

The MacRaes' March

There are settings of this tune in the following manuscript sources:

– **MacArthur-MacGregor** MS, ff.67-70;

and in the following published sources:

– **Frans Buisman and Andrew Wright**, eds., *The MacArthur-MacGregor Manuscript of Piobaireachd (1820)*, p.150;

– **Angus MacKay**, *Ancient Piobaireachd*, pp.21-22;

– **C. S. Thomason**, *Ceol Mor*, pp.188-189;

– **David Glen**, *Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd*, pp.170-71;

– **William Stewart**, et al., eds., *Piobaireachd Society Collection* (first series), i, 16-17;

– **John McLennan**, *The Piobaireachd As Performed in the Highlands for Ages, till about the year 1808*, pp.2-3;

There are basically three different ways of doing this tune, that set forth in the MacArthur-MacGregor MS; Angus Mackay's setting which is followed with small variations by most later editors; and the bold timing adopted in Lt. John McLennan's collection which is perhaps the most interesting of all.

The **MacArthur-MacGregor** gives the tune the title "Suarachan." A later hand has added "Macrae's March." The tune as follows:

pipes | drums



pipes | drums



pipes | drums



pipes | drums



The crunluath is "up" cut, and the timing of the taorluath movements suggests a similar approach.

Angus MacKay sets the tune as follows, dropping the F passing note in the ground and producing in the process an arguably rather duller tune:

SPAIDSEARACHD MHIIC RAADH.

Mac Ræe's March.

A. D. 1401.

VIII.

Sibhal Ordalg.

Taor-luath Breabach.

The musical score consists of two sections. The first section, 'Sibhal Ordalg', is marked with a Roman numeral 'VIII.' and contains 10 staves of music. The second section, 'Taor-luath Breabach', contains 10 staves of music. The notation is in treble clef with a 6/8 time signature. The music features a complex, rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes, characteristic of traditional Scottish pibroch.

Dublachadh an Taor-luath.

Crun-luath Breabach.

Dublachadh a Chrun-luath.

D. C. Thema.

The image displays three sections of a musical score for pipes and drums. Each section consists of ten staves of music. The first section is titled 'Dublachadh an Taor-luath', the second 'Crun-luath Breabach', and the third 'Dublachadh a Chrun-luath'. The notation includes various rhythmic values and articulation marks typical of pipe and drum music.

MacKay's taorluath movements are "down" pointed and his crunluath "up."

C. S. Thomason gives Angus MacKay's published setting as his source. His score does not add to the expressive possibilities of the tune and is not reproduced here.

David Glen follows Angus MacKay, but makes the timing of the thumb variation more explicit:

THE MACRAES' MARCH.

SPAIDSEARACHD CHLOINN MHC-RATH.

(1491.)

Úrlar.

72. *3 times*

1st

2nd

Var. 1st Siubhal Ordaig.

3 times

1st

2nd

Var. 2nd Taor-luath Breabach.

twice

1st

2nd

Doubling of Var. 2nd. Dúblachadh an Taor-luath.

twice

1st

2nd

Written. Played.

and so on.

The score printed by **William Stewart** in the *Piobaireachd Society Collection* (first series) is a transcript of Angus MacKay's setting and is not reproduced here.

John McLennan sets the tune as follows:

SPAISDEARICH MHIC RATH.
THE MACRAE'S MARCH.

Fonn.

Play 1.2.1.2.5.6. || 1.2.3.4.5.6. || 1.2.7.8.

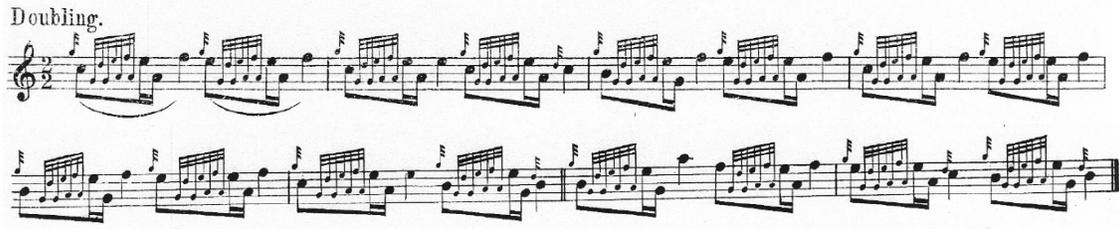
1st or Thumb Var.

Tri-luth Breabach.

Doubling.

Ceithir-luth.

pipes | drums



McLennan's bold throws to the F arguably give the tune the tonal thrust and tension that MacKay's setting rather lacks, and his vigorous "up" cut taorluath and crunluath variations also contribute to the forward momentum which this piece seems to require.

Commentary:

The "Historical and Traditional Notes on the Piobaireachds" in Angus MacKay's *Ancient Piobaireachd* give the following account of the tune:

In the year 1477 the Lord of the Isles resigned the Earldom of Ross, the claim to which had been so long and so keenly contested, into the hands of the king; but instead of producing peace, the province was even more exposed to the harassing incursions of the untameable inhabitants of the West Isles. "*Gillespic*" cousin to MacDonald, gathering a company of men, invaded the height of that country with great hostility; which the inhabitants perceiving, and especially the Clan *Coinnich*, or MacKenzies, they assembled speedily together, and met the islanders on the banks of the Conan, about two miles from Braile, where there ensued a sharp and cruel skirmish. The Clan Kenzie fought so hardily and pressed the enemy so, that in the end *Gillespic* MacDonald was overthrown and chased, - the most part of his men being either slain or drowned in the river Conan, and this was called "*Blar na Pàirc*," i.e. the Battle of Park.*

* Conflicts of the Clans. The MacKenzies had shortly before obtained a royal grant of Strathconan, Strathgarbh, &c. Crawford's Peerage.

The Laird of Brodie, who was then with MacKenzie on his way to Kintail for a herd of cattle with the chief had presented him with, finding the MacDonalds approach and understanding the object for which they appeared, immediately returned, and taking the side of his friends the MacKenzies, he fell with forty of his men fighting bravely.

The Clan Donald, it is said, had robbed and burned a chapel at Contin near to where the battle took place, for which deed, it was believed, they justly met their sad reward.

The personage who gave rise to a Piobaireachd of which those of his name are so proud, was Duncan MacRae, an orphan brought up in the castle of

Loch Kinellan, the seat of the chief of the MacKenzies, under whose banner the Clan Rae fought. This devoted follower was known by the familiar cognomen of "Suarachan," a term of a contemptuous signification. His physical prowess, however, and undaunted valour was great, and on this occasion he founded a good claim to a higher consideration than had formerly been afforded him. He mixed in the battle with impetuous valour, and speedily brought down his foeman, in a hand-to-hand encounter; when, like the *Gobhadh-crom*, on the north inch of Perth, he thought he had done all that was expected or required of him, and calmly seated himself on the body of the slain. MacKenzie, astonished at this behaviour during a hot conflict, called out sharply. "What! sit you so, when your help is wanted?" "If I am paid like a man, I will fight like a man, and if every one does as much as I have done," replied Suarachan, "the day is yours." "Kill your two, and you shall have the wages of two," rejoined the chief, and the obedient follower did his behest, and again sat down on the lifeless trunk of his fallen foe. "Kill your three," cries the fiery chief – "nay, fight on, I will not reckon with you for days' pay." Suarachan, it is said, fought like a lion, till he had killed no fewer than sixteen of the enemy, and thus he proved his worth, and was ever afterwards in high esteem, becoming a leading man in the clan, and acquiring the more honourable appellation of "*Donncha mòr na Tuagh*," Big Duncan of the Axe, the weapon which he had wielded to such purpose.

This fine old Piobaireachd was composed in honour of brave Duncan MacRae and his associates, who, on the field of Pairc so valiantly acquitted themselves. This clan, which was formerly numerous, adopted it as their march to battle. (pp.4-5)

In his note to the tune in *The Piobaireachd Society Collection* (first series), William Stewart adds:

When the first regiment of Seaforth Highlanders was raised, "Suarachan" was adopted as one of the regimental Piobaireachd, for the reason that most of the men were MacRaes, as is recorded by the historian of the Highland Regiments. "Suarachan," no less than "Tulloch-Ard," inspired the gallant Seaforths to those deeds that made the "Caber-feidh" the emblem of Victory wherever it has been displayed.

Many interesting tales of Great Duncan's feats of arms still remain in the traditions of Kintail. At Blàr-na-Pairc, his battle-axe turned the tide of conflict when it struck the head off Lachunn Mac-Thearlaich, a mail-clad knight of the MacLeans, and reputed the best fighter in the army of the isles [...] (i, 10).

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