

Highland Piping: *Gaelic Roots 2000*

(Michael Kerr, *Instructor*)

Some General Principles

*) In order to concentrate on timing and expression (musicality), you must be as confident as possible with the tune. To get to that point,

- run through tune many, many, times on practice chanter
 - play tune many times from memory
 - sing tune to let natural instincts influence expression
 - carry tune over to pipes
 - back to ✱
- } ✱

This is a tried-and-true principle in my own playing. These steps all get wrapped up with each other as you really get to know a tune. Each tune should be approached as its own entity because each tune will sustain only a certain amount of pointing, only a certain amount of embellishment, and only a certain range of speeds...and sometimes these ranges are very narrow. Study the personality of each tune, finding its strong points and then bring out those strong points with your playing. Use whatever techniques you are comfortable with until playing the tune becomes like second nature. As you approach all of your music this way, you will find yourself becoming more musically mature and will probably find yourself re-visiting tunes: making your approach more sophisticated musically and more sophisticated technically (if the tune will accept it). That is, the whole process feeds on itself. You'll see a progression something like this:

You'll enjoy the music you're playing more → you'll gain more confidence → you'll approach things with more of your own personality and musical background → you'll start enjoying *your* music

*) Dance playing requires holding the beat. Bring your fingering into subjection to that requirement by either improving it or backing off on it. Then you can play dance music that is also enjoyable to hear. Learn to hold the beat by concentrating on the G-grace notes that set the cadence. A metronome and a scale exercise during warm-up help a lot in building these capabilities.

*) Listen, sing, listen. If it's a Cape Breton kind of a feel you want, listen to all the old time fiddlers you can find, recorded and live, as often as you can. If it's an Irish feel you want, listen, sing, ...