth-century models, and developing a style of piping that is less complex, and more danceable than the competition style. To this end, he has used as his model what he feels are the most pertinent aspects of the closely connected music and dance style of Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. There, some of the older Scottish tunes are still played and danced to by descendants of the Scottish émigrés amongst others, although, unlike Moore's model, Cape Breton percussive dance is predominantly accompanied by fiddle and piano. In common with both Donal Brown and Bruce Campbell mentioned above, Moore has focused in particular on such stylistic aspects of the music as a steady pulse and strong, simple playing in order to create a closer connection between dance and music than tends to be found on the competition circuits.

Dickson has suggested that Moore is a revivalist and that his ideas of playing fall neatly into the six category model proposed by Tamara Livingstone, but it appears

more likely that he is trying to move piping forward by attempting to replace the dance style of playing that has been largely lost from contemporary piping. Moore's summer school workshops focus on listening and on dance skills, in order to impart a more rounded sense of musicianship in the player, and are intended to encourage pipers and fiddlers to connect more closely with dance.⁴²

Alex Currie (c.1910–1998), a piper from Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, whose forebears emigrated from South Uist, was a great influence on Moore. Currie learned piping as a child, by ear, from his father and from his elder brother, Paddy. From an early age, he was taught the importance of dance timing. Currie believed that his style of what was essentially dance piping, was the old, Highland way of playing: 'I play a different style. I play the old-style music. And that came from Scotland 300 years ago, over here. That's the style I've got.'⁴³

Alex Currie was primarily a dance player, and that seems to be the main influence behind Moore's great interest in developing a closer connection between dance and music. Currie was particularly concerned with getting the timing right for dancing:

You go to a party, the old people wanted the old music, you know. It was dancing, and step dancing [...] So you had to do the thing right. If you were playing a strathspey and you were playing it too high, or too low, you'd start it first. He'd [the dancer] stop you right there: 'You've got to go a little bit faster than that'. So at the last of it, he's getting right onto it, what he wanted. He'd get up, jump on the floor. There was nothing to it.⁴⁴

To this end, Currie insisted on sitting to play, as he felt it was important to use the heels, balls, and soles of both of his feet to create a complimentary, accented rhythm to whatever tune he might be playing in much the same way as a dancer would. In analyzing Currie's foot rhythms, it becomes clear that he used accentuations – a toe tap amongst heel taps, or a sole beat amongst heel taps, to mark areas he felt were important to the rhythmic accentuation of the specific melody he was playing. This aspect of accentuation – an aspect that enhances the dance rhythms of the melody, is what Hamish Moore and those who adopt his ideals have tried to impart into dance piping as opposed to the competition style of piping, where dexterity in performing complex melodic accentuations has become more important than the rhythmic connection between the music and the dance.⁴⁵

Conclusion

The close connection between piper and dancer, where the piper pays attention to the dancer's needs and the dancer in turn listens to the piper and produces an enhanced performance through the connection, is what appears to be missing from the music of those pipers who are steeped in the competition culture. That connection was found in the playing of the late Alex Currie, and is currently being encouraged by Hamish Moore. Dance pipers, such as Donal Brown and Bruce Campbell, themselves

dancers who play for competition dancing are few in that they strive to communicate to dancers through music what they feel is best suited to the dance in question, and through carefully judged tempo and accentuations. As long as more importance is placed on a highly technical, competition-based style of excellence in both piping and dancing rather than on a connection of the dance to the music – by both pipers and dancers – the piping becomes increasingly difficult to dance to. The pursuit of supreme technical excellence in execution at the expense of tempo, natural rhythm, and accentuation, means that pipers will soon have shed all the qualities that once made the music they play dance music. The same pursuit applied to Highland dancing means that the dancing becomes more a feat of supreme athleticism than a form of closely integrated movement with music: it loses its quality of making the dancers *part* of the music.

Yet it is certainly not a picture of doom as far as the relationship between piping and dancing in Scotland goes. As we have seen, an increasing number of pipers are concerned that the dance music should be played in a simpler and livelier style more suited to dancing. Pipes are increasingly used in a wider variety of musical contexts as shown by the popularity of bellows bagpipes, which can easily be played in combination with other musical instruments. Alongside the more rigid competition style of piping, more and more pipe music is being played in a style that makes the dancer want to dance.

Notes

¹ I am a percussive step dancer and a Highland dancer with a teaching qualification from the British Association of Teachers of Dance.

² Francis Peacock, *Sketches Relative to History and Theory, but More Especially to the Practice of Dancing* [...], (Aberdeen, 1805), p. 87.

³ The Piobaireachd Society was formed in 1903, the College of Piping in 1944 and the Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing in 1950.

⁴ Richard Blaustein, 'Rethinking Folk Revivalism: Grass-roots Preservationism and Folk Romanticism', in *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*, ed. by Neil V. Rosenberg (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), pp. 258–74 (p. 267).

⁵ Joshua Dickson, '“Tullochgorm” Transformed: A Case Study in Revivalism and the Highland Pipe', in *The Highland Bagpipe, Music, History/Tradition*, ed. by Joshua Dickson (Farnham; Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2009), p. 200.

⁶ Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing, 'About Us', <<http://www.sobhd.net/aboutus/>> [accessed 28 February 2011].

⁷ Billy Forsyth, 'Foreword', in *Highland Dancing The Textbook of the Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing*, 6th edn (Glasgow: Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing, 1993).

⁸ Jeanie Campbell, *Guide to the College of Piping Graded Piping Exams*, ed. by Robert Wallace (Glasgow: College of Piping, 2010), p. 1.

⁹ Donal Brown, interview on piping for dancing by Pat Ballantyne, 23 August 2010, Edinglassie, Huntly.

¹⁰ For a detailed description of grace notes, see The National Piping Centre, *The Highland Bagpipe Tutor Book* (Glasgow: National Piping Centre, 2010).

¹¹ Roderick D. Cannon, *The Highland Bagpipe and its Music* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1995; repr. Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2008), p. 142. William Donaldson, *Pipers: A Guide to the Players and Music of the Highland Bagpipe* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2005), p. 103. *Pipers* has a section on G. S. MacLennan, see pp.

127–29, and a discussion of the MacLennan family of pipers, see pp. 102–105. For a short biography of the three dancing MacLennan brothers, William, Donald, and Duncan, see Alastair MacFadyen, ‘The MacLennans: Dancers and Pipers’, *The Reel*, 258 (London Branch RSCDS: December 2006 – March 2007), p. 7. Available online at <<http://www.rscdslondon.org.uk/061211Reel258.pdf>> [accessed 11 March 2011].

¹² The Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama was renamed the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in 2011.

¹³ Allan MacDonald, interview on piping in Scotland, by Pat Ballantyne, 24 June 2010, Barga, Tuscany, Italy. For the army background to piping, see also Cannon, *The Highland Bagpipe and Its Music* and Donaldson, *Pipers*.

¹⁴ John G. Gibson, *Traditional Gaelic Bagpiping 1745–1945* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2005), p. 183.

¹⁵ MacDonald, interview, 2010.

¹⁶ Sources of data – Pipe Major Bruce Campbell, ‘Piping for Dancing: Trying to Get it Right’, *Piping World*, 24, digital series (Prenton, Wirral: Duntroon Publishing, March 2011); D. R. Mackenzie, *An Illustrated Guide to the National Dances of Scotland* (Stirling: Stirling Observer, 1910); The Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing, *Highland Dancing: The Textbook of the Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing*, 6th edn (Glasgow: Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing, 1993) <<http://www.sobhd.net/downloads/index.shtml>> [accessed 27 February 2011].

¹⁷ Mackenzie, *Illustrated Guide*.

¹⁸ Mackenzie, *Illustrated Guide*, p. 33.

¹⁹ SOBHD *Highland Dancing* (1993), p. 31.

²⁰ Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing, ‘Forms and Downloads’, <<http://www.sobhd.net/downloads/index.shtml>> [accessed 27 Feb 2011].

²¹ Pipe Major Bruce Campbell, *Piping for Highland Dancing* (Prenton, Wirral: Duntroon Publishing, 2010). PM Campbell is also the publisher of a web-based monthly journal for pipers, *Piping World*, in which the survey results were published: ‘Piping for Dancing’, p. 51.

²² Campbell, ‘Piping for Dancing’, p. 51.

²³ Peacock, *Sketches*, p. 87.

²⁴ Mackenzie, *Illustrated Guide*, pp. 41 and 46.

²⁵ Campbell, ‘Piping for Dancing’, p. 5.

²⁶ Mackenzie, *Illustrated Guide*, p. 46.

²⁷ See Campbell, *Guide to the Graded Bagpipe Study Examinations*, p. 1.

²⁸ D. G. MacLennan, *Highland and Traditional Scottish Dances* (Edinburgh: the author, [1950]), p.23

²⁹ For an example of this recording, visit <<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/scottskinner/music/cd211a.m3u>> [accessed 28 February 2011].

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Peacock, *Sketches*, p. 108.

³² Mackenzie, *Illustrated Guide*, p. 20.

³³ Calum MacCrimmon, interview on piping for dancing, by Pat Ballantyne, 3 March 2010, Glasgow.

³⁴ The Scottish Official Highland Dancing Association has been in existence slightly longer than the SOBHD, having been set up in 1947. However, it is a much smaller association than the SOBHD, and does not have the same following or influence. It places more emphasis on recognizing a large number of dances. See <<http://www.sohda.org.uk>> [accessed 27 February 2011].

³⁵ Brown, interview, 2010.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Bruce Campbell, Skype telephone interview on piping for dancing, by Pat Ballantyne, 4 January 2011.

³⁸ Campbell, ‘Piping for Dancing’, pp. 6–7.

³⁹ Campbell, ‘Piping for Dancing’, pp. 6–7. The reference to the SOBHD’s ‘strong, weak, medium, weak’ style of accentuation can be found in *Highland Dancing*, 1993, p. 58.

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⁴⁰ MacCrimmon, interview, 2010.

⁴¹ Dickson, 'Tullochgorm'.

⁴² Dickson, 'Tullochgorm', p. 193. For Tamara Livingstone's discussion of her model of what constitutes a music revival, see 'Music Revivals: Towards a General Theory,' *Ethnomusicology*, 43, no. 1 (Winter 1999), 66–85.

⁴³ Ronald Caplan, 'With Alex Currie, Frenchvale', *Cape Breton's Magazine*, 73 (June 1998), 29–45 (p.32).

⁴⁴ Caplan, 'With Alex Currie, Frenchvale', p. 33.

⁴⁵ Caplan, 'With Alex Currie, Frenchvale', p. 34.