

The Pretty Dirk

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

– **David Glen**'s MS, f.353;

and in the following printed sources:

- **Angus MacKay**, *Ancient Piobaireachd*, p.80;
- **Donald MacPhee**, *Collection of Piobaireachd* i, 27;
- **C. S. Thomason**, *Ceol Mor*, p.191.

Angus MacKay sets the tune like this:

A BHÌODAC BHÌODHEACH.
The Pretty Dirk.
Composed by
Patrick Oig Mac Crummen.

XXXIII

Part 2.

D.C. Thema.

Angus MacKay seems to be the earliest source for this tune and to have formed a pattern for the later settings. The tune is essentially a miniature, a ground with a single variation modelled closely upon it, on a hexatonic scale gapped at C.

pipes | drums

Donald MacPhee sets the tune like this:



MacPhee alters the tonality, coming up to high A (rather than high G) in bar eleven of the ground and emphasizing the double-tonic A/G sequence with an obtrusive-sounding C in bar eleven of his second part—possibly echoing his high A in part one—but his filling of the gap at C seems a clear violation of the scale.

C. S. Thomason follows **MacPhee**'s emendations closely and his score is not reproduced here.

David Glen sets the tune like this:



Commentary:

This tune has an unusual song-like structure being built of alternating phrases of unequal length in the pattern ABBA. It is also one of the shortest pieces in the repertory.

The earliest report on the circumstances of its composition comes from James Logan in the notes for Angus MacKay's published volume of 1838, which emphasize in Logan's usual style a culture of chiefly munificence and quasi-feudal dependence:

The weapon which gave rise to this piobaireachd was in possession of the Laird of MacLeod. Patrick òg MacCrummen admiring it very much, the chief told him, that if he composed an appropriate tune in its praise, it would be presented to him. Patrick wanted nothing more; next morning he struck up the newly composed piobaireachd with which MacLeod was so much pleased, the notes seeming to express the performer's entreaties for the gift, and exultation on receiving it; that, calling him into the castle, he handed the instrument to MacCrummen, saying he well deserved it, for so forcible an appeal, prepared in so short a space of time. ("Historical and Traditional Notes on the Piobaireachds", p.18)

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