

David Semple.

PRESENTATION DINNER TO PIPE MAJOR DONALD MacLEOD,
GROSVENOR HOTEL, GLASGOW : WEDNESDAY 23rd NOVEMBER
1977.

The Chairman, Mr. Angus J. MacLellan, President of the Scottish Pipers' Association, welcomed the company and was sure no-one would take exception to the mention of a few who had come a distance - Joe Wright from Granton-on-Spey, the McCourt family from Bathgate, and Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Stobo from Edinburgh.

It was quite a time since he had seen so many friends of the piping world together - the last time was at Pipe Major Robert Reid's dinner almost twenty years ago. Both had been pipers to the Highland Club and the occasion was similar - thanks for what they had done for piping.

All present tonight had known Donald as a soldier, as a piper, but most certainly, as a gentleman, and we are here to pay tribute to him. On behalf of all the other Associations and pipers throughout Scotland, he called upon Mr. Ronald Morrison, Convenor of the Uist and Barra Piping Competition, to address the company.

MR. RONALD MORRISON, CONVENOR, UIST AND BARRA.

I consider it a very great honour to speak on behalf of all the Associations - and particularly the Uist and Barra - to pay tribute to Pipe Major Donald MacLeod, our very distinguished guest this evening. He needs no introduction from me; he is known the world over. Indeed, he is known to most of you as well as he is to me. It is my duty - and a very pleasant duty - to give you a few brief facts about Pipe Major Donald MacLeod.

He was born in Stornoway and, at the tender age of four, he received his first piping lesson from his father - I am quite sure his father little realised the great gift he was giving to the piping world when he introduced Wee Donald to the piping fraternity. Donald MacLeod was fortunate in those days because he came under the influence of two very distinguished personalities - I think I should mention, first of all, Major John Morrison of Assynt House, who took a special interest in Donald, and secondly, the legendary Willie Ross who instantly recognised the genius he was dealing with and, as time progressed, Donald was very fortunate to have these very illustrious tutors because Donald himself tells me he spent four seasons training and studying with Willie Ross. It is, however, to Pipe Major John MacDonald, Inverness, that he pays the greatest tribute because Donald had been associated with Pipe Major MacDonald for at least thirty years - twenty-five of them in very close liaison. Now, ladies and gentlemen, you must accept from me that John MacDonald was one of the greatest pupils of the MacPherson School, but he also had a foot in the Cameron camp, and you must appreciate that, having spent twenty years with one distinguished piper, you are bound to learn a great deal. As far as Donald is concerned, not only did he learn the MacPherson phrasing, he was also acquainted with the Cameron phrasing, and I think this is highly important in a judge of Piobaireachd Competition; he must know the two schools of thought before he starts condemning or criticising a player.

Having said that, Donald joined the Seaforth Highlanders in 1937 and, there again, he was lucky - he came under the influence of Pipe Major Logie and D.R. MacLennan. I doubt if they would have given much to Donald's playing success, but they would give him a great deal so far as expertise is concerned because, if you realise that, of twenty-five years of that service with the Seaforth Highlanders, twenty-one of them had been spent as Pipe Major - that record speaks for itself! Obviously, he must have been promoted Pipe Major at a very young age.

In 1962, after twenty-five years' outstanding service with the Seaforth Highlanders, he came to this country and was appointed Director of the Highland Brigade Piping School at the Bridge of Don and, here again, he met such distinguished players as John MacDougall, Iain MacFadyen, James McIntosh. In 1962 he retired from the army and joined Grainger & Campbell as a partner - a position he holds till the present time.

This is, very briefly, an outline of Donald as an islander and as a soldier, but I would like you now to sit back and listen to me because I intend dealing with this in greater detail - as a distinguished player.

Piping is the name of the game here tonight, and I am quite sure this will impress you. Donald won the Gold Medal at Oban and at Inverness; he won the Marches at Oban and at Inverness, the Strathspey and Reel at Oban and at Inverness, and the Jigs at Inverness eleven times!! Apart from that, he won the Clasp at Inverness eight times! and also the Open at Oban. The March, Strathspey and Reel for previous winners at Oban and Inverness, he has won six times - and he goes on to win the Bratach in the Open in London - and he has won every single competition at the Uist and Barra - March, Strathspey and Reel, Jigs, Piobaireachd, and the Overall on three successive occasions. He has done almost precisely the same with the Scottish Pipers' Association - he has won every event and the Overall on two occasions. If that isn't a record, what is? But, in addition to that, in 1957 in going round the Games, Donald competed in thirty-four events and won thirty-two of them! As Jock Wallace or Jock Stein might say, he has had the breaks - you add to that experience, efficiency and great playing. As Roddy MacDonald remarked, he thought Donald MacLeod was the best all-round player he ever heard!

Only a handful of years ago, he retired from competing in professional competitions - and dear knows why he did this because, today, he is just as good as the last time he played. At the last Uist and Barra, we were looking over the results and we noticed that seven distinguished, good pipers had played the Knightswood Ceilidh - Susan MacLeod, Fiona MacLeod, The Hammer on the Anvil, Roddy MacKay and many other tunes - but what I'm trying to say is that, apart from being a first-class player, the best piper of the generation, he is also a composer of magnitude. It is doubtful if any piper in this generation has composed so many beautiful tunes as Donald MacLeod. He is very lucky because it doesn't matter what tune he "attacks" - if that's the right word - he adds to it a certain sort of musicianship which really is difficult for me to describe. This is not the end, for we have now been told he has produced six piping books, and he tells me a seventh is in publication. He has also produced a Piobaireachd Tutor and the relevant cassettes - this is outstanding but I would say to Donald that one of his highlights is that he has been commissioned by the Piobaireachd Society to compose a piobaireachd in recognition of the Queen's jubilee - he has completed this commission and Her Majesty has graciously accepted it - this is an honour to him and the piping world, and we are very proud of him.

You must be thinking he has been playing day and night over the last twenty-three years; he has visited two thirds of the sane world - North America, South Africa, Rhodesia, New Zealand and Australia, organising, teaching and training in various summer schools, and at Tobermory this year, there were numerous pupils of Pipe Major Donald MacLeod's. I wonder what is going to happen to our Scottish heritage if these pipers from North America continue to come over and continue to give excellent performances? Apart from the summer schools, he has also found time to

produce great pupils in Scotland, who have brought him honour, and I will be forgiven tonight if I mention one or two names - Angus MacLellan, Andrew Wright, Dugald MacNeill, Andrew Pitkeathly, Iain MacFadyen, John Wilson and, I think I am right in saying, Jimmy McIntosh, too... all Gold Medallists and all distinguished players because of the experience and the effort Pipe Major Donald MacLeod has put into his work, and the great example he has shown to us.

I asked Donald recently what he thought was the best prize he ever won - he told me it was the two Firsts at a local Mod in Stornoway many years ago. He also said he thought one of the better distinctions which came his way was that he was Pipe Major of the Highland Club and he is proud of being associated with the Highland Club and, on reflection, I can see this clearly because the distinction follows MacDougall Gillies and Robert Reid, and now Pipe Major MacLeod continuing with this Club and carrying on the good work.

Angus mentioned he was a gentleman - he is indeed, but I would like to add to that and say he is a man of ideas and ideals which permeate his work throughout. I use the word deliberately because, recently, he has completed a recording with Scotsoun and, recognising the great service and brilliance of his playing, they presented to Donald a silver tassie which he has kindly presented to the Scottish Pipers' Association - indeed, a memorable gift and I am quite sure the Scottish Pipers' Association will not forget this gift from Pipe Major Donald MacLeod.

Ladies and gentlemen, in all I've said I have not mentioned the word "Retiral" - I don't like it - so far as piping is concerned, I don't like it. I am sure Donald MacLeod will never retire from piping, from composing - he might withdraw from public recitals, but never retire; he would not do that simply because Donald, as an islander, will never abandon his heritage - canan 's ceol - our language and our music - they are in the heart and never more so than in Pipe Major Donald MacLeod's.

It's all very well to praise Donald - and rightly so - but I think it is right to say he could do very little without his good lady. Many's a time, I am sure, she has waited dinner for Donald - but welcomed - and sometimes chastised - him a wee bit.

On behalf of the Highland Associations, Pipe Major and Mrs. MacLeod, my sentiments to you are these - health, wealth, prosperity and happiness - these are our wishes to you, Pipe Major MacLeod and your good lady.

PIPE MAJOR DONALD MacLEOD:

When I first heard of this presentation dinner, my reaction was one of wonder - what on earth for? I've been sitting here, enjoying a beautiful meal, listening to Mr. Morrison, and I still wonder, what on earth for! All I have ever done is to share the enjoyment with you, and many others - the love of the Highland bagpipe, its traditions and its music. I'm quite convinced that's all I have ever done - nothing else. My family are all here with me, except my wee grandson, who is more interested in sleeping than in eating just now, but maybe, one of these days, he will get my menu, which most of you have signed, and will treasure it, as we will treasure it, as a memento of this evening.

I am not going to speak for long - one or two little things I would like to say. Going back to when I was being taught, I wish I was still in the same region - I wish we had had tape recorders then - musically, I would have been very well off today.

Listening to Mr. Morrison's beautiful eulogistic speech,..... every now and then, my family threaten to hand me in for a newer model - this would be the time for the tape!!

Going back a few years to when I was 9, one very exciting year I went with John Morrison of Assynt House to the Northern Meetings. After a very rough crossing we arrived at Kyle of Lochalsh - at a most ungodly hour - and there, waiting in the station, was my first train! I spent the hour's waiting time wandering up and down the platform, marvelling at this monstrous train of an engine and three carriages! 7 o'clock the next morning - here was traffic moving at 7 o'clock! I thought Inverness must have been the biggest place in Scotland! Since then, many miles have been travelled and many tunes played - all because of the Great Highland Bagpipe! I say to the younger chaps - it is all there for you to do.

I will finish by casting my mind back to a dinner, something like this, in honour of Pipe Major Willie Ross of Edinburgh Castle. He was nervous and had a few notes, but before he was due to speak, all he had in his hands was confetti!! He stood up and said "Thank you but you shouldn't have done it!" - I hope it will sound half as sincere as it sounded to me that evening. It's been wonderful!

CEILIDH:

John Wilson, Strathclyde Police Pipe Band - Piping Selections.

Calum Ross
Archie MacTaggart } Gaelic Songs.
Joe Henderson - Scots Songs.