

Notes on the piping tunes, pibroch and pibroch songs

by Prof Joshua Dickson

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The notes below appear in order of track listings

Fhir a' Chinn Duibh | The Black-haired Lad / Patrick Mór's lament on the death of his son

This short and melancholy song relates to two classics of the pibroch repertoire: Cumha na Cloinne (Lament for the Children) and Cumha an Aona Mhic (Lament for the Only Son).

Both pibrochs are traditionally understood to have been composed by Patrick Mór MacCrimmon, one of the greatest of the MacCrimmons of Skye, a family with roots in Harris and who served the chiefs of MacLeod at Dunvegan as hereditary pipers since, some say, the 16th century. The MacCrimmons were considered members of the elite professional class of musicians and orators that made up a clan chief's courtly retinue from the Middle Ages right up to the 18th century. Patrick Mór ('Big Patrick', or 'Patrick Senior') was born around 1595 and took over the role of piper to the chief of MacLeod in 1640 upon the death of his father, Donald Mór. He served in that role until his own death in 1670. Some maintain that it was Patrick Mór to whom King Charles II gave his hand to be kissed on the eve of the Battle of Worcester in 1651 (see the notes for I Got a Kiss of the King's Hand).

The circumstances surrounding the origin of the pibrochs to which Fhir a' Chinn Duibh relates were truly tragic: folklore tells us that of Patrick's eight children (some say sons), seven were killed by smallpox in the space of a single year. Henry Whyte's retelling of the tale in his notes to Glen's *Collection* put it poignantly:

... On one occasion Patrick Mór and his eight sons, all "braw lads," marched to church, and that before the end of that year seven of them slept beneath the sod in Kilmuir Churchyard.

Patrick Mór is widely considered the greatest composer of pibroch in his or indeed any other family, and this tragedy is said to have inspired him to compose Cumha na Cloinne – the Lament for the Children – one of our most revered pibrochs. Fhir a' Chinn Duibh, or The Black-haired Lad, expresses in words Patrick's grief, and its melody relates most closely to Variation 2 of Cumha na Cloinne:

Fhir a' chinn duibh, thug mi gaol dhuit	<i>Lad with the black hair, I loved you</i>
Fhir a' chinn duibh, thug mi gràdh dhuit	<i>Lad with the black hair, I adored you</i>
Thug mi gaol, is thug mi gràdh dhuit	<i>I loved you, and I adored you</i>
Thug mi gaol, nach tug mi 'chàch dhuit	<i>I gave you love that I didn't give to others</i>
Fhir a' chinn duibh, thug mi gràdh dhuit.	<i>Lad with the black hair, I adored you.</i>

The Lament for the Only Son is said to be another composition of Patrick Mór's. According to the late Captain John MacLellan, this tune 'reflected his sorrowing that the only son he had left after the others had died in the smallpox epidemic was Patrick Òg' – a reference to the next great piper in the MacCrimmon dynasty.

Crònán na Caillich ‘sa Bheinn Bhric | The Old Woman’s Lullaby

Very little is known of the origins surrounding this plaintive pibroch. Its title in Gaelic translates literally as ‘the Mournful Murmuring (or Crooning) of the Old Woman on Ben Breac’, though it is known more popularly today as The Old Woman’s Lullaby. Ben Breac – ‘mottled or speckled hill’ – is a mountain on the isle of Jura, measuring around 466 meters high.

According to Seton Gordon, a prominent figure in piping circles in the mid-20th century and piping correspondent to the London Times in the 1960s:

A well-known MacDougall piper was Ailean Dall, Blind Allan. Born In Glencoe five years after Culloden [i.e. 1751], he was a travelling tailor, carrying on his trade in the crofts of the poor and the houses of the well-to-do. In his pack he carried a wooden candlestick for three lights. It is written in the chief’s family papers that one of Blind Allan’s tunes, composed in his old age, was the beautiful Cronan na Cailliche, the Old Woman’s Lullaby.

If Blind Allan MacDougall was born around 1751 (just as Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair’s poetry was first being published – see the notes to *Moladh Mòraig*), and composed *Crònán na Cailleach sa Bheinn Bhric* ‘in his old age’, then the tune would not be nearly as ancient nor enfolded in the mists of Gaelic folklore as is often assumed.

However, mitigating against Seton Gordon’s assertion is the fact that the tune was among those notated in a written form of *canntaireachd* – a vocal notation traditionally used by pipers before the age of printed collections of music, and still sung by pipers like Rona Lightfoot – some time between 1790 and 1814 by Colin Campbell of Nether Lorn. This suggests that the tune was well known among pipers in Argyllshire by the late 18th century.

The name of this pibroch in Campbell’s notation was *B’ fheàrr a bhith dìolain na bhith pòsda*: ‘T were better to be a mistress than a wife’.

Gabhaidh Sinn an Rathad Mór | We'll Take the High Road

This tune is an old traditional air which appeared in different forms in several published or manuscript sources across a roughly 100-year period. It was printed as a fiddle tune in David Young's *Collection of Scotch Airs* in c. 1751 and in James Oswald's *Caledonian Pocket Companion* in c. 1755-60. In both collections the tune is named after the Battle of Sheriffmuir which ended the Jacobite rising of 1715. It first appears in pibroch form in Angus MacKay's handwritten manuscripts compiled during the 1830s, but didn't make it into his published *Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd* in 1838. In march time, the tune is also known as the MacIntyre or Sheriffmuir March.

'Gabhaidh sinn an rathad mór' translates as 'we'll take the high (or main) road', and the words to this traditional Gaelic song may provide an oral historical record of, or popular Jacobite perceptions of, the famous battle of 1715:

Gabhaidh sinn a' rathad mòr
Gabhaidh sinn a' rathad mòr
Gabhaidh sinn a' rathad mòr
Olc air mhath le càch e.

*We'll take the high road
We'll take the high road
We'll take the high road
Whatever the rest may think.*

Olc air mhath le Clann an-t-Saoir
Olc air mhath le Clann an-t-Saoir
Olc air mhath le Clann an-t-Saoir
'S bodaich maola Làghainn.

*Whatever Clan MacIntyre thinks
Whatever Clan MacIntyre thinks
Whatever Clan MacIntyre thinks
And the bald old men of Laggan.*

Thig Clann Ghriogair, feachd nam buadh,
'S thig Clann Choinnich bho'n taobh-tuath
'S maireg an dream do'n nochd iad fuath
Nuair dh'èireas fuaim nam blàr orr'.

*Clan Gregor will come, and
Clan MacKenzie from the north
Pity the band that they despise
When the sound of struggle rises.*

Thig Clann Ghriogair garg san strì,
Stiùbhartaich 's iad sluagh a' Rìgh
Mèarrsaibh uallach, suas a' phìob
Olc air mhath le càch e.

*Clan Gregor will come, fierce in contest
The Stewarts, the royal host
March proudly, sound the pipes
Whatever the rest may think.*

It is one of a number of tunes which over time found life not only in Gaelic oral tradition, but also in Scots: stripped of the pibroch's cadential accoutrements, the melody is immediately recognisable as that of the Scottish children's song Katie Bairdie: 'Katie Bairdie had a coo / black and white about the mou' / wasna that a daintie coo? / Dance Katie Bairdie ...'.

Cha Till Mi Tuilleadh | I will never return / MacCrimmon will never return / MacCrimmon's Lament

Few examples in Gaelic music inhabit the space between pibroch and song as intimately as this traditional air. According to Donaldson in 2005, the tune very likely predated any association with the MacCrimmons, being simply known as Cha Till Mi Tuilleadh – 'I return no more' – until Sir Walter Scott arranged the tune for Alexander Campbell's *Albyn's Anthology* of 1815 with Scott's own lyrics making specific reference to the famous piping family:

MacLeod's wizzard flag from the grey castle sallies,
The rowers are seated, unmoor'd are the galleys;
Gleam war-axe and broad-sword, clang target & quiver,
As Mackrimmon sings, 'Farewell to Dunvegan for ever.'

Whether inspired by Scott's lyrics in the *Anthology* or through some other means, a longstanding tradition maintains that the tune of Cha Till Mi Tuilleadh was composed during the Jacobite rising of 1745-6 by Donald Bàn MacCrimmon, after a premonition that he would not survive his military service under MacLeod on the side of Government.

According to the folklorist Henry Whyte:

When leave-taking, the scene was a sad one; wives, mothers, and sweethearts weeping for their loved ones, and MacCrimmon, in sympathy with the scene, and having a presentiment that he should never return, struck up the sad notes of the tune "*Cha till mi tuille*" - I return no more.

Sure enough, on 16 February 1746, Donald Bàn was killed at the Rout of Moy.

Of course, something of the truth might be found in Whyte's account, in that Donald Bàn, on his departure for service with MacLeod, and in his role as MacLeod's piper, could well have struck up the pipes and played what was possibly even then a very well-known traditional air. Succeeding generations could then have intertwined the story of the tune with MacCrimmon himself.

Since Sir Walter Scott's arrangement of the tune – indeed since Donald Bàn supposedly played it in 1746 – many variants have emerged in Gaelic oral tradition. Some wonderful renditions to be found among the archives of the School of Scottish Studies are those by the Gaelic scholar and ethnologist Rev William Matheson and Rona Lightfoot's own mother, the redoubtable Kate MacDonald of Garryhellie, South Uist, who sang in 1970:

Cha till, cha till, cha till Mac Cruimein
An cogadh no sith, cha till e tuilleadh.
Cha till, cha till, cha till Mac Cruimein
'S ged thilleadh a' phìob, cha till Mac Cruimein

*MacCrimmon will never, never return
In war or in peace, he'll return no more.
MacCrimmon will never, never return
Though the pipes will return, MacCrimmon won't.*

Cha till, cha till, cha till Mac Cruimein
'S ged thilleadh Mac Leoid, cha bheo Mac Cruimein.
Cha till, cha till, cha till e tuilleadh,
Cha till gu brath gu La na Cruinne.

*MacCrimmon will never, never return
Though MacLeod will return, MacCrimmon won't.
He'll return no more, no more,
He'll never return til the end of time.*

A Cholla mo Rùn | The Piper's Warning to his Master

This pibroch's Gaelic title translates literally as 'Colla, my beloved' and the sentiment expressed is platonic, not romantic, as it is played (or sung) from the point of view of a clansman under the leadership of Coll Ciotach, 'Left-handed Coll', a feared and celebrated Hebridean clan chief of the early 17th century and the father of the famous Alexander MacDonald, lieutenant to James Graham of Montrose and a decisive figure in the Scottish Covenanters' War. The well-known title 'The Piper's Warning to his Master' is a reflection of the event which immortalized this tune (and its cognate song) in *ceòl mór* thereafter.

Various legends in Scottish Highland folklore refer to this event, and tend to conflate it with the Covenanting era. Folklore depicts Coll Ciotach and his party returning to his castle (thought variously to have been Dunyvaig, Dunstaffnage, Duntroon, or another Argyll stronghold), unaware that a garrison of royalist – Campbell – soldiers had taken over the castle and was lying in wait for Ciotach's return. Coll sent a scouting party ahead and they were captured and hanged by the garrison. One among them though, a piper, asked to be allowed to play the pipes one last time. The request was granted, and the piper played a pibroch from the castle's ramparts. It is said, however, that the very notes of his tune conveyed a warning to Coll to stay away. The royalist soldiers, realising too late what was taking place, executed the piper.

The notes of the pibroch were said to have conveyed the following message:

A Cholla mo rùn, seachainn an caol
Seachainn an caol, seachainn an caol
A Cholla mo rùn, seachainn an caol
Seachainn an caol, tha mis' an làimh,
Tha mis' an làimh.

*Colla my beloved, avoid the strait
Avoid the strait, avoid the strait
Colla my beloved, avoid the strait
Avoid the strait, I am in hand,
I am in hand.*

Enough historical evidence exists to suggest that some version of this story is probably true, but the events in question likely long predated the Covenanting era. Historians Roderick Cannon and Keith Sanger have observed that Castle Dunyvaig was appropriated by the crown and handed to Clan Campbell in 1608; that Coll Ciotach reportedly retook the castle around 1612-15; and that a newspaper report in 1647, on the occasion of 'the old Rebellious Fox' Coll's eventual capture and execution, detailed his escape from Dunyvaig in 1615 by a ruse involving a piper as a distraction.

The story, and the pibroch, has since become synonymous with the rivalry between Clans Campbell and Donald.

A Mhnathan a' Ghlinne Seo | Women of This Glen / The Carles with the Breeks

This short but punchy pibroch, like many others, has been known by several titles over time: 'The Carles with the Breeks' in Scots, or in Gaelic 'Bodaich nam Briogais' (lit: 'the old men wearing the trousers'); Donald MacDonald in 1820 referred to it in his typically descriptive style as 'Lord Breadalbane's March to the battle fought betwixt him and the Sinclairs of Caithness'.

The pibroch melody's rhythm, when smoothed into a more compound march timing, is closely related to the song A Mhnathan a' Ghlinne Seo, which translates as Women of this Glen. The song is associated with the Massacre of Glencoe, which took place on 12 February 1692, and entreats the women and wives of the clan to rise up from the night's slumber as the traitorous Campbells put their husbands and brothers to the sword.

As is often the case in oral tradition, this song's verses sometimes overlap with other songs, such as Cumha Mhic an Tòisich, or MacIntosh's Lament:

*A mhnathan a' ghlinne seo,
ghlinne seo, ghlinne seo
Mhnathan a' ghlinne seo,
's mithich dhuibh èirigh*

Women of this glen,
of this glen, of this glen
Women of this glen,
it's time you rose up

*'S mise rinn moch-eirigh,
's mise inn moch-eirigh
'S mise inn moch-eirigh,
agaibhs' bha feum air*

It's me that woke early,
it's me that woke early
It's me that woke early,
you must as well

*Eoghainn Oig leag iad thu,
leag iad thu, leag iad thu
Eoghainn Oig leag iad thu,
'n eabar a' ghàraidh*

Young Ewan they felled you,
they felled, they felled you
Young Ewan they felled you
in the mud of the garden

*'S truagh nach robh mise sin,
's truagh nach robh mise sin
'S truagh nach robh mise sin,
's bheirinn air làimh ort*

Tis a pity I wasn't there,
a pity I wasn't there
Tis a pity I wasn't there,
I'd have been at your side

The folklorist Henry Whyte summed up the backstory to the pibroch's more popular title 'Bodaich nam Briogais' or 'The Carles with the Breeks' in his notes to Glen's *Collection*:

This tune is said to have been composed by Findlay MacIvor, piper to Sir John Campbell of Glenorchy. In the year 1672 George, Earl of Caithness, in consideration of certain sums of money advanced to him by Sir John Campbell, assigned to him all his titles and possessions, but binding him to take the surname Sinclair. On the death of Earl George in 1676, Sir John took the Caithness title, but was resisted by the next heir-male George Sinclair of Keiss, who gathered together a strong band of Sinclairs and seized the lands. In 1680

Sir John Campbell proceeded to Caithness with a strong following, and defeated the Sinclairs at a place called Alld-nam-mèirleach. The matter, after many difficulties, was arranged by Sir John being created Earl of Breadalbane, and Sinclair of Keiss being reinstated in the Earldom of Caithness.

Sir John's followers wore the Highland dress, while the Sinclairs wore trews - hence the contempt expressed for "*Bodaich nam briogais*," the carls with the breeks or trews.

A 2015 correspondent to the Pibroch Network on this tune nicely translated the idiomatic force of 'Bodaich nam Briogais' as, basically, 'Losers in Troosers'.

Maol Donn | MacCrimmon's Sweetheart

This English title associated with this beautiful pibroch, in terms of its reference to the MacCrimmons, seems to be a Victorian invention based on simple romanticism rather than any genuine oral tradition. 'Maol Donn' translates simply as 'brown hornless cow' and was a favourite in the *ceòl mór* repertoire of the southern Outer Hebridean community in which Rona Lightfoot was brought up.

Other titles and accounts as to the origin of this tune appear throughout the 19th century. Peter Reid in 1826 referred to it as 'A' Mhaol Donn – Morar's March', which does not mean that the tune was literally marched to; the word 'march' was often ascribed to pibrochs in the 18th century as a term of art. 'Morar's March' probably meant that the tune was a particular favourite of a laird of Morar. Other accounts ascribe the pibroch to Donald Ruadh MacCrimmon (c. 1743-1825), one of the last hereditary pipers to MacLeod of MacLeod to fulfil the office in a genuinely professional capacity. Still others claim that Maol Donn was a reference to Maolduin, an early Scoto-Irish king who was name-dropped at the coronation of Malcolm III in 1058.

General Thomason's account from 1900 is that in Benbecula in the 17th century, an old widow's cow wandered off and got lost in the marsh, and as livestock was the main source of income for West Highland farmers before the rise of the kelping industry, she was distraught. The cow was never found until a year later, when its skeleton was discovered among the peat-bogs. According to legend, the piper to Clanranald was among those in her community who had come out to help in the search; it is said that he, not Donald Ruadh MacCrimmon, composed the tune to commemorate the sad occasion.

The following verse depicts the desperation and despair of the widow searching for her cow:

Cha bu shealbhach dhomh d' fhaotainn
'S e mo ghaol am Maol Donn x3
Gad iarraidh 's gad fhaotainn
'S gad shlaodadh à poll

*It wasn't easy for me to find you
My love is the Maol Donn x 3
To search for you, to find you,
Nor to pull you from the bog.*

The verse above does not comprise a single song associated with the pibroch – it is rather one of a range of song fragments, preserved in perpetuity through the recordings of South Uist women with links to piping; chief among them Rona Lightfoot's mother Kate MacDonald, whose brother Angus Campbell was a champion pibroch player of the early 20th century and whose husband, daughter and son were all well-known pipers and tradition-bearers. Kate herself recorded approximately 200 songs for the University of Edinburgh's School of Scottish Studies Archives between 1953 and 1976.

Fhuair mi Pòg o Làimh an Rìgh | I Got a Kiss of the King's Hand

This pibroch and its associated song fragment, in English 'I Received a Kiss from the Hand of the King', is said to have been extemporised by a MacCrimmon piper to the Earl of Sutherland on the eve of the Battle of Worcestor in 1651 when King Charles II (long before the official restoration of the Crown in 1660) was inspecting his troops on the fields below Stirling Castle.

The account is preserved in the Wardlaw Manuscript, which was written by Rev. James Fraser, the minister of Wardlaw (now Kirkhill) around the time of the event in question. Edited here and there for spelling, the account depicts the King seeing from afar the almost royal deference with which many pipers were treating one of their own:

Never was Prince more taken up with an army as our King was, especially with the Scotch Highlanders, whom he termed the flower of his forces ...There was great competition betuixt the trumpets in the army: one Axell, the Earl of Hoomes trumpeter, carried it by the King's own decision! The next was anent the pipers; but the Earle of Sutherland's domestick carried it of all the camp, for none contended with him. All the pipers in the army gave John Macgurmen [MacCrimmon] the van, and acknowledged him for their patron in chief. It was pretty in a morning [the King] in parade viewing the regiments and bragads. He saw no less then 80 pipers in a crowd bareheaded, and John M'gyurmen in the middle, covered. He asked What society that was? It was told his Majesty: Sir, you are our King, and yonder old man in the middle is the Prince of Pipers. He called him by name, and coming to the King, kneeling, his Majesty reached him his hand to kiss; and instantly played an extemporanian port, *Fuoris Pòdge i spoge i Rhì'*, I got a kiss of the Kings hand; of which he and they all were vain.

Words associated with the melody and rhythm of the opening phrases of the pibroch have survived through oral tradition and convey the pride the piper felt in the honour of this transaction:

Fhuair mi pòg, is pòg, is pòg
O fhuair mi pòg o làimh an rìgh; x 3
Cha do chuir gaoth an craiceann caorach
Neach a fhuair an fhaoilt ach mi.

I got a kiss, and a kiss, and a kiss,
O I got a kiss from the hand of the king;
No one who's breathed into a sheepskin
Has had such joy but me.

'I Got a Kiss of the King's Hand' remains a firm favourite among pipers today.

Moladh Mòraig | In Praise of Morag

This fine pibroch has been known by several names over time: in Gaelic, 'Guileagag Mòraig' ('The Swanlike Warbling of Morag'); 'Ceilearach Mòraig' ('The Melodious Warbling of Morag'); 'Moladh Mòraig' ('In praise of Morag'); in English, 'In Praise of Morag', 'In Praise of Marion', and 'Marion's Wailing'. It seems also to have been known at one time as 'Piobaireachd Chloinn Dùghail' ('The MacDougalls' Pibroch') or the 'Grand March of Clan MacDougall'.

Like many tunes created, performed and transmitted through pibroch's oral-formulaic tradition, accounts vary as to the events which inspired In Praise of Morag's composition. Judging by the above, the tune may well have been associated traditionally with the MacDougalls, but it is generally understood today to have had Jacobite associations, particularly in relation to 1745-6, though the exact nature of its association with the Jacobite rising of that period differs according to folklore or Gaelic literary history.

The well-known Gaelic poet Alexander MacDonald (Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair) was a schoolteacher in Ardnamurchan when Prince Charles Edward Stuart unfurled his banner in Glenfinnan in 1745. He became a staunch supporter of the Jacobite cause and composed many song-poems associated with the movement and its aftermath. One of his most famous works was 'Moladh Mòraig (The Praise of Marion)', which is regarded as the first substantial Gaelic poem to be published whose structure and progressively complex syllabic rhythms mimicked pibroch. Research has shown that the air associated with MacDonald's poem is still discernible in the pibroch performed in modern times, once shorn of its cadential ornaments.

Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's famous poem is an unfettered declaration of love (and lust?) to a feminine object, but whether the object is a woman or a tree is still debated. The Skye-born pipemaker Donald MacDonald wrote of the pibroch in the 1820s, saying that the poet happened upon a copse of Scottish fern trees, and was so inspired that 'he went round and round it, and began his song.'

Derick Thomson's 1993 translation of the poem gives a sense of his adoration:

Since a glimmering of sense came to me in my youth,
I never saw a creature so glorious;
Molly, true, was mild, and her cheeks were rowan-red,
but fickle as the breeze, always song-singing;
Peggy was too mature for me to win her love;
flighty Marsaili had all sorts of strangenesses;
Lilly pleased me well though her lashes were too fair.

But they're all dishwater compared to Morag ...
You can't get her equal for beauty or ballast,
or for rare virtues in Mull or in Lewis:
she's chaste, smart and welcoming, confident, pride-less;
a stunner in figure from her top to her tip-toes.

The poet's ardour had its consequences, apparently. According to Donald MacDonald, Mac Mhaighster Alasdair's object of desire was a tree 'which he feigned to be a beautiful lady. When his own wife (who was a gentleman's daughter) heard of it, she vowed she never would put a foot into his bed; nor would she be persuaded, but that the subject of the song was a young lady in reality.'

Many years later, the piper to Queen Victoria, Uilleam Ross, claimed in his 1869 *Collection of Pipe Music* that the Morag in question referred to Prince Charles Edward Stuart on his flight from Hanoverian troops following the disastrous Battle of Culloden. The 'warbling' or 'wailing' of the title of the pibroch therefore took on a political sentiment.

Cumha Mhic an Tòisich | MacIntosh's Lament

This pibroch, in English 'MacIntosh's Lament', and its cognate song, have links with a range of other tunes in the extant repertoire, including Lament for the Son of King Aro (which referred to the Laird of Arisaig). As is often the case in oral tradition, the song's verses sometimes overlap with other songs, such as *A Mhnathan a' Ghlinne Seo*, or Women of This Glen.

According to a history of the MacIntoshes written in Latin in 1676, this lament was originally composed as a poem in joint commemoration of two chiefs of the clan who met their end in quick succession: Farquhar, who died after a long imprisonment in 1514, and William, who was murdered by disgruntled members of his own clan a year later.

Alternatively, oral tradition offers various accounts of the circumstances surrounding the composition of the tune and its associated song, but one of the most popular, touching and romantic is that it refers to an unnamed chief of the clan who was thrown from his horse immediately after his wedding. Alexander Carmichael was told the story on a trip to Barra in 1872, which folklorist Henry Whyte reprinted in his historical notes to the pibrochs in Glen's *Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd* between 1880 and 1907:

It seems there was a prediction that Mackintosh of that day was destined to die through the instrumentality of his beautiful black steed. Whatever he felt, the Chief determined to show his people that he treated the prediction lightly, and so he continued to ride his favourite, notwithstanding the entreaties of his friends to the contrary. On the day of his marriage the Chief rode his black charger, which became more than usually restive. He became so restive that the Chief, losing control over himself and his horse, drew his pistol and shot him dead. Another horse was at once procured for him, and he proceeded to the church. After the ceremony was over, the bridal party set out on their homeward journey. The bride and her maids, upon white palfreys, preceded, and the bridegroom and his friends followed. In passing, the Chief's roan horse shied at the dead body of the black horse, and the rider was thrown to the ground and killed on the spot. A turn on the road hid the accident from those in front, and thus the bride, unconscious of the fatal fall of her husband, continued her way home the happiest of brides. Tradition relates that she not only composed the beautiful and weird air of the Lament, but chanted it as she moved forward at the head of the bier at her husband's funeral, and marked the time by tapping with her fingers on the lid of the coffin.

Although some verses of the song bear witness to William's murder in 1515 (such as in the refrain), some others reflect the tradition of the wedding day prophecy. Here below are the refrain and two such verses:

Ochòn, a laoidh, leag iad thu,
leag iad thu a laoidh, leag iad thu
Ochòn, a laoidh, leag iad thu
'm bealach a' gharaidh

Bha mi 'm bhreidich 's am ghruagaich
Bha mi 'm bhreidich 's am ghruagaich
Bha mi 'm bhreidich 's am ghruagaich
'S am bhantraich 's an aon uair ud

An leann thug iad gu'd bhanais,
An leann thug iad gu'd bhanais,
An leann thug iad gu'd bhanais,
Air d' fhalair a bha e

*Alas my darling, they felled you,
They felled you my darling, they felled you
Alas my darling, they felled you
In the pass of the garden*

*The ale they brought to your wedding,
The ale they brought to your wedding,
The ale they brought to your wedding,
Instead it was for your funeral*

I was a maid and a bride
I was a maid and a bride
I was a maid, a bride and a widow
On the same day.

Whatever the origins of this pibroch and its associated song, it remains one of the most enduring and haunting laments in the *ceòl mór* repertoire.

Piobaireachd Dhomhnaill Duibh | Black Donald's March to the Battle of Inverlochy

This pibroch is a classic of the repertoire associated with all sorts of good things: battle, slaughter, the gathering of energies, the mustering of arms, and grudging clan rivalry. It is associated with two clans – the MacDonalds and the Camerons – and is linked most often to the first Battle of Inverlochy in 1431. This battle took place after King James I imprisoned Alasdair of Islay, Lord of the Isles; in response, Alasdair's cousin, Donald Balloch MacDonald, mustered an army and met the Earls of Mar and Caithness, who fought under the King's banner. Clan Cameron, loyal to King James, took part on the royalist side. Inverlochy, the site of the fighting, was Cameron land.

Folklorist Henry Whyte quoted from the first volume of *The Clan Donald* (1896) when he described a vivid and some might say biased account of the battle:

The wild onset of the Islesmen, who carried death upon the blades of their claymores and Lochaber axes, plunged the Earl of Mar's army into confusion, while the galling fire of Alastair Carrach's archers, whose successive volleys from the height seemed to darken the air, still further carried destruction into the ranks of the enemy.

Clan Donald's victory has led many to believe that the pibroch is a 'MacDonald' tune, conflating 'Black Donald' (Domhnall Dubh) with Donald Balloch. In fact Donald Balloch was never known as Domhnall Dubh; whereas 'Mac Dhomhnaill Duibh' was the traditional patronymic of Locheil, chief of Clan Cameron at the time. Indeed, many of pibroch's primary written sources refer to the tune as 'Locheil's Salute', 'Cruinneachadh Mhic Dhomhnaill Duibh', or similar, which again demonstrates its enduring Cameron connections.

Showing its popularity through Gaelic oral tradition, the tune is well known not only as a pibroch but also as a 6/8 march in the light music of the bagpipe and fiddle and as a song. The words of the song tend to favour the MacDonald connection, and are sung from the point of view of the defeated:

Piobaireachd Dhomhnaill Duibh	<i>Pibroch of Black Donald</i>
Piobaireachd Dhomhnaill x 3	<i>Pibroch of Donald x 3</i>
Piob and bratach	<i>Bagpipe and banner</i>
Air faich Inbhir Lochaidh	<i>On the battlefield of Inverlochy</i>
Chaidh an-diugh, chaidh an-diugh,	<i>Today went, today went,</i>
Chaidh an-diugh oirnne x 3	<i>Today went against us x 3</i>
Chaidh an-diugh, chaidh an-de,	<i>Today went, yesterday went,</i>
Chaidh a h-uile latha oirnne	<i>Every day went against us</i>
Theich, 's gun do theich	<i>Fled, how they fled</i>
'S gun do theich Clann an Tòisich x 3	<i>The MacIntoshes fled x 3</i>
Dh' fhalbh Clann Mhuirich	<i>The MacMhuirichs took off</i>
Ach dh' fhuirich Clann Dhòmhnail	<i>But the MacDonalds held firm</i>
Nuair a rainig mi 'm bhaile	<i>When I reached my village</i>
Cha robh caithream no ceol ann	<i>There was no celebration or music</i>
Cha robh piob ga spreigeadh	<i>No pipe stirring us</i>
Cha robh faram an oil ann ...	<i>No merry drinking ...</i>

The enduring appeal of the tune and the song is a testament to the strength of orality and cultural memory in Gaelic music.

A' Ghlas Mheur | The Fingerlock

A' Ghlas Mheur (literally 'The Finger Lock') appears in many manuscript and published sources across the 18th and 19th centuries, not just in pibroch collections but in fiddle collections as well, most notably Patrick MacDonald's well-known *Highland Vocal Airs* in 1784.

The origins of the tune remain a mystery and there has been much speculation among pipers, folklorists, and ethnologists as to the meaning of its name; particularly because the title appears in some sources as *glas* / *glass* and in others as *glais* (a misspelling of *gleus*). This is significant because while *glas* means a lock, *gleus* means to tune up, to test, to challenge.

Some have claimed that the title (in relation to *glas*, or lock) refers to thumbscrews – not today's small DIY screws intended to be tightened or loosened by hand, but the torture device introduced in early modern Europe. Others have claimed, rather fancifully, that the tune is named for a specific handshake exchanged between clansmen before battle. Still others cite fairy stories that have flowered in Gaelic oral tradition in which a young and inept piper encounters an old fairy who bestows upon the piper a great gift, in which it is said either that 'the lock on his fingers was taken off' (his fingers were suddenly nimble and dextrous) or 'the lock was placed on his fingers' (his fingers suddenly could perform a sublime 'grip', a typical bottom-hand embellishment). There is something to this latter element of the story, owing to a predominance of grips in its opening phrases.

It is impossible to determine when the fairy stories involving a 'lock' in relation to one's fingers began to circulate, but the earliest known written record linking A' Ghlas Mheur with the meaning of 'lock' was an anonymous manuscript drafted around 1815, which translated the title as 'a lock on fingers'. One could well imagine, however, that the tune was originally composed as a *gleus mheur* – a tune that tests the fingers; one that is technically demanding.

A' Ghlas Mheur was named as a reveille tune to be played by the piper in the Argyle Fencibles or West Fencibles in 1778, a regiment raised for home defence during the American War of Independence. The fact that the tune was played as a reveille may suggest that it was once (or at least in certain circumstances) played with a lively and stirring tempo, very unlike the slow and sombre approach that pipers have traditionally taken to the tune in the two centuries since.

That the tune was once played at a lively tempo is further suggested by the Gaelic song Òl òl òl, or 'Drink, drink, drink'. Renowned piper Allan MacDonald demonstrated the rhythmic links between the song and the pibroch in his 1995 MLitt thesis, concluding that the song's performance style is a crucial clue that suggests how A' Ghlas Mheur may have been performed in the 18th century:

Òl òl òl, òl òl òl,	<i>Drink, drink, drink, etc,</i>
Òl òl òl, òl òl òl;	<i>Drink, drink, drink, etc;</i>
Òl òl òl, òl òl òl,	<i>Drink, drink, drink, etc,</i>
Òl air an daoraich, òl òl òl.	<i>Drink on a spree, drink!</i>

Òl air an daoraich, òl òl òl,	<i>Drink on a spree, drink,</i>
Òl mar a dh' fhaodas, òl òl òl;	<i>Drink as you like, drink;</i>
Òl air an daoraich, òl òl òl,	<i>Drink on a spree, drink,</i>
Òl mar a dh' fhaodas, òl òl òl.	<i>Drink as you like, drink!</i>

Subsequent verses get more rhythmically complex, imitating the pibroch idiom in ways similar to Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's 'The Praise of Morag'.