

Accentuation Patterns and their Impact on Steps in Scottish Highland Dance

By Stefanie Bilidas sbilidas@utexas.edu

Introduction

Highland Dance is a unique cultural art form. Modularity is part of the art form, as the order and choice of steps in one particular iteration of a dance is up to the dancer and the music for each dance may be up to the discretion of the piper and/or feature a rotating collection of tunes. Because many interpretations of one Highland dance can occur simultaneously and over time when dancers perform at different events, Scottish Highland Dance operates with a dynamic, modular pairing mechanism between conventionalized dance steps and musical genres.

For bagpipe music, a generic category implies the tempo, meter, and rhythmic accentuation. As an art form, Highland Dance is structured so that movements show the accentuation of several bagpipe genres. This leads to the same steps being performed with different accentuation depending on the musical genre. Furthermore, dances are made up of multiple tunes to different genres, leading to marked changes in movements throughout the dance.

Research Goal

I argue that music and dance interactions in Highland dance can be more fruitfully analyzed at the level of genre following Mari Romarheim Haugen's concept of music-dance (2021). I provide a way to analyze music and dance interactions through generic musical conventions and movement patterns for styles of dance where neither the music nor the dance is set.

Previous Literature

Mari Romarheim Haugen's concept of *music-dance* (2021)

"*Music-dance* refers not only to genres in which music is always performed with a corresponding dance but also to genres where the music and dance have developed together, under mutual influence, and where the music should be understood in relation to the corresponding dance."

"If the experience of a music genre's general feel is intrinsically related to specific motion qualities in the corresponding dance, it would imply that music and dance are experienced directly, as a unified entity."

Genres in Bagpipe Music

Metagenre 1: Light Music

• March – defined by time signature either in 4/4 or 6/8

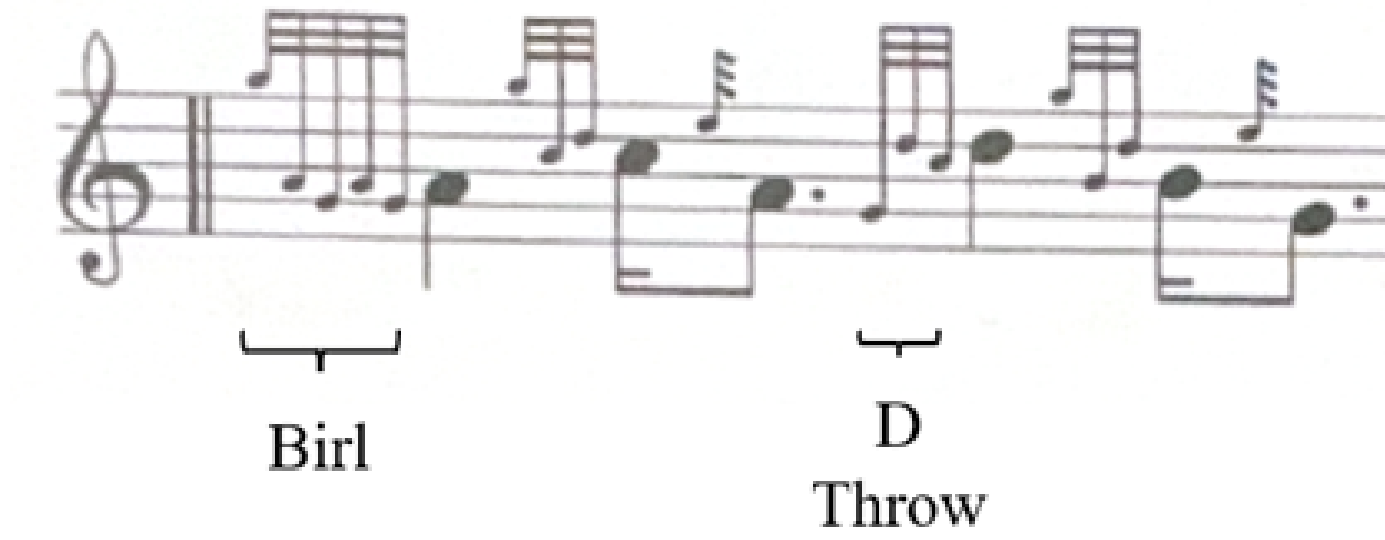
• Strathspey
• Reel
• Hornpipe
• Jig
• Slow Air

Played together for solo pipes
Played together for solo pipes

Metagenre 2: Piobaireachd

Figures and Results

Accentuation aligns with both pieces due to the change in dance movement.



Music for "Ghillie Calum" in common time, embellishments on beats 1 and 3 delay printed quarter notes
Used in the Sword Dance

Dancers perform two steps of a movement called "Pas de Basque" to match the embellishment into the quarter note

Video Example 1



Music for "High Road to Linton", cut time, evenly played beats
*Can be used as music inside of a Reel Dance

Dancers perform all three steps of the "Pas de Basque" since the music is now even

Video Example 2

Accentuation aligns because of a change in music to fit the general pattern of dance movements.



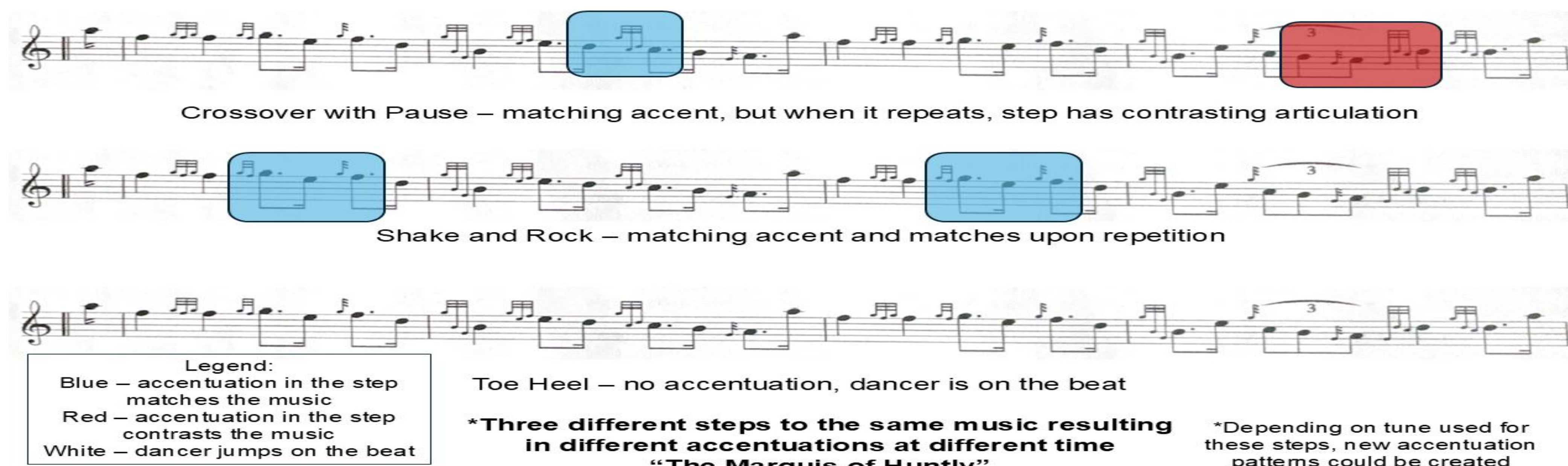
Music for "Orange and Blue" and a transcription showing how the embellishments push the notated downbeats to a slightly later timing Strathspey timing of quarter notes – **STRONG** weak MEDIUM weak

Video Example 3

Strathspey music used for all sections of dances related to a "shedding movement" Highland Fling
*Strathspey and Highland Reel
*Strathspey and 1/2 Reel of Tulloch
*Seann Triubhas in the quick time

*Here the music of the dance changes multiple times, the music of the Strathspey is used where the font is in bold.

Accentuation consist in the music, but both the step modularity and tune performed impact close reading relationships between the music and the dance.



Video Example 4

Conclusion

Considered a folk tradition, Highland Dance is also highly specialized and has a codified written system of steps. However, in practice, the exact combination between the dance steps and music is not specified leading to multiple combinations of the same dance. What stays consistent is the accentuation patterns of the movements and the music. I have argued that analyzing at the level of genre and studying accentuation patterns, allows for the connections between the music and dance to be illuminated in ways close reading cannot.



Link to the QR code to the Video Examples

Acknowledgments

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