

2015

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MAKING AUDIO LEARNING VISUAL

A Workshop Guide to Understanding the Pulses and Phrases within Light Music

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For over 4 centuries, pipe music has been passed on from generation to generation of pipers by mouth music. With the voice there are so many advantages. You will here:

- **Stresses where a note is prolonged**
- **Passages where notes are combined without you taking a breath**
- **Natural places to take a breath**
- **Volume variations within music expressing snap or accents**
- **Pitch changes expressing moods and drama in the music**
- **Repeats of passages (phrases)**
- **Resolution of a tune**

These are all nuances in our music that are not readily apparent in the written (visual) score. For years, they were understood with the aid of an experienced quality instructor – that is, passed down from one piper to another. But society has changed. With computers, photocopying, music software and the like, plus an indoctrination of Western rather than Highland culture, music students have become more visual in learning their music.

The genesis of this paper really must be credited to my piobaireachd teacher, John Wilson of Edinburgh and Toronto. In the early 60's I would go for my weekly lessons. He would sing the tune in an unheard of language; pitch that of a chanter and "words" that rhythmically, indicated the passages of the tune. He would articulate the words in what appeared to verses of a poem, taking breaths at various locations – quite often equally spaced and repetitive. Not being allowed to make notes, but just play, I would scramble on the way home to pencil his "voiceover" into my music, so I wouldn't forget the lesson. The syllables and words I used mimicked his. Little did

I know that I was learning a form of canntaraichd; not the ancient form from the Campbell Netherlorn MS but my own interpretation. To this day I use this method.

It is based on being able to recognize strong pulses or accents (volume difference) in our music. It doesn't rely on being able to vocalize the tune, although this is an asset. The important criteria must be the longer notes in a passage – those dotted 1/16th, 1/8th and 1/4 notes – all those notes your instructor tells you to hold!

So often, we read these strong pulses in the music but don't play them. You have to question whether you really see them at all. Have you ever heard the statement “hold that note as long as you can, and then hold it some more”? Laughable and impossible at best, for I believe each of us has an internal “governor”, like that of an auto engine, which limits the duration of a note for some reason. Those limits are too short and as a result we don't get the stresses in our music that we want.

The method we are going to use will always allow you to play in time – the best of both worlds where you will always play musically correct from the start and in time! The converse often happens, especially with the use of a metronome. We play in time but not musically correct. In steps your instructor!

So with this introduction, the method is quite simple. With the use of straight vertical lines I call pulse lines, I identify every note that is extended – dotted 1/16th, 1/8th and 1/4 notes – and place this line immediately behind it. The result is a series of one, two or three “syllable” musical words, with the strong note being identified. I play the first pulse... take a breath...play the second pulse... take a breath, play the third pulse... take a breath, etc. Then I repeat the process blowing through those pulse lines taking all the time in the world. Further steps allow me to shorten the distance across those pulse lines to create a passage of music that flows correctly from

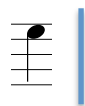
beginning to end. Let's try the method for a simple march to begin with. Once successful, we can easily upgrade the quality of the tune and consider similar techniques for strathspeys and reels.

Pulsing (The Words of Music)

Music is a language much like English. The understanding of a passage is in the words, not the individual letters. In music, pulsing is a method of determining the important "musical words". This will allow you to put "space" or good pronunciation into your music. Here are some rules to follow for pulsing. Strictly adhere to them and you will play all tunes with the best of them: pulsed, with good phrasing, rhythmic technique and in time.

Rules: Place a pulse line after

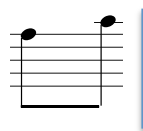
1. Every $\frac{1}{4}$ note



2. Every dotted note (dotted $\frac{1}{8}$ th note)



3. Every pair of $\frac{1}{8}$ th notes



The Shoals of Herring

Retreat

The image shows a musical score for 'The Shoals of Herring' in 3/4 time. It consists of four staves of music. The first staff has vertical blue lines indicating pulse positions. The music is written in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The score includes various rhythmic values such as eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Written with PiobMaster (Cool Mór Software Ltd.)

In the $\frac{3}{4}$ march (as well as in the $\frac{4}{4}$ march) there are just three types of pulses or words as indicated. The time signature and tune type will define the rules for pulsing all your other music.

A pulse, then equates to a word in a sentence. When playing a tune, never take a breath on your practice chanter in the middle of the pulse. This leads to incorrect rhythm; in other words, incorrect pronunciation.

With the pulse lines in place, you can begin to play the tune one pulse at a time, taking a rest on the pulse lines. As a second step, you can play continuous, blowing through the pulse lines; taking as much time as you wish.

Finally, you should shorten the duration over the pulse lines as you become familiar with the tune. This allows you to put **SPACE** into your music. These pulses are re-occurring. The time signature and tune type will define the rules for pulsing all your other music.

Phrasing (The Sentences of Music)

You read English in phrases, with punctuation, to form sentences. Phrases in music are often 2 bars in length, satisfying what many call a “question and answer” pattern. Marches follow this consistently. As with pulsing, there are set rules to follow to identify the musical phrases and eventually the sentences.

Rules – place braces around each two bars of the tune.

The phrasing pattern structure should be analyzed. Most often you discover a recurring pattern like

A	B
A	Ending

Having a look at the Shoals of Herring, we get

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The Shoals of Herring

Retreat

Written with ProMaster (Cool Mor Software Ltd.)

Notice a few things.

- 1. Bar 1 of each phrase is almost the same (bar 7 differing slightly)**
- 2. From the pulsing, the dominant notes use the A arpeggio, A, C, E and high A. It is not coincidental that the part ends in A (called resolution) and the 4th bar ends in B (the G arpeggio)**
- 3. Each phrase has 2 bars – the question and then the answer**

The Strathspey

Rules: Place a pulse line after:

1. Every 1/4 note | - strong pulse
2. Every dotted note (dotted 1/8th note) | - strong or medium pulse
3. Every triple (two 1/16th notes and an 1/8th note) | - weak pulse to last note

This will define those important musical words. Have a look at the pulse lines placed in Molly Connell to assist in reading the score.

The Tune: Molly Connell, composed by P/M Jimmy Wark

Molly Connell

Strathspey
MM = 106

Jimmy Wark - Strathclyde Police

The musical score is written on three staves in C major and common time. The first staff begins with a repeat sign and contains 12 measures. The second and third staves each contain 12 measures, with the second staff starting with a repeat sign. The music features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, characteristic of a strathspey.

The Pulsing – working two bar phrasing

Molly Connell

Strathspey
MM = 106

Jimmy Wark - Strathclyde Police

The image shows a musical score for a Strathspey titled "Molly Connell" by Jimmy Wark. The score is written for three staves in C major and common time (C). The tempo is marked as MM = 106. The first staff includes vertical blue bar lines and two blue arrows pointing to specific notes. The second and third staves continue the melody.

Reels

Now, from the above let's see what we can do with the natural pulsing of the reel:

Kalabakan

Reel

P/M Angus MacDonald
As played by Alasdair Gillies


The image displays a musical score for the reel 'Kalabakan'. It consists of four staves of music, each beginning with a treble clef and a common time signature (C). The music is written in a single melodic line. The first staff starts with a double bar line and a repeat sign. The notation includes various rhythmic values such as eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together, and rests. There are several trill ornaments indicated by small 't' symbols above notes. The score concludes with a double bar line and repeat sign at the end of the fourth staff.

There are some flexible pulses in reels, but you must feel them – either dot/cut or even.

Kalabakan

Reel

P/M Angus Mac Donald
As played by Alasdair Gillies



One thing for sure with reels, passages with or without dot/cuts, must be firmly established for consistency. You do have a lot of freedom here as we see above. Make sure there is consistency throughout the score.

Where GDE rhythms are used, pulse to the E grace note, using the 4th note as a connecting note to the next pulse i.e. an “and” note in the oral sense.