

ONE TONE: OVER THE LINE SWEET MHAIRI (2008)
Gordon A. Taylor.
The Sherbrook Music Company: Winnipeg, Canada

A REVIEW

Reviewed by
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Recently at the Class 3 slow marches and airs competition at the Caledonian Games in Woodland, California, I heard many of the old standards from "Westering Home," to "My Lodging's on the Cold, Cold Ground," when one young piper announced he was playing a "Gordon Taylor tune, 'Meadowpark;'" my fellow steward whispered to me this was a tune worth hearing. It was. Hence, when an offer came up to purchase three of G.A. Taylor's books, *A Collection of Bagpipe Tunes composed by: Gordon Taylor and John Gillis* (1995), *A Collection of Tunes by: Gordon Taylor Operation Gold Chair* (2000), bound and paginated by the composer, and the one under review here, I jumped on it. Now, having had the chance to go through them, I would like to share the impressions of a run of the mill (or less), piper who takes a serious approach to music in general and pipe music in particular.

Celtic music is highly structured, generally modal (mixolydian, for the most part), often pentatonic and frequently expressed in minor keys. I mention these constraints because one need only take a trip through the two volumes of the Scots Guards Standard Settings of Pipe Music to see how rigid and often repetitive themes, motifs and melodies can become. So, it is refreshing to encounter crisp tunes, snappy arrangements that are both pleasant to play and enjoyable to hear. Reading through and playing the music contained in these three works reveals that Gordon Taylor has a definite penchant for melody which shows up in his marches, airs and dances. In Taylor's two earlier works, including his collaboration with fellow composer, John Gillis, we see their willingness to take risks and depart from the standard fare that has been served up to us before as old wine in new bottles.

The latest work, *One Tone: Over the Line, Sweet Mhairi* represents a step forward. In some his arrangements of old favorites, e.g., High Road to Linton, Mhairi's Wedding and Devil in the Kitchen, we hear some new crisp approaches in the timing and use of embellishments. Many pipers love to show their stuff with reels, strathspeys and hornpipes, but can overemphasize technique at the expense of the tune. What Taylor gives in these arrangements is reasonable and realizable middle ground that strokes the performer's ego while pleasing the ear of the listener or dancer. However, it is his collection of 16 marches replete with clear, identifiable melodies that depart from the main in a modern, but not cutesy vein, the listener is most likely to remember.

As for challenges, I would have liked to have seen some more airs and slow marches. However, I recognize that the overall tone of this new volume is upbeat and as such, the more dirge-like music that old guys like me like to play can be found in his earlier work.

I commend this book to any piper who wants to expand his/her repertory in an eclectic way, whether playing the pipes in a marching band, providing music at a funeral or wedding, or even as part of a mixed group of musicians. Whatever the occasion, I think all of Gordon A. Taylor's books have a place-- but for those who want something modern, up-beat and "over the line," this is the book to have.