

2007 Tuition Series

Timing of Embellishments

Presented by Greg Wilson - Principal of the College of Piping

Introduction

The teaching of piping embellishments is a vital and yet under estimated step in the learning process. Teachers of piping have historically paid little attention to the timing of an embellishment or where a beat will fall if the embellishment is on a beat note. This is not restricted to the NZ Pipe Band scene. It is vital that as teachers of piping, we ensure our students are timing embellishments correctly, and are fitting them into a piece of music or an exercise accurately. There will be those who disagree with some of the content in this tutorial, but the assertions made have the benefit of endorsement from such eminent pipers as the late Pipe Major Angus MacDonald, MBE; Roddy MacLeod, MBE; Colin MacLellan; and Gordon Walker. This tutorial will focus on some key examples of piping notational embellishment.

Single Gracenotes

This is the first of the embellishments covered after mastering the scale and some basic exercises without gracenotes. Exercises – with or without embellishments – should always be practiced at an appropriate tempo and to a regular beat. This ensures that the exercises we practice will be directly transferable into the tunes we are learning or will be learning.

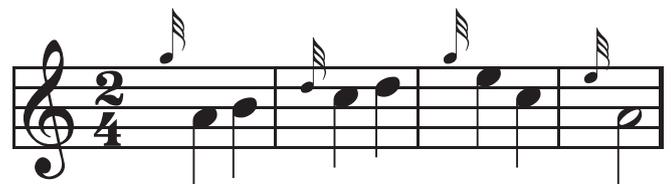
The high G gracenote is usually the first embellishment taught. As the vast majority who are reading this tutorial will know, it is achieved by lifting the high G finger on the top hand and replacing it smartly back on the chanter. This is simple, but is also not the end of the story. The

timing of the gracenote when put to a regular beat also needs to be taught. Let us look at the example in the music below where we are playing a series of high G gracenotes all on low A.



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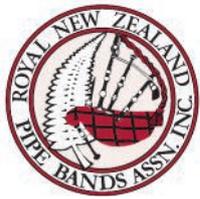
The beat occurs at the start of each low A note, as soon as the high G finger on the top hand has been replaced on the chanter. It does not occur at the start or part of the way through the high G gracenote. The same is true for other single gracenotes where they fall on a beat note. This is illustrated in the music below:



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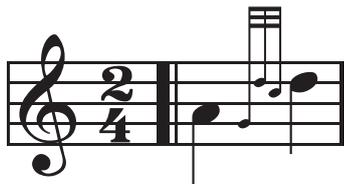
The Throw on D

After we have mastered the single gracenote exercises, we are introduced to the first complex embellishment (an embellishment consisting of more than one gracenote), usually the throw on D. This is a very common embellishment in pipe music and must be completely mastered if the



pipings student is to have any hope of producing good music. Some teachers prefer teaching the 'light' throw on D and some prefer the 'heavy' throw on D. The former is executed with a D gracenote to C followed by playing D, and the latter is executed by playing a grip to C followed by playing D. To me, it makes sense to start with the 'light' throw on D as our students have not yet been taught to play a grip! If the 'heavy' throw on D is preferred, it can be taught directly after the grip movement has been mastered.

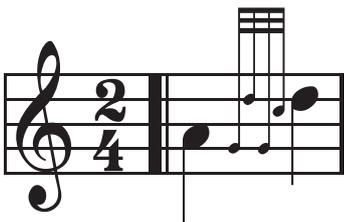
The movement from low A to D is written below where the D is a beat note. We need to teach our students to put the beat on the C gracenote within the throw on D; that is, the beat occurs as soon as we have put the D finger back on the chanter to make the C gracenote.



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Note that it is vital to put any throw on D exercise to a time signature and steady beat in order to develop fluency in the movement and to time it correctly in relation to the beat. An extra lesson or two and more development time at this stage will save a lifetime of problems with the throw on D!

If or when the 'heavy' throw on D is taught, the same principle applies. The grip should be timed so that the C gracenote occurs on the beat.

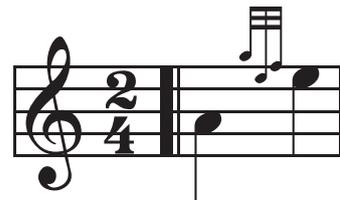


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Doublings

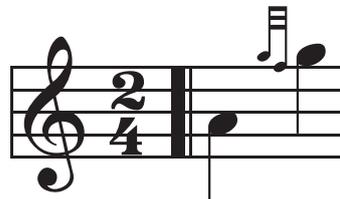
Doublings are so named because they produce a double sound on one note. Examples are the Low G, Low A, B, C, D, E, F, high G, and high A doublings. The throw on D, grips, taorluaths, birls, and single gracenotes are examples of embellishments.

If a doubling occurs on a beat note, the beat will occur at the start of the middle or theme gracenote as in the examples below. As soon as the high G gracenote has been completed, i.e. the high G finger has been placed back on the chanter, that is where the beat should be.



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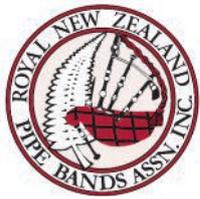
The exception is the high G doubling. We should be taught to play this doubling as a high G gracenote to F and then play high G with the beat occurring at the start of the F gracenote as soon as the High G finger has been replaced on the chanter.



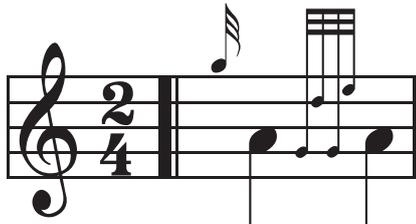
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The Taorluath

The timing of this movement has historically been taught in two ways. The first way is with the beat falling on the first low G gracenote



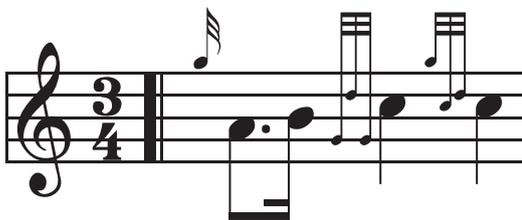
and the second way is with the beat falling on the note immediately after the E gracenote of the taorluath movement. The second way is the 'right' way. If you choose to attempt to time the taorluath with the beat on the first low G, you will have a lifetime of problems fitting a taorluath into a piece of music.



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Grips

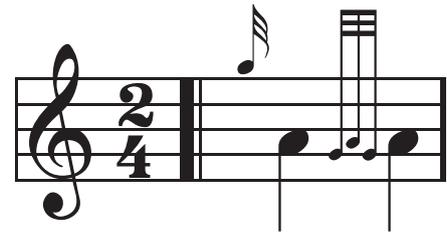
If a beat note has a grip preceding it, the key is for the grip movement to be completed before the beat occurs on the note immediately following it.



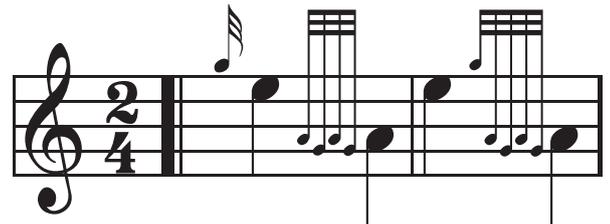
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Birls

The standard 3 gracenote birl (all birls from low A to low A) that occur commonly at the end of a measure and that are on a beat note should have the first low G gracenote of the movement placed on the beat. Birls from notes other than low A to a beat note should have the first low A gracenote placed on the beat.



[Click here to listen](#)



[Click here to listen to birl 1](#)

[Click here to listen to birl 2](#)

Summary

The intention of this tutorial is to highlight timing issues relevant to playing embellishments in pipe music. Again, it is not an exhaustive tutorial in that it does not cover every type of embellishment we have in piping. It does however, highlight the more common embellishments. It is vital that students of piping are taught to play embellishments correctly including timing them accurately in the exercises they are working from. This will ensure the standard achieved in the exercises is directly and easily transferable into the tunes being learned now and in the future, and a much more fluent and musical result will be clearly evident.

Greg Wilson