

The Piper's Corner

by PVSFC Member Peter Walker

Retreat!

Last spring, we looked at 4/4 marches, and the use of pointing to imply stress on an instrument not capable of adjusting its volume. What, again, is pointing? Pointing is the process by which, in a figure subdividing a beat into a dotted note and a flagged note, where the dotted note is held beyond its allotted time, at the expense of the flagged note that follows, in such a way that they still add up to the original combined length of time; and in this way, imply stress on a note.

The stress on the note can be direct (a pointed dotted eighth can feel "bigger" than an unpointed one), or it can be indirect, by building tension in a pick-up note, the tension being resolved on a stressed beat. As with the 4/4 march, the 3/4 march doesn't differentially point to imply varying levels of stress; generally, the candidates for pointing are held to the maximum level possible.

There's another curious thing about 3/4 marches. When it comes to bagpipe marches, everything is about the down feet, not the down beat. These marches are marched to. In formation. With other pipers, and drummers even! And they have to move together. It's all real simple. For a quick march, the pipe major cries, "Right. Quick. March." and you start walking to that cadence, left foot first. Left, right, left, right. The drums immediately begin with four beats of rolls on the first beat. On the fifth beat you strike in your drones. On the seventh beat you play what's called the "preparatory E" on the chanter, and the ninth beat starts the first bar of the tune. If there is a pick-up, it's taken out of the time of the preparatory E, so that the first beat of the first bar is the ninth beat since you started marching, always on your left foot. As importantly, you stop playing on right foot. Always. Even when marking time (marching in place). Even at rest.

This is all well and good for tunes with an even number of beats per measure. But what about a 3/4 march? Two very popular tunes of this type are *The Green Hills of Tirol* and *Lochanside*. Each bar contains a heavy beat, a light beat, and what's usually a pick-up to the next bar, meaning the last note of the tune would be the second beat of the last bar. If you were to play this as I describe, you would end on the left foot. That won't do! So we've got to start the tune a beat later somehow. Now, a sensible person would tell the pipers, "In the case of 3/4

(or 9/8) tunes, there's an exception. It's two beats of preparatory E **plus** the beat of pickup, instead of minus, and you start the first bar of the tune on your right foot". But that involves math. So pipe tunes are written so that the first beat of every bar is what should be the pickup in the previous bar. Look at one of the tunes I mentioned in the fiddle club collection. Look at it from a phrasing standpoint. The heavy beat, from the standpoint of the melody, is the **second**, not first, beat of each bar. This is completely contrary to the meter or 3/4, and it's entirely designed to get you to end the tune on the right foot, if it begins on the left.

Now try playing one of these tunes as written, but making the first beat of every bar the heavy beat. Sounds strange, forced, doesn't it? It should! Now make the second beat of each bar especially heavy. There, that's it. I suppose we should be writing those tunes for fiddlers and other musicians with the pick-ups in their proper place - but the horses left that barn long ago.

So how does this look? I've included two versions of the Pipe tune *Lochanside*. The first, is the version played by the City of Alexandria Pipes and Drums. The second, at is how a fiddler might play it, noting the pointing and ornamentation, using my standard convention of "T" for a tap on the beat, "D" for a delayed tap, and "H" for hammer-on. I have notated the pointing by replacing the single-dotted eighth notes with triple-dotted ones, though the timing is inexact, this conveys the severity of the agogic stress used in a 3/4 march.

Lochanside

P/M John McLellan DCM (arr. J.G. Sprague)

Lochanside - "Literal" Fiddle Version

P/M John MacLellan, Dunoon

H - hammer-on
 T - tap (on the note change)
 D - delayed tap