MUSICA SCOTICA

800 years of Scottish Music

Proceedings from the
2005 and 2006 Conferences

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Performance Practice and Aesthetics in Traditional Scottish Gaelic Singing

Erin McPhee

My paper today [May 2006] will discuss my ongoing PhD research on performance practice and aesthetics in traditional Scottish Gaelic singing. As it is still very much a work in progress, I have more questions than answers at this point, but my hope is to help illuminate the under-researched area of Gaelic singing and performance. At this point, therefore, I will give an overview of my research topic, and present some early findings from my fieldwork.

The purpose of my research is to investigate the opinions and beliefs that lie behind Gaelic singing and performance, and look closely at what distinguishes Gaelic singing from other traditions. I have broken this topic down into four specific areas of research:

- Aesthetics
- Singing Styles and Vocal Techniques
- Performance Contexts, and
- Repertoire Selection and Transmission

To study these various elements, my fieldwork methodology involves a combination of first-hand interviews with singers to learn about their internal aesthetics, as well as participant-observation, which enables me to analyse singing and performance from my researcher’s perspective. While there is not time today to discuss each of these topics in great detail, I will say a little bit about each to give you a better idea of what I am trying to find out, and what I have learned from singers so far.

Aesthetics

One of the primary concepts of aesthetics that I am examining is what precisely is considered to be ‘good singing’ in the Gaelic tradition. Do singers place importance on such aspects as vocal timbre and technique, expressiveness, diction, or type of song? Are the poetry and the melody in a song thought to be equal, or does one dominate the other? In Irish sean-nós singing, a tradition which is closely related to Scottish Gaelic, it is not the singer at all, but the song, that is considered to be most important; the singer is simply the medium conveying the message, and the audience’s focus is meant to be on that message, not on the singer. In traditional music, there are many other attributes that are more highly prized, and are indicative of good singing, than a singer’s vocal quality. In fact, the terms ‘good singing’ and ‘good singer’ can be seen to represent different levels of aesthetic priorities, where for some it is the act of singing itself that takes precedence over the singer.

Traditionally, Gaelic singers equated the value of a song with the poetry, not the music, and felt that the melody did not have an existence independent of the words. The American musician and folksong collector Amy Murray, learning songs from singers in Eriskay in the late nineteenth century, cites in her book an example of being taught a song by two women who could see no difference between two phrases in the song that had the same words but somewhat different tunes: ‘Aren’t they just the same words?’ they said (Murray 1905-1906: 319-20). The variation in the music was not enough for them to consider the two phrases to be different. This aesthetic dominance of poetry over music was reflected in both Scotland and Ireland in the ancient practice of composing new songs to pre-existing airs, where a song was considered ‘new’ with the composition of new words and not necessarily a new tune.

There have been many external influences on the Gaelic singing tradition in the twentieth century, such as pop music to name just one. I think that how today’s singers judge the importance of the words versus the tune is a very relevant question, and can possibly reveal quite a lot about the state of the tradition today, and how much it has changed. So it is definitely one of the areas that I am exploring in my fieldwork with singers.
With regard to what constitutes good singing in the Gaelic tradition, the answers I have received from singers so far have been very diverse. One told me:

Well, it isn't necessarily having a good voice, though obviously you have to be able to carry the tune, you have to be able to reach the notes and all that sort of thing. It's more than that though. You have to express what the song says, and I don't mean [...] being overly emotional or anything like that, but your voice has to carry the message of the song, and you have to have respect for the words and for the tune, you have to sing them in a sympathetic way and not try and force them...

Another emphasised the intelligibility of the text as a crucial factor:

I think the most important part is being understood, being very clear [...] in the text, yes. Intonation. Often you hear people with fantastic singing voices, and you can't understand what the song's about, so I always want to know what the song's about, and if I can't understand what the song's about, well, it's not much use to me, so I think it has to be very clear.

And yet another singer, when I asked her about good singing, thought that the singer's vocal quality was very important to her:

I quite like a good melodic tone in a voice, I'm not so keen on harsh voices, I quite like a sweet, colourful voice, with just a bit of personality to it... male or female, a bit of warmth to the voice, I quite like.

So there we have three different singers emphasising three different parts of singing: the emotion and the overall feeling of the song, the text, and the vocal sound. Other singers I spoke to cited various combinations of these elements in what they found to be important, but every answer was slightly different, and as individual as the singers themselves are. Clearly, what is considered to be good singing is not a simple question with a straightforward answer, but a complex issue with many layers that will take much more investigation.

Singing Styles and Vocal Techniques

Description of singing style, whether of an individual or of a culture, is a sphere of ethnomusicology that is vague and imprecise. Vocal techniques are discussed less than instrumental techniques in the literature and no definitive descriptive vocabulary exists. It is much easier to describe what is sung rather than how it is sung, and consequently this is what much of the singing scholarship has focused on. Gaelic song is no exception, with most studies concentrating on the text of the songs rather than the method of singing.

It is, however, singing style in which I am interested, and what precisely typifies Gaelic singing. I am addressing such questions as whether or not there is a characteristic vocal quality, and if singers ever consciously manipulate their voices; what ornaments are used, and how singers decide how and where to use them; whether singers improvise, or if they know how a song will come out in advance of a performance; whether or not they sing a song the same way every time; and how their physical singing style affects their vocal sound.

These can be difficult questions for singers to answer, but in talking to them I am curious to see how conscious they are of how they sing; if it is something they really think about and work at, or if it is a natural process that they don't try to analyse. I have received quite a range of replies from singers on these topics.

If we take the use of ornamentation, as one example. Several singers told me that they don't think about it at all:

I don't know. I really don't know. I just do what I think, I don't, certainly, go through a line and think oh, I must ornament here, I don't do that, I just sing it. […] What I'm trying to do is sing the tune and the words together. And sometimes, ornamentation will happen. That's all.

Said another:
I don't decide at all. [...] I just sing.

A third singer felt very strongly that ornamentation is personal to every singer, and should be an organic process that is not copied:

Never think about it. [...] It just happens. [...] My angle on ornamentation is that it’s a natural instinct, and a natural flow, which is why I have real problems with people going back to a source, whether it might be a School of Scottish Studies recording or whether it’s a piece of musical notation, and then trying to mirror that. Because then it doesn’t come naturally to them.

This singer’s strong feelings on the subject of ornamentation are quite interesting, particularly in view of the fact that another one of the singers I spoke to learns her songs precisely by copying old archive recordings. To her such a method is not about imitation, but about preserving the songs the way the old people used to sing them:

I learn it from the original person singing it, where it was collected from. And if they put grace notes in, I put grace notes in [...] whichever way they sing it, I try to sing it that way as well.

In my interviews with singers so far, this is emerging as quite a prominent theme: on the one hand, there are those who see it as their obligation and responsibility to preserve songs exactly as they were sung in previous generations, down to every last grace-note; and on the other, there are singers who feel that the act of singing, while it is certainly about protecting and conserving songs, is also about their own creative expression, and finding their own personal way of communicating songs to their audiences. I will say more about this later in the context of transmission.

**Performance Contexts**

A fundamental principle of ethnomusicology is the belief that music cannot be isolated on its own as simply a series of sounds, but must be considered in its cultural context. In an analysis of vocal performance practice, this means that researchers must investigate the performance as a whole, taking into account the music itself, the performer, the audience, the physical setting, and the performance occasion.

The setting is a crucial variable in any performance, as it may influence the singer’s choice of songs and how they present them, and also how they present themselves. Formal concert situations, where the performer is on a raised stage and separated from the audience, and where there may be theatrical spotlights and amplified sound, are very different from a small musical gathering in a home, and this will certainly have consequences for both the musical and extra-musical behaviour of the singer.

In addition, the relationship between the performer and audience is extremely important in traditional oral performance and this has a substantial effect on the overall result. Most of the singers I interviewed felt that communication with their audience was an essential part of their performance, and for many this involved speaking to them: perhaps telling the story or background of the song before they sang it, or describing what the song meant to them, or where, when, and from whom they learned it. Different singers had different motivations for doing this. One said that it was about ‘respecting the people that you got the songs from’, while another felt that such communication made the songs accessible to the audience:

Because if you give them just a teeny line, all it needs is a very short introduction in some cases, and it’s enough for the audience to jump on it, and have a picture that they can stick with in their mind which helps the song along for them.

Yet another singer, while also feeling that spoken introductions helped the audience further understand and appreciate the songs, also liked speaking to her audience for her own benefit:

‘Cause it relaxes me, it makes me feel at ease too. And I’m not nervous, but I just feel that getting up there and singing and going off it’s like- we’ve lost something, because we’ve got to share ourselves as well as the song and the stories.
Traditionally, another very important part of the performer-audience relationship in Gaelic singing was the audience taking part by singing the choruses along with the soloist. Based on my interviews, it appears that this is still the case, as every singer I spoke to enjoys, and in fact prefers, it when this happens. This may be partly because it can make their job easier; as one singer said, whose repertoire consists mainly of waulking songs, 

It lightens the load considerably if the audience help you with the chorus.

It may also be because it seems that many Gaelic singers see singing not as a one-way performance to non-participating listeners, but as a real relationship with their audience, where both performer and audience are sharing equally in the experience of the song. One singer described this by saying that:

I think when a singer sings a song that people know, there is a bond. It’s as if they’re all sharing in the same thing. […] And they can evoke a lot of feelings and memories in the people listening that maybe the singer knows nothing about, but it can be a very emotional experience. […] I think that the singer will feel that, they’ll feel that from the audience, that people are […] all sharing in the same thing, when a song is sung that people know, and I don’t think it would be the same if they were singing on their own. I think songs are meant to be shared.

The performer-audience dynamic of Gaelic singing may be changing, with Gaelic singers performing regularly for audiences who don’t speak the language, but it appears that many singers still see the relationship between the performer and the audience as an important part of the tradition today.

**Repertoire Selection and Transmission**

The factors that affect a singer’s choice of repertoire are very interesting. The seemingly obvious criterion of personal preference has been cited in the literature as a reason for many singers’ choice of songs, but it is the influences behind the personal preferences that are intriguing to explore more closely with the singers themselves. Aesthetic appeal is an important consideration, including such aspects as melody, rhythm, poetry, complexity of the language, subject of the song, and length of the song. Singers’ individual personalities and life histories will also influence the kinds of song to which they are exposed and those they prefer.

There are also several external factors that can have a great effect on repertoire selection, such as what audiences want to hear, and what other singers are performing. From singers I have spoken to, I have found that those singers who make their living performing Gaelic song are more conscious of their audiences’ tastes and preferences, but their own opinions are also important to them; just as the singers who sing for their own enjoyment are also aware of what other people in the community like to sing and what songs they want to hear.

How and why singers select their repertoire is particularly interesting to me, and is one of the areas I hope to learn more about as my research continues.

Alan Lomax has written that ‘Folk singers do not sing naturally, like birds. All singing is learned behaviour’ (Lomax 1978: 70). How singing styles and vocal techniques are transmitted from generation to generation and singer to singer in the Gaelic tradition is, I think, a very important question, but one that has largely been ignored in the literature. This may be due to the informal nature of style transmission, where traditionally the teaching of songs emphasised the verbatim passing on of the texts. Whether verbalised or not, singing style was definitely transmitted from singer to singer. The Gaelic custom of learning songs word for word from repeated hearings means that singers would have been learning and assimilating singing style at the same time, and they would have had to sing within the cultural aesthetic boundaries in order for their performances to be accepted by their community.

Because the contexts of Gaelic singing are changing, today’s singers do not always have the luxury of hearing songs sung all around them as a part of their everyday life, and they have to make a more dedicated effort to learn songs and singing style. My realisation of this has made me curious to talk to singers about if and how they change songs stylistically from the way
they originally learned them, and, just as we saw earlier in the comments on the use of ornamentation, singers have very
different opinions on this subject.

One said quite unequivocally about changing songs:

No, no. Some people say that you can, that you can put your own style on it, but I quite like singing it the way- if it’s supposed
to be sung like that, or if that’s the way it was collected, then I quite like singing it that way.

Another singer feels that everyone has their own individual voice and so subconscious alterations will inevitably happen:

You try not to change it. […] Because, well, you change it anyway because you’re singing, your voice is different, your whole thought process is different so you’re going to change it, but you try and remember the words you heard, and work from there. […] But consciously, no.

And a third singer feels that there are many different ways to sing a song, and that the particular version she learned originally is only one possibility:

Of course I do. Because that’s just one- that’s the introad. And I would also check up other sources. I’ve got classic examples of looking at songs and finding six or seven recordings from the same singer. And they’re all different. […] There’s no such thing [as a correct version], I don’t think.

Among the other singers I spoke to there was a range of opinions as to if and how it was acceptable to change songs. Those singers who do make changes, however, felt that they were only able to do so because they had strong backgrounds in the tradition, and were not doing it lightly. They felt that they had the knowledge and understanding to inform any decisions that they made, and so felt that they were still treating the songs with the respect that they deserved.

**Conclusion**

This, then, is an overview of the main aspects of my doctoral research, and a small sample of what I have learned from singers up to now. My fieldwork will be continuing, and I still have much more work to do in that area. I will also be branching out to analyse and compare singing styles more closely and to investigate aspects such as vocal timbre which are impossible to discover in interviews alone.

Two areas in which I am very interested are firstly, how singing style and vocal timbre are changing over time, and secondly, how the singing style of different members of the same family varies or corresponds, and these are directions I will be following next. While I do not yet have many definitive answers, I hope I have managed to shed some light on what is important to singers in the Gaelic tradition, and identify some of the key areas that I think deserve further research.

**Bibliography**

LOMAX, Alan (1978) Folk Song Style and Culture. (New Brunswick New Jersey: Transaction Books)
In the 1980s I was doing ethnomusicology fieldwork in the Glenkens in Galloway in South West Scotland, documenting the musical life of this still lively rural community. I drew on the memories of many older residents whose oral memory recalled the early years of the twentieth century or, when relating stories of their parents, even earlier. The fruits of such fieldwork often includes artefacts, and over several years I was given many collections of written and published music, personal songbooks, photo albums and even instruments. I still occasionally receive items - people like to feel these things from the past may have a new life in the present. One of my interviewees was Peggy Kirk (1913-199?), a pianist who had played for dancing, and was also a church organist. Peggy and her sister Jean gave me printed music belonging to their father, Will Kirk, a fiddler.

Amongst this material was the manuscript I want to describe here. I call it the Hanning manuscript, after its creator. It is a small notebook about A5 size, written sometime between 1790 and about 1820 in the Gatehouse area of Galloway and containing 94 tunes in all. Many such fiddle books were made all over Scotland in the eighteenth century, and a fair number survive, but none that I am aware of from this part of the country.
I think that it is significant for three main reasons:

1. it provides evidence of a local fiddle tradition in eighteenth - nineteenth century Galloway, an area often neglected in studies of Scots fiddling and traditional music generally;
2. it allows comparison with other similar manuscripts of the period;
3. it provides a link to a family and local music tradition of the recent past.

Will Kirk, the fiddler who last owned and used the Hanning Ms, was born in 1871 in the Glenkens. His father (also William Kirk) was a shepherd, and young Will worked and travelled with his father, including spending time in the Gatehouse area where his father managed a farm in the 1880s-90s, and where he may have acquired the fiddle manuscript. Will made his first fiddle himself - a not uncommon skill amongst many Scottish fiddlers - and for a time cycled weekly to Dumfries, about 20 miles away, for lessons. In 1911 Will went to live in the St John's Town of Dalry area, where he spent the rest of his years. A shepherd like his father, Will often took his fiddle with him when he went lambing or shooting rabbits and would play it when the work was quiet. He also taught pupils for free, and played regularly for dances at small rural schools and halls outside the villages, being paid between 7/6 and 10/ for these engagements. He also accompanied the classes of Mr Buck, a travelling dancing master who visited the area. There were stories that Will actually took the class himself on occasions when Mr Buck had had a drink too many! Will Kirk began playing regularly with accompanists, including his daughters Peggy and Jean, when Dalry Town Hall acquired its first piano in 1925. He died in 1951.

We have, then, a picture of the activities of a typical local fiddler in the early twentieth century. Will Kirk's collection of music included not only the older manuscript examined here, but also tunes to accompany the dances of his own day - some in his own hand, some printed. Examples include music for waltzes (mostly Scots song tunes), grand march, Paul Jones, valeta, foxtrot and the one step (an American medley beginning with 'Yankee Doodle'). There are also popular song tunes of the era such as 'I've never seen a straight banana', 'My Irish home sweet home' and 'Let me call you sweetheart'. A dance album includes music for foxtrots, waltz cotillons and lancers.

It is not known what use Will would have made of the eighteenth century Hanning Ms., though signs of his pencil scribblings on it indicate that at least he kept it accessible. It contains not only music notation but dates, signatures, place names and text (See Appendix). There are signs of its having been used not only as a music collection but also as a commonplace book by its creator James Hanning, a possible descendant and an unknown other, who may or may not have been Will Kirk. A few tunes are given in more than one version. Music may well have been copied from published collections, or recorded from memory. Parts of some pages have been cut out - perhaps items were given to others - and corrections and changes have been made. All this indicates regular practical usage of the manuscript, as opposed to its having had a role as a showpiece item to be displayed to visitors or prospective publishers.

The contents are comparable in range to other contemporary collections. All are melody only apart from one, 'Count Brown's March', which has a second melody part and a bass line. Jigs and reels are most prominent (28 jigs, 21+ reels). There are seven strathspeys. The name strathspey, of course, only appeared in printed collections in the later eighteenth century though they were probably played before this. There are four allemandes, four marches and one each of gavotte, cotillion and minuet. All the tunes are linked to popular dance forms of the day although they may also have been played for listening. Most of the items were widely known and published in eighteenth century collections, such as this tune, published by Robert Bremner and many others:
Also published in Bremner’s collection was one of several Hanning Ms tunes with local names. Portpatrick was a significant local port at the time the manuscript was created, especially for cattle trade with Ireland:

There is also ‘Fleet Bridge’. As David Johnson has pointed out, a number of tunes were written in the late eighteenth century to celebrate new bridges. These constructions are a big event for communities at any time, and a Glenkens fiddler I interviewed in the 1980s, Robbie Murray, made a tune of his own for Polharrow New Brig, built over Polharrow Burn in 1980. Another tune was named ‘Kirkdale New House’ - after the home of members of the local gentry - although in fact this is just a renaming of Nathaniel Gow’s reel ‘Loch Earn’, a common practice in fiddle collections at the time.

Other items include dance tunes of the day employed by songmakers like Robert Burns and still well known today, such as ‘White Cockade’ and ‘Stumpie’, and the strathspey ‘Braes o’ Tullymet’, used by James Hogg for his song ‘Birniebouzle’. Amongst the more classically influenced items is the ‘King of Sweden’s March’ - obviously a favourite, since Hanning has
written out two versions of it, one in July 1790, and the second in September of the same year, headed "a good sett", though the second hardly varies from the first. The tune appears in other fiddle manuscripts of the time, and is an example of the type of long variation set created between 1730-1800. Its theme is a trumpet march, with chordal variations based on Italianate chord progressions.

Towards the end of the book we have 'Yankee Doodle', much published then and, you may recall, also part of a set played by our twentieth century fiddler, Will Kirk. The version in the manuscript is a strange setting, with the intended key unclear.

In cases like this a certain amount of guesswork is needed to establish the likely version of the tune. The manuscript certainly includes mistakes, some of which Hanning himself has corrected, but this serves to remind us that notation is only ever a guide and that the performer has choices as to how the tune is played. This manuscript raises questions, then, not just about the repertoire represented, but how the collection was made and used, by whom, and to what extent aspects of it may be descriptive rather than prescriptive of a playing style.
It is clear the creator was called James Hanning, although it appears that at least one other - possibly a descendant - contributed items in another hand later in the book. Old Parish Registers record a James Hanning (or Henning) who was born near Gatehouse and would have been 31 in 1790. Hanning wrote down tunes and other items over a period of three decades, while he was staying in the Gatehouse area. In fact the majority of tunes seem to have been noted over four years; around half at the farms of Barncrosh and Parkyett in the summer of 1790, and from 1791-94 most others in Gatehouse. A small number of items were added in 1814, 1819 and 1823.

Figure 6: The old farmhouse at Barncrosh, one of the locations mentioned frequently by Hanning

It is important to know something of local history if we are to speculate further on Hanning’s possible identity. In the late eighteenth century Gatehouse was a thriving centre of industry. It did not exist before 1760, when James Murray of Cally Estate built the village, and in 1763 Cally House. By the 1790s over 500 people were employed in cotton manufacture in Gatehouse, which was the most important centre of the Galloway cotton industry. The first Statistical Account in the 1790s records fifteen public houses and daily mail coaches from Carlisle and Portpatrick. There was also a well established cattle market and tannery which collapsed when cattle droving from Ireland to Portpatrick ceased. So it was a thriving town when Hanning first started to set down his fiddle tunes. By the mid nineteenth century however the cotton industry was failing. We know James Hanning was on farms in 1790-91, and then in Gatehouse itself from 1791-94. At this time he may have been a farm manager or other employee of the local Cally Estate. The next manuscript entry is not till 1814. There are references to a James Hanning, merchant, in advertisements in a local paper of 1810-11, as Gatehouse agent for Bleachfields. Perhaps Hanning was first in agriculture, then a merchant. I have not yet found a date or local place of death for him which suggests that he may have moved out of the area as his work changed.

I have yet to examine the papers of the Cally Estate, which may well have been Hanning’s employer and I hope that these will yield further information. The ‘great house’ culture in this period which supported much music teaching and performing is well known so that it would not be surprising if this included Cally House. Hanning was obviously an educated and musically literate man, who probably had access to some of the many published music collections of his day. I intend to explore other contemporary accounts of the local music culture of the period, though from experience these are likely to be
sparse, searching for any mention of James Hanning.

Finally, there lurks the tantalising possibility that through researching historical sources and continuing fieldwork in Galloway it may yet be possible to establish a direct connection between Hanning and the last owner of his manuscript, Will Kirk, neither of them named in the ‘great men’ history of Scottish fiddling so often told and retold, but both of whom were undoubtedly active and important contributors to the musical life of their communities in their own day.
## Appendix

**HANNING MANUSCRIPT**

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<td>Ma Chere Amie (verse)</td>
<td>2/4</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Le Maire's Allemand</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Norriss's Allemand</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Ratha Fair</td>
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<td>blank</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td>A Favorite Gavot</td>
<td>2/4</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Graces</td>
<td>6/8 jig</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td>James Hanning Cally, Oct 26th, Gatehouse of Fleet 1823, near Dumfries by Castle Douglas in this side of Creetown over the carse of slakes and down by his grandfather's</td>
<td>6/8 jig</td>
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<td>King of Sweden's March bad sett</td>
<td>6/8 jig</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Barncrosh July 9th 1790</td>
<td>6/8 jig</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Adam Turner, Blacksmith</td>
<td>6/8 jig</td>
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</table>
17   King of Sweden's March contd.
18   A Song. Mutual Love
19   King of Sweden's March contd.

XX    The White Cockade
[part of page cut out]

XXI   The Birks of Invergary

20   James Hanning, Adam Turner, Cally

21    XXII  Breas [sic] of Tillymite
       Barncrosh July 9th 1790

XXIII  Miss Ward’s Delight July 10th
       2/4 reel

XXIV   The Handsome Fellow
       2/4

22   explanation of Italian musical terms

23    XXV  Count Brown’s March (melody & keyboard acct)
       Barncrosh 20th July 1790

24   unclear scribbles

25   Count Brown’s March contd. July 21st 1790

26   A Cosmetic or Wash for the Ladies Sept.30 1790

27   [top part of page cut out]

XXVI  Miss Ramsey’s Reel
       C reel

XXVII  Kiss me Sweetly
       C

XXXVI  Camron [sic] has got his wife again
       good sett

28   The Ducks dang o’er my Daddie
       Gatehouse 15 April 1814 [same hand but added later]
       6/8 jig

29    XXVIII Cuddie’s Wedding. Strathspey
       C strathspey

XXIX  Stumpie strathspey
       C strathspey

30   blank

31    XXX  The Merry Lads of Ayr Parkyet 29th July 1790
       C reel

XXXI  Rosina 29th July
       6/8 jig

XXXII  Miss [Abot’s] Favorite Parkyet 29th July 1790
       6/8 jig

XXXIII A Bonny Lass to marry me
       C reel

XXXIV Sleepy Maggy Parkyet Aug 3
       C reel

32   blank

33    XXXV Lochiel’s Rant Parkyett 3 August 1790
       C reel

XXXVII Sr. Alexr. Macdonald’s Reel 3 August
       C reel

XXXVIII John o Badenyon Parkyett 4th Aug. 1790
       C reel

34    XXXIX Manksman’s Lake 4th Aug
       C reel

XL   The Chase 5 Aug
       2/4

XLI  The Samson’s Festival 6th Aug 1790
       2/4

XLII  The Cowslip
       C

35    XLIII Sykes Fair 6th Aug
       6/8 jig

XLIV  Lenox’s Love to Blantyre Parkyet 14th Aug 1790
       C strath.

XLV  The Fyket Parkyet 14th Aug 1790
       C reel

XLVI  Had the Lass till I win at her Parkyet
       16th Aug 1790
       C reel

XLVII I has a wife o my ain Barncrosh 18th Aug 1790
       9/8 jig

36   handwriting scribbles
37  King of Sweden’s March contd.
    Barncrosh Sept 21st 1790
38  blank
39  LX  Lord Lothian’s March Gatehouse Octr 26 1791   C
    [part of page cut out]
40  blank
41  LI  The Myrtle Barncrosh 20th Aug 1790   C
    LII  The Mason’s Apron Barncrosh 23rd Aug 1790   C reel
    LIII  Sally Kelly August 23rd   C reel
    LIV  The Garner’s Garter 23rd August   strathspey
42  blank
43  LV  Athol House Barncrosh 24th August   C
    LVI  Family Duty Barncrosh 24 Aug 1790   6/8 jig
    part of page cut out
44  blank
45  King of Sweden’s March. A good sett.
    Barncrosh, 6th Sept. 1790
46  pencil addition
47-8  torn out
49  LVIII  Take care of [ ] Lagg June 24th 1791   6/8
50  blank
51-2  cut out
53  LIX  [F]leet Bridge   6/8
    part of page cut out
54  pencil addition
55  King of Sweden’s March contd. Barncrosh Sept 21st 1791
56  blank
57  LX  Lord Lothian’s March Gatehouse Oct 26 1791   C
58  blank
59  LXI  Orangefield’s Strathspey   C
    LXII  Duke of Holstein’s March Gatehouse Oct 26th 1791
60  blank
61  LXIII  Mr Charles Sharp of Hoddam’s Giga   6/8
    LXIV  The Baker’s Rolling Pin   6/8 jig
    LXV  A March Gatehouse Oct 26th 1791   C
62  scribbles and Morgan Rattler
63  LXVI  Morgan Rattler Gatehouse 1st March 1792   6/8 jig
    LXVII  Better sett same tune P. Gordon Scripsit. 2nd March 1792
64  LXVIII  Sukey Bids Me   C reel
    LXIX  Nottingham Races   C
    LXX  Ace of Spades. A Cottilion   2/4
65  LXXV  A Mile to Ride   9/8 jig
    LXXVI  The Rakes of London   6/8 jig
    LXXVII  An Irish Jigg   6/8 jig
66  scribbles: James Hanning, Cally Gatehouse
67  instructions for interpreting musical signs
68  scribbles of James Hanning, Cally
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Music Title</th>
<th>Time Signature</th>
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<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Christmas Day in the Morning</td>
<td>6/8 jig</td>
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<td>71</td>
<td>English Oak Stick (different hand)</td>
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<td>72</td>
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<td>73</td>
<td>Lass gin ye loe me tell me now</td>
<td>6/8</td>
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<td>74</td>
<td>blank</td>
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<td>75</td>
<td>German [Sp...]? (no barlines) Capt Davill's scripsit</td>
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<td>Lord George Gordon's Reel Gatehouse</td>
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<td>30 Sept 1794</td>
<td>C reel</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Paddy Whack</td>
<td>6/8 jig</td>
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<td>76</td>
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<td>77</td>
<td>Ale Wife and her Barrels</td>
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<td>Stewarnton Lasses. a good reel Oct 2 1794</td>
<td>C reel</td>
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<td>79</td>
<td>Yankee Doodle Gatehouse Oct 13 1794</td>
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<td>Wednesday's Night from Lond.,</td>
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<td>Magar 8 Nov 1819</td>
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<td>80</td>
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<td>81</td>
<td>unnamed reel</td>
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<td>82</td>
<td>Song contd.</td>
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<td>83</td>
<td>Song (air only)</td>
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<td>85</td>
<td>W Normans, Comedien</td>
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<td>86</td>
<td>Nae bonny lad to tak me awa</td>
<td>6/8</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Highland Ladd</td>
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<tr>
<td>87</td>
<td>Morgiana in Ireland</td>
<td>6/8 jig</td>
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<tr>
<td>88</td>
<td>St John's Town Dalry, 26 January...</td>
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</table>

**Endnotes**

1. See Miller, 1986, for a detailed account. Recordings, photos and other related material are in the Archive of the School of Celtic and Scottish Studies at Edinburgh University.
2. But see the Little manuscript from Dumfriesshire (Johnson, 1984) and also Riddell, 1794. Both require comparison with the Hanning ms.
3. See Flett, p23, for further information on Mr Buck.
4. Burns, 1921
5. See Johnson, pp7-8, for discussion of creation and use of contemporary fiddle mss.
6. Johnson, p215
7. My thanks to John Miller, and Dougie Bell and David McMath of Dalry for help in establishing this date
8. Personal correspondence, David Hannay
9. Girthon Parish Records
10. Dumfries Weekly News
11. It is intriguing to note that the final jotting on the manuscript mentions St John's Town of Dalry, the area where Will Kirk went to live in 1911. Frustratingly, the year is illegible.

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The Perfect Fusion of Words and Music: 
The Achievement of Robert Burns

Katherine Campbell and Emily Lyle

The book The Celestial Twins: Poetry and Music Through the Ages by H. T. Kirby-Smith, published recently by the University of Massachusetts Press, makes it very clear what a difficult task song-composing is. As Burns said:

“The world may think slightingly of the craft of song-making, if they please, but . . . let them try.”

This difficulty partly arises from the cultural separation of words and music. In a fully oral phase of society, the two are constant companions as in the sung epics. Kirby-Smith outlines how the two diverged in the English-speaking world and how poetry developed a complexity of its own, drawing on the sounds of speech which can be referred to as “musical” but which are far from being music. He deals with England in the early part of his book and then comes to Burns in the late eighteenth century, finding him, in his time, uniquely able to compose what could be called “full songs”; by which he means songs that give value to both the words and the music and have an extra dimension arising from the fusion between these two elements.

Burns is a less surprising phenomenon when we come to him from the Scottish perspective. He could not have done what he did without the matrix into which he was born.

One of the songs that he supplied to Johnson’s Scots Musical Museum was “Robin Shure in Hairst”.

Robin shure in hairst
I shure wi’ him
Fint a heuk had I, Yet I stack by him.
I gaed up to Dunse, to warp a wab o’ plaiden
At his dad-die’s yet, Wha met me but Robin?

Figure 1: Robin Shure in Hairst

Robin shure in hairst
I shure wi’ him
Fint a heuk had I, Yet I stack by him.
Was na Robin bauld, ‘Tho’ I was a cottar,
Play’d me sic a trick And me the Eller’s dochter?
Robin promise’d me
A’ my winter vittle,
Fient haet he had but three
Goos feathers and whittle.

The traditional song that Burns knew was longer than this and is, we think, a perfect folk song. Burns gave this fine tune to the world in a form in which it could be more widely sung without offence, but weakened the song in the process. He makes a personal allusion to his friend, Robert Aitken, who was a lawyer, and who is pictured in the last lines as owning nothing but three goose-feather quill pens and a knife to sharpen them with. In the folk song, the girl earlier comments affectionately that “Robin, silly body, / He gat me wi bairn” and, after their marriage, she speaks at the close of the song of their sexual pleasure together veiled in the common metaphor of musical instruments:

Now I’m Robin’s bride,
Free frae kirk fok’s bustle;
Robin’s a’ my ain,
Wi’s twa trumps and a whistle.

Burns knew the field of Scots song as regards both words and music (and this use of the word “field” points up the fact that Burns had a scholar’s grip of his materials).

Opposite is a page from some notes he made on song that is in the Laing Collection in Edinburgh University Library[^3]. “Rob shoor in hairst” is the second item and he jots down the chorus with an indication that more of the song is quite familiar and correctly notes that the tune is in Oswald’s Caledonian Pocket Companion and in other collections.

In the first item on the page, “O the king o’ France he rade a race” he tells us that the tune is now altered into a modern reel called “The Leys o’ Loncarty”. The Burns commentators do not say anything about this tune but it is found in the eighteenth century collections of Joshua Campbell and Neil Gow, and is indeed that of “The King of France”.[^4]

By the nineteenth century, the tune is appearing in the tune books as “The Lees of Luncarty” instead of as “The King of France”.[^5] As Burns realised, the “modern” name was replacing the older one. On the words too, he is a very valuable informant, and he gives us a form of this anti-Jacobite song that is closer to his own developed composition than the full texts in Hogg’s Jacobite Relics[^6]. Kinsley indicates a missing word in the third line[^7].

Reading “son”, this fragment from Burns runs:

The King o’ France he rade a race
Out o’er the hills o’ Syria,
His eldest [son] has followed him,
Upon a gude grey marie, O;
They were sae high, they were sae skeigh,
Naebody durst come near them, O;
But there cam a Fiddler out o’ Fife
That dang them tapsalteerie, O.

Burns reflected on this power of the fiddler (that is quite obscure in the source) and turned it into a compliment to Neil Gow in the context of Burn’s own response (and that of Fergusson in his Elegy on the Death of Scots Music) to the Italianate singing that had come into vogue. He uses the brisk tune and the two most effective lines of the traditional song to make something quite new and satisfying in its own terms, though for full understanding we have to know that the “royal ghaist” is that of King James I of Scotland, seen as a lute-player who was an early exponent of the Scottish love of melody.
The king o' France he tae a race (now walked into a moor red call'd the lee o' Loncastry)
O' the king o' France he tae a race
Out o'er the hills o' Syria,
His eldest had follow'd him,
Upon a guid grey mare C.
They were sic high, they were dag duagh,
Ne'erbody durst come near them.
But there cam a fiddler out o' the Fei
That sang them ta'aeuerlie C.

Robb shoos in heairnt (at this tune in Cowper's
& other Collections)
O' Robin shoos in heairnt,
I shoos wi' him,
O' what a heuk hae I
Yet I stak by him. — c-o c-o c-o.

Jockie's Grey breckie — Though this has certain
video evidence of being a recitation yet there is a well
known tune & song in the north of Is'land, called, the
Weaver & his shuttle C, which though sung much quicker
is every note, the very tune.

Corn-rie and boney — All that ever could
meet of old wolves to this air were the following
which seems to have been an old chome
Corn-rie & boney
Corn-rie are boney,
And where of ye meet a boney lad,
Plen up his cockenry.

It is now evident to me that Cowper composed his Robin
castle on the modulation of this air, in the second part
of Robert Pette Cowper's tune he has in his first

Figure 2: Page from the Laing Ms. (reproduced by kind permission of Edinburgh University Library)
Their capon craws, and queer ha ha’s,
They made our lugs grow eerie, O!
The hungry bike did scrape and pike
Till we were wae and weary; O!
But a royal ghaist, what ance was cas’d
A prisoner aughteen year awa,
He fir’d a fiddler in the North
That dang them tapsalteerie, O!

For another of his songs, Burns knew that he was composing to a tune by William Marshall of Fochabers, whom he describes as ‘the first composer of strathspeys of the age’.” The tune is Miss Admiral Gordon’s Strathspey and it is very rewarding to have this linkage of a famous composer of music and a famous composer of words in a song addressed by the poet to his wife, Jean Armour, whose own lovely singing inspired him. Burns’s complete song is just the length of the air which is in two parts.
Burns tells us that he could never compose a song until he had the tune firmly in his mind. As he explained in a letter to George Thomson:

> Untill I am a compleat master of a tune, in my own singing, (such as it is) I can never compose for it, and all the tunes of his songs had had a previous existence before he absorbed them. He had, however, once composed music in association with the twelve lines he wrote beginning “O raging Fortune's withering blast/ Has laid my leaf full low!” Even in this case the music came first and he composed words to his own music just as he did to the music of others. Burns notes in a Commonplace Book entry dated September 1785:

> I set about composing an air in the old Scotch style. – I am not Musical Scholar enough to prick down my tune properly, so it can never see the light, and perhaps 'tis no great matter, but the following were the verses I composed to suit it. – The tune consisted of three parts so that the above verses just went through the whole Air. –

It is a pity that this tune has not survived. Although Burns was primarily a poet we cannot assume that he would have been incapable of composing a melody that pleased him. There is relatively little evidence available on this situation but one of the present writers, Emily Lyle, offers this personal anecdote which has some relevance to the matter.

I am generally concerned with words and have written some poems but I once wrote a song and I will tell you about its genesis. I was in England at this time and had been at a concert by Julian Bream where he was playing, and talking about, lute-music, and a song came to me that was in the persona of a young man of the sixteenth century addressing the lute as his mistress. It is called Sung to a Lute and I knew it was a song but it had no tune. I had the words in my head, though, and it was some time afterwards while I was driving along a country road that I composed the tune (the modern equivalent of Burn's making up verses on horseback!). Like Burns, I was not scholar enough to prick it down but I kept the whole song in my memory and years later, when I was at the Radcliffe Institute at Harvard, one of the Creative Fellows in the programme, Jan Hamer, kindly wrote it down for me.
Burns was already surrounded by airs that delighted him and was happy to use them, and he also probably acquired the skill
to "prick them down" from singing in later life. He could certainly write out music and an instance in his hand, Here's his
health in water, can be found in the Hastie MS in the British Library\textsuperscript{13}. He also played the fiddle and his sister Isobel, who
is our main source of information on his playing, stated that he 'played from printed airs'.\textsuperscript{14} He got his fiddle when he was
in his early twenties and practised at that time 'for about twelve months or so', throwing himself into this new activity with
his typical energy: Isobel recalled:

> He used to play in summer when they took shelter from the rain; and in winter he used to rise early in the mornings and chop
> up the gathering coal, and play away for the amusement of those in bed – so that could not be borne for ever, and speedily came
to an end.\textsuperscript{15}

Charles Gray questioned Isobel about her brother's musical preferences asking:

> What sort of airs did he seem to prefer – slow and pathetic ones, or quick and lively ones – or did he relish both equally?

She replied:

> He liked both; but at that time pathetic airs had a decided preference. 'Loch-Erroch Side' was one he often played; also, 'My
> Nanny, O,' 'Tweedside,' 'For Lack of Gold,' 'Cold Frosty Morning,' 'Auld Rob Morris,' &c..\textsuperscript{16}

Burns composed songs to some of these tunes. One fine match between music and words is the opening of "My Nanie,
O".\textsuperscript{17}
Burns often gives specific references to tunes in books as we have seen from his notes, but he was also drawing on living tradition and actual performance practice and made his own choices. Writing to Thomson in connection with O, for ane and Twenty Tam he says:

The set of the last in the Museum, does not please me; but if you will get any of our ancienter Scots Fiddlers to play you, in Strathspey time, 'The Moudiewort,' (that is the name of the air) I think it will delight you\textsuperscript{18}.

Here is Burns's song given in strathspey time to this air which appears in the tune books as a jig\textsuperscript{19}.

Figure 6: My Nanie, O

Figure 7: Ane and Twenty

An O, for ane and twenty Tam! An hey, sweet ane and twenty, Tam! I'll learn my kin a rattlin sang, An I saw ane and twenty Tam. They snool me sair, & haud me down, And gar me look like blun-tie, Tam; But three short years will soon wheel roun', And then comes ane & twenty Tam.
A gleib o’ lan’, a claut o’ gear,
Was left me by my Auntie, Tam;
At kith or kin I need na spier,
An I saw ane and twenty, Tam.

They’ll hae me wed a wealthy coof,
Tho’ I mysel hae plenty, Tam;
But hearst thou, laddie, there’s my loof,
I’m thine at ane and twenty, Tam!

We close with a rollicking song, The De’il’s Awa’ th’ Exciseman, that shows Burns at his best as a song-writer of a category that is at a considerable remove from tradition. A proportion of Burns’s songs, like My Nanie, O, overlap with traditional elements in the wording which give them some of their power, but here, as in the case of O for ane and twenty Tam, he draws on tradition for nothing but the air, which in this case is Madam Cossy or The Hemp-Dresser. There is an added irony to the song when we remember that Burns himself was an exciseman. He certainly encapsulates a joyous sense of release from all control in the unexpected metaphor of the devil’s booty and this exuberance is, typically for Burns, expressed in terms of the fiddling and dancing that provided this outlet for the people of Scotland – even when the devil was not on hand to lend his aid.

![Figure 8: The De'il's Awa'](image)

We’ll mak our maut and we’ll brew our drink,
We’ll laugh, sing, and rejoice, man;
And mony braw thanks to the meikle black de’il,
That danc’d awa wi’ th’ Exciseman.

The de’il’s awa the de’il’s awa
The de’il’s awa wi’ th’ Exciseman,
He’s danc’d awa he’s danc’d awa
He’s danc’d awa wi’ th’ Exciseman.

There’s threesome reels, there’s foursome reels,
There’s hornpipes and strathspeys, man,
But the ae best dance e’er cam to the Land
Was, the de’il’s awa wi’ the Exciseman.
Katherine Campbell and Emily Lyle: The Achievement of Robert Burns

Endnotes
1 Letter 147 (Roy, 1985).
2 Johnson and Burns (1803: no. 543). In the Museum, Burns did not get his words published to the tune he had in mind, but his note in the Laing MS locates it in the Caledonian Pocket Companion. The tune is given by Kinsley (1968, 1:456). For further discussion of the song, see Campbell and Lyle (2000a).
3 Edinburgh University Library MS La.II.2109.
4 See Campbell (1786, 1:27) and Gow (1784: 1:4), references cited in Gore (1994). Dick (1903:448) notes that “The King of France” was also printed in Bremner (1757) under the title “Lady Doll Sinclair’s Reel”.
5 See, for instance, Robertson (1883). Gore’s tune listings for the nineteenth century do not include “The King of France” (Gore, 1994).
6 See Hogg (1819:21-23) where two songs are given: song XII “There cam’ a fiddler out o’ fife”, and song XIII “Ne’er to Return” to the tune of “There cam’ a Fiddler out o’ Fife”.
7 Kinsley (1968, 3: no. 171).
8 Dick (1903: no. 254).
10 Dick (1903: no. 69).
11 Letter 586 (Roy, 1985).
12 Daiches (1965:42).
13 583 A, Hastie MS, f. 128. The tune is reproduced in Ericson-Roos (1977). For further discussion of Burns’s musical abilities, see Campbell and Lyle (2000b).
14 Graham (1852:162).
15 ibid.
16 ibid.
17 Dick (1903: no. 13). Verse 1 only is given.
18 Letter 644 (Roy, 1985). A “moudiewort” is a mole.
19 Tune adapted from Johnson and Burns (1792: no. 355); text from the same publication.
20 Johnson and Burns (1792: no. 399).

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The title of this paper is intended as a tribute. It refers to one of the last essays I submitted as an undergraduate student at Glasgow University, in the Spring of 1993. The topic, set by Kenneth Elliott, was "Myth and Reality in Scottish Histories of Music". I am sure it was a total coincidence that of all the histories of Scottish music which I read for the essay, sometimes stifling laughter so as not to disturb the other users of Glasgow University Library, the one which came through this critical process unscathed was his own A History of Music in Scotland, written with Frederick Rimmer, published in 1973, and very hard to come by due to its size and the consequent ease with which it could be smuggled out of the departmental library.

The essay has stayed with me, as has so much of what I learned about Scottish culture both in Kenneth Elliott's lectures and in classes I attended in the one year I studied Scottish literature at the same university.

First and foremost, I learned that the school education most of my contemporaries and I had received was rather patchy when it came to Scottish history. I can still remember Dr. Elliott's horror when he asked us to name the date of the Act of Union, or at least the Union of Crowns, and was greeted with a sea of faces which made it perfectly clear that it was not just the dates of which we were ignorant.

Secondly, I learned that this period and the events leading up to it were definitive in moulding the future course of Scottish music history, by effectively removing the most important support systems for composition - previously the Catholic Church, then the royal courts - which prevailed in other European countries.

Thirdly, I learned that research and writing on music in Scotland was infrequent and, with some very notable exceptions, generally the work of amateurs. The amateurs included musicologists who could identify a perfect cadence at a distance of ten metres but were completely out of their depth when it came to traditional Scottish tunes, with their irritating tendency to end somewhere other than the tonic.

Fourthly, and this is where the Department of Scottish Literature came in, I realised that there is much more to Scottish culture than what the comedian Billy Connolly once called the 'shortbread and heather' version. This, then, in combination with the other three lessons leads us now to Robert Burns.

The fact that Robert Burns did not fit neatly into any of the moulds prepared by his 18th and 19th century fans does not seem to have disturbed them much, nor indeed him. Indeed, I rather think Burns would be amused to hear that the actor chosen to play him in a new film of his life has previously played Attila the Hun and Dracula. What Burns would think of the same actor's starring role as Andrew Lloyd Webber's 'Phantom of the Opera' is perhaps better not pursued, but Burns may well have been pleased to learn of the actor's singing talent, a talent which Burns, according to many accounts, never possessed.

There are disputes about the extents of Burns's other musical capabilities, too, about whether or not he could read and write music, whether or not he could play the violin. These are, after all, the types of thing one would tend to look for in judging a child or a national Bard "musical" or "unmusical". The undisputed fact that Burns is one of the most important figures in the history of Scottish music, a songwriter of phenomenal skill, and someone who clearly understood the significance of song in human society seems of rather secondary importance in judging his "musicality".

At this point, the voice of Kenneth Elliott resounds again in my ear, reminding me to point out that Burns did not compose the tunes of his songs; the question of Burns's authorship of many of the texts attributed to him is also a sticky one. No-one doubts, however, that Burns is inextricably linked to two major collections of Scottish music which first appeared in the late eighteenth century, collections which are still regarded as standard references and sources: James Johnson's 'The Scots Musical Museum and George Thomson's Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs (to take one of its many titles: see McCue 2003 for a painstaking overview). Journalistic commentators from the nineteenth century onwards have repeatedly suggested that
Burns's world-wide fame is almost certainly, perhaps almost exclusively, the result of the wide circulation of his songs. And yet, as researchers of Musica Scotica we face an ironic situation: there is very little research on Burns's songs, certainly nowhere near as much as their popularity and influence would merit.

We do not have to look very far for the reasons. Traditionally, folk song research has focused on ballads, while Burns preferred the lyric. The researcher's preference for the ballad has to do with the fact that until fairly recently, folksong research has generally been the province of literary historians or folklorists rather than musicologists or even ethnomusicologists. To close the circle of irony, it is almost certainly because Burns favoured lyrics over ballads that his songs have become so popular, so widely favoured, so widely sung: aside from the basic fact that they are shorter and often have a memorable refrain, his lyrics favour universal sentiments rather than the specific histories related in ballads.

Despite this, many researchers and other commentators have paid considerable attention to how the songs may have related to incidents in Burns's life (who the love songs were written for, for example), or to Burns as authorial figure. Even when the researcher's starting point is the fame of the song - including two monographs on the topic of my own research, Auld Lang Syne (Dick 1892, Roy 1984)- the concentration tends to lie on the origins and immediate distribution of the song: where the tunes came from, and where they went after George Thomson got his hands on them and replaced many of them with others of his own choosing.

What drew me to this topic, however, is a different case of myth and reality with regards to Scottish music, an aspect of Scottish musical culture often overlooked. The myth in this regard is do to with what Billy Connolly once described as the “shortbread and heather” version of Scottish folk music, the kilted Kenneth McKellar standing on the windswept hillside. The contradiction for Connolly was not with any notion of “real” or “authentic” folk music, but with the reality of the music of the folk he grew up with in 1950s Glasgow - typified, as he so memorably described, by the drunken uncle sitting in the corner at the family party, “gie’ing it laldy” as we would say, sounding at best like Elvis Presley and at worst like Sydney Devine.

I suspect many people reading this essay have uncles like that. It is not the image which immediately springs to mind when we think of local tradition, or Scottish folk culture; indeed, during singsongs in my own family you are as likely to hear songs by Simon & Garfunkel as by Burns. The repertoire, however, is only part of it: it took quite a few years resident in Germany for me to realise what I had been missing at all the parties I had been to there - a guitar and a singsong. In fact, on reflection, I am fairly sure that the myths which are told in the future among Scottish folk will focus less on fairies and silkies and will instead include one about The Guitar Which Appeared, as it magically seems to do when enough people are gathered in a particular type of social setting and ample food and drink have been consumed. In the run-up to such events, I have heard people discussing who will bring the sausage rolls and who will bring the caramel shortbread, and that everyone should bring their own bottle, but I have never heard people arranging to bring a guitar. The guitar always appears anyway.

Researchers looking at folk music are of course no strangers to the analysis of social context. The question of course is - what social context did and do researchers look at? What music did and do they look at, and what music was and is ignored? The answer to this question is inextricably tied to the tricky phrase “folk music”, a term which has a very chequered and complicated history. A few aspects will have to suffice here.

1. Folk music, in many scholarly and popular traditions from the eighteenth century onwards, is deemed to be ancient and pastoral. (Or, to put it another way, it is not newfangled, not commercial, and not urban.)

2. Folk music, for many scholars, is distinguished by being an oral tradition marked by continuity and variation; what is important is not the origin of the music but its reception in a particular group. This is more or less the definition given by the International Council on Folk Music in 1955. This society itself is now called the International Council on Traditional Music, because of 3. below.

3. A distinction is now often drawn between folk music and traditional music: folk music is Bob Dylan and Pete Seeger, protest music which may be inspired by folksong but which has in fact been referred to pejoratively as fakesong (Harker 1985).
The story of Burns, the Ploughboy Poet, as it has been told over the years, provides a perfect example of the application of each of these theories, and the points at which they each become very obviously limited. Not only his rural background, but also the debate on whether Burns was capable even of reading written music and the discussion on which of the song texts he actually wrote - these oft-cited biographical factors feed into and are nurtured by the kind of presumptions that lie behind the first two of our three sample definitions. Those who have not fallen into this trap point to the fact that collections of the type to which Burns contributed were effectively made by and for the learned gentry, which is why David Johnson, for example, favours the term "National song", thus keeping the songs anchored within a Scottish tradition but not deeming them folksong in the sense of the second definition (Johnson 1972).

Such a distinction is the basis of the third definition. There is a common denominator in all these definitions (and there are, of course, many more): music which is not consciously steered, either by a known authorial figure or by commercial forces, is given a special status. Research into popular music, which has almost exclusively focused on the later twentieth century, has, on the other hand, addressed such issues as the music industry, consumer politics, the cult of superstars, and also subcultures (the latter addressed as a mode of resistance to the culture industry's best efforts).

The only problem, and the songs of Burns are absolutely a case in point, is that the dividing lines are not nearly as clear-cut as we might like to think. As several researchers have pointed out, definitions of folksong in the eighteenth and especially the nineteenth century may seem to focus on a contrast with the cultivated, middle- and upper-class music of the classical concert hall and salon, but in fact an underlying motive was to present an alternative to the rise of urban popular music (Middleton:1981 goes into this in more detail).

Thus, folk music as a concept and as a trend is best understood not simply as an offshoot of romanticism, but of the wider socio-economic and technological contexts against which romanticism developed - including the industrial revolution and the rise of the city (in itself a symbol of modernity: see Berman: 1981), not to mention the commercialisation of music at roughly the same time, and the mass movements of people within countries, across borders, and overseas. Folk music as a concept had its first heyday, then, at exactly the point at which its “folk” were undergoing massive social upheaval. Folk music research tried to preserve these traditions before they died out but the folk themselves rarely die out, they just regroup.

Folk music, as an idealised object within the scholarly tradition, received a status still far from that of “classical” music but certainly much more privileged than other traditions such as popular music theatre which were hardly mentioned at all, except perhaps with a sneer, and yet which probably had a definitive impact on disseminating songs nowadays regarded as folksongs.

Even the best efforts of more recent cultural histories have made few inroads into this state of affairs: popular music traditions of the nineteenth century have received relatively scant attention in musicology. Yet a summary glance at what music publishers actually published, to say nothing of what people without access to such sources would have heard and sung, whether socially, or at work, or at church, is enough to suggest that the accepted history of music in the nineteenth century is seriously flawed.

This being said, recent indications suggest that a paradigm shift is taking place. Take, for example, the renaming of the German Jahrbuch für Volksliedforschung as Lied und populäre Kultur at the end of the twentieth century. This renaming is the logical conclusion of a tradition in German folksong research of investigating how songs are adopted and adapted in popular culture, rather than seeing them as hallmarks of distinctive ethnic practices or traditions.

Two German institutes have done pioneering work here. The elder of the two is the Deutsches Volksliedarchiv in Freiburg, whose founder, John Meier, developed a reception-focused approach to folksong based on the concept of Kunstlied im Volksmund - art song in the mouth of the folk (for an introduction, see Lindner-Beroud 1989, and the first section of Heimann 1982).

As Meier and many researchers since have demonstrated, very many of the songs which are now regarded as authorless folksongs can in fact be traced back to a particular author, even though the contemporary versions may be very different from
the original. Knowing this helps us to explore the ways, means and reasons for the distribution of songs, not to mention exploding some of the myths of the purity of folk culture. A more recent development, but one which is an offshoot of Meier’s approach, is the work of the Institut für Musikalische Volkskunde, now based at the University of Cologne. Its first director, Ernst Klusen, himself a student of Meier, rejected the term “Volkslied” in favour of “Gruppenlied”, in other words the uses of song in social groups, and song as social act rather than text (see e.g. Klusen: 1989).

While the Freiburg archive specialises in historical sources, the main focus of the Cologne institute is the present-day use of song, and their long-term research aim is to develop a social theory of singing (see Noll: 1997 for further details).

German song researchers are therefore at the forefront of attempts to make the activity and functions of singing their prime object, consequently putting less emphasis on the “rightness” or “wrongness” of what people sing. Their focus may still mainly be local traditions, but the fact that people in a particular locality sing a particular song does not mean they are the only ones to do so, or that the song originated in that part of the world.

Also, ethnic groups are only one of many types of group who might find solace, inspiration and motivation in song. Song has always been linked to political movements and ideology: its use and abuse in the Third Reich is often stated as a reason why the German folksong tradition seemed to die out after the war, though in fact, as researchers have been at pains to point out, it was a temporary hiatus, with a new impetus coming from the realisation that song could be used for positive political ends as well (this revival was strongly linked to the Folk Music Revival in other countries). Indeed, when the author of one study asked a group of 23-year-old Germans about their associations with “folk music”, a few referred to Nazi propaganda, but most thought of dirndl skirts, sausages and the like - strikingly reminiscent of the whole “shortbread and heather” problematic (Künzel: 1993).

There are other connections as well: take the following example, extracted from one of the most popular German songs associated with the revolutionary movement of the 1840s:

Trotz alledem und alledem - es kommt dazu trotz alledem,  
däß rings der Mensch die Bruderhand  
dem Menschen reicht trotz alledem.

Or, as it is in Burns’s Scots:

For a’ that, an’ a’ that,  
It’s comin’ yet for a’ that,  
That man to man, the world o’er  
Shall brithers be, for a’ that.

The German song - text by Ferdinand Freilirath (1810-1876) is adapted from, and very much in keeping with the spirit of, Burns’s “Is there for honest poverty” and is sung to the same tune. The text is no longer by Burns, the tune was taken by Burns from somewhere else, and yet the song in both these versions is somehow more than the sum of these stray parts. Attentive readers with some knowledge of German may also have realised that the imagery in the German song is reminiscent of another text:

And there’s a hand, my trusty fiere  
And gie’s a hand o’ thine ...

Auld Lang Syne more than demonstrates why going beyond the origins of Burns’s songs to what became of them, and why, is important. Taking its transmission and its development into a Scottish but also global folk song as an example, it quickly becomes clear that the perspectives offered are also both local and global.

Firstly, such a study could provide significant further insights into the uses of song in human culture, a topic which is important
from a number of interdisciplinary perspectives aside from musicology (including cultural anthropology, developmental and educational psychology, evolutionary biology).

Secondly, it would contribute to the history of musical media from the eighteenth century onwards, and offer a much-needed historical perspective for more recent categories such as “world music”, “globalisation” and indeed even “popular music”. Auld Lang Syne was by no means the only song by Burns to be disseminated widely in the early nineteenth century, but at some point its popularity increased exponentially - perhaps because of the social and ritual functions with which the song became linked (for example, being sung at the end of social gatherings). What needs to be established is how and when this took place - and then we can start to ask why.

Thirdly, there is the question of the song today, in Scotland. There have been a number of recent recordings of the song by, amongst others, Ronnie Brown, the Tannahill Weavers, The Cast, Dougie Maclean, Ian Bruce, and Eddi Reader. Of the versions mentioned, only one - by Dougie Maclean - uses the tune to which Auld Lang Syne is sung by most people (i.e. the tune published by George Thomson). The others use either the “original” tune from The Scots Musical Museum, or a newer tune introduced by The Tannahill Weavers with the express intent of restoring to the song some of the sad import of the text. The issue for these recent artists is apparently not so much the thin line between myth and reality as myth and banality - too many drunken renditions at the end of ceilidhs, too many versions on American Christmas albums.

The real question surely is, if the song had not been sung so many times in that context, would these more reflective, recent versions have the same impact? How contemporary singer-songwriters have approached this legacy cannot be separated from the legacy itself: for without it, there would be no need to give the song fresh wings.

Looking more closely at this example, from many angles, could therefore help us learn something about music in Scotland as a whole: the lines we draw, the lines we willingly cross, the identities we aspire to, the traditions we foster, and expand, and reinterpret, and perhaps also the traditions we overlook. The “we” in this equation refers to us all, just as the operational definition of folksong which I have adopted is simply that folksongs are songs that folk sing. Why they choose to sing them is, of course, another story, much too long to start on here.

One final question begs to be asked: Is Auld Lang Syne a Scottish song at all? Its language is Scots; its music is certainly Scottish in character; it is either by or at the very least strongly associated with one of Scotland’s most famous sons; it came to fame in an edition by a Scottish publisher; its spread may have been assisted by its inclusion in an opera based on a Scottish novel written by Walter Scott (Rob Roy, or, Auld Lang Syne (1816)).

To revise the initial response: its language is that mix of Scots and English so characteristic of Burns; Burns’s audience from the very start spread far beyond Scotland; its more influential publisher enlisted the help of continental composers to harmonise it; the opera referred to stemmed from an English composer, John Davy (1763-1824) and was produced in Covent Garden and New York before Edinburgh. The song became known and loved in other countries simultaneously to Scotland. In fact, at the current point in time I am keeping an open mind as to whether the traditions and fame of Auld Lang Syne are Scottish in origin at all.

Does this matter? It certainly does if we have a need to justify ourselves by reference to a distinctive culture founded in historical traditions. It certainly does not if present-day practice is afforded the same importance as historical practice. The same can be said for the question of which tunes are the right ones, which words are the right ones, and the attitude we take to the others.

Having said that, pointing out that nation states and many of their attendant traditions are constructs, or that music history is written, perhaps not by the victors, but by those whose traditions corresponded with the requirements of conservatories and university departments, does not mean that we can settle back in our own version of reality. Nor is this really the point if we are interested in music, and particularly song, as one of the most significant forms of action and interaction in every known society.
To paraphrase Simon Frith’s closing comments at the end of an essay in which he analyses rock music’s claim to be a new folk music, it is not sufficient to dismiss something as myth: on the contrary, and particularly from the viewpoint of the sociologist, the fact that something is a myth makes it all the more important to analyse (Frith 1981). The importance of myths is precisely the importance they have for people.

Myths are realities for the people who believe them, and only function when they function as such. In this regard, Burns’s most famous creation may warn us about the perils of concentrating on an academic ideal which neglects the function and importance of song in countless manifestations of social and cultural life.

Being proud of our shared global tradition in the form of a song like Auld Lang Syne, no matter how badly sung or how far its main components may be from Burns’s own version, may encourage us to address the full spectrum of Scotland’s vibrant musical heritage, past and present, regardless of whether the musician is a respected folk singer or a drunken uncle at a party, or whether the song sung is a bothy ballad or a blues classic.

Endnotes
1 The actor in question is Gerard Butler. The film, directed by Vadim Jean, is due for release in 2006. The makers of the film staged an online poll to establish who the public thought should play Burns and the various women in his life.
2 This sentiment is expressed in most of the articles on Burns’s songs catalogued in the Mitchell Library Burns Collection, full bibliographic details in the Catalogue of Robert Burns Collection, The Mitchell Library Glasgow, Glasgow City Libraries 1996, 108-111.
3 Like many a music theatre piece of the time, it consisted of a drama with musical interludes culled for the most part from popular songs of the day. The existence of several sheet music versions of Auld Lang Syne specifically referring to different productions of the opera give some indication of how important this mode of transmission may have been. Significantly, the two central verses referring to childhood, omitted when most people sing the song, are omitted in the song as it appears here.

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Aberdeen Musical Society

Peter Davidson

[This paper was originally written to celebrate the 2005 concert of the revived Aberdeen Musical Society. The programme of the concert is given at the end of the text.]

The Aberdeen Musical Society, revived on this S. Cecilia's day 2005, was at the centre of social and intellectual life in Aberdeen in the second half of the eighteenth century. Its chief purpose was to organise regular concerts, at first with comparatively modest forces, although at the height of the society's prosperity in the 1780s, it was employing ten professional musicians, running an orchestra and regularly giving first performances of compositions by resident and visiting composers.

The Society was founded at Aberdeen, on 29 January 1747/8. The names of the founder members, as well as the regulations for the conduct of the society, are found in two substantial manuscript Minute Books, now in Aberdeen Central Library (LO 780.6 AB3)

The following Persons viz The Reverend Professor Pollock & Mr Peter Black. Dr John Gregory & Messrs James Black, Andrew Tait, Francis Peacock, David Young having agreed to erect themselves into a Musical Society to meet for their mutual entertainment in Musick once a week for the better management therof they have come to the following Resolutions.

The resolutions are of a kind familiar from the music meetings held in many cities of northern Europe, and are very like the regulations of the Edinburgh Musical Society, formally constituted in 1728. There is a modest subscription of a guinea a year for coal, candle and other Necessaries, overplus to be spent on music.

In this first stage, the Society is very much envisaged as a society of performers, so the number of listeners is strictly limited and careful regulations are framed to prevent the meetings being diverted into either purely popular concerts or into assemblies for dancing.

It was resolved too

that a plan be laid down every Night of the Musick to be perform'd at the next Meeting... That the Plan be...divided into three Acts, in each of which some of Corelli's Musick shall be performed: each Act also, if a Voice can be had, to end with a Song; and the whole so contriv'd as to end at Eight o'Clock at Night, and not to exceed two Hours in Continuance.

At the same meeting Dr John Gregory was elected Praeses, David Young ('a music copyist') clerk and Andrew Tait (master of the Aberdeen Music School and Organist of St Paul's Episcopal Chapel) was elected Treasurer. Also on the committee were Francis Peacock, dancing master and composer, and Professor Robert Pollock who had been had been professor of Divinity at Marischal since 1745, and became Principal of the College in 1757.

It is worth dwelling for a moment on the career of the first Praeses of the Society, one of the central figures of the intellectual life of eighteenth century Scotland and, significantly, a man whose medical education had brought him into contact with international European music.

John Gregory (or Gregorie) (1724-1773) was son of James Gregorie, professor of Medicine at King's College, Aberdeen. Because of his father's early death, he was brought up by his half-brother James and his maternal grandfather, Principal Chalmers. His education was also influenced by his cousin, the philosopher Thomas Reid. He was educated at Aberdeen Grammar School and King's College, then studied medicine in Edinburgh under Alexander Monro primus (1697-1767). He studied at Leiden in Holland in the year 1745, as Monro had done before him. This places him centrally in the tradition of cultivated Scottish doctors and lawyers who had finished their studies on the continent and who formed the backbone of
the cultural life of eighteenth century Scotland. Monro primus was quite possibly himself a composer, if the attribution of A Collection of Scots Tunes published at Paris in 1732 to him is accepted (he had certainly studied at Paris in 1719 and an anatomist of his generation would have been likely to have maintained Parisian contacts).

Monro’s master, the great medical innovator Hermann Boerhaaven, was himself skilled in music and had written texts to be set to music by Sir John Clerk of Penicuik, at the turn of the eighteenth century. Clerk, who had studied composition in Leiden with Jakob Kremburg and in Rome with Corelli, is the most distinguished of several eighteenth-century Scottish musicians who had studied in the Dutch universities, and many of whom were members of the Musical Societies.

Manuscript music, probably by Peacock, bound with Gregory’s copy of “R.M. Philomusicus”’s Medulla Musica (London, n.d.) [Aul, GF (Med)] is very much in the tradition of Clerk and Monro, being a slightly Italianate harmonisation of a Scottish air, in the tradition of the third movement of Clerk’s violin sonata, as well as to the complex fusion of Scottish Vernacular and Corellian styles in Monro’s 1732 Collection.

As membership grew, it grew also more diverse, particularly as many members joined as listeners rather than performers. By 1752, the society had definitively changed its nature from a small, learned society of performers meeting to play works on the scale of Corelli’s Concerti Grossi to a body promoting public concerts, using partly-professional forces large enough to perform a Handel oratorio, whose committee and membership were dominated by the local aristocracy and gentry, although members of the two University Colleges continued to form the backbone of the society.

The society played a part in the public life of the city: when the Coronation of George III was celebrated at Marischal College, the Musical society performed an anthem composed by Francis Peacock. A special concert was arranged in July 1750 to honour the visit of Thomas Erskine, future Earl of Kellie, the first Scot active as a composer in the advanced orchestral style pioneered at Mannheim, whose own music was later frequently played at the Society’s concerts.

Cosmo Alexander’s painting of S. Cecilia was given “in a present” in 1757. Alexander (1724–1772), of whose work the University holds several examples, was an Aberdeen painter, who lived his life in the Jacobite and Catholic communities, so much so that he had to go into Roman exile after the rising of 1745. (A number of early members of the Society are marked in the minutes as “gone abroad” by the early 1750s.) He studied in Livorno and Paris in 1751-52 before returning to live in London (in a house inherited from the architect James Gibbs) with frequent visits to Scotland. The S. Cecilia must have been painted in the mid 1750s, very much in the style which Alexander had learned in Rome, and donated to the Society of which he had become a member by 1755-56.

A chamber organ was purchased 1752, and money continued to be spent on instruments and scores for loan to members as well as for use at concerts. By the 1750s musicians were being engaged from Edinburgh and further abroad. In 1758 the society bought a harpsichord and a badge (set with diamonds and rubies) for the Praeses with Apollo’s Harp on one side with Harmony and, on the reverse, Concord. In 1759 copperplates “beautifully engraved with musical devices” were bought to serve for tickets to S. Cecilia’s day concert.

This period is very much the high point of the society, which by this time seems to have been able to muster an orchestra of strings and continuo, horns, flutes, oboes and bassoons, with kettledrums and voices. In 1761 “Mr Putti” was paid £15 and given a benefit concert and £5 expenses for performing at the end of the season. In 1765 subscriptions were raised for a professional violinist called Martino Olivieri who was engaged as leader at the salary of £50 per year. At its height the Aberdeen Society is paying its leading musician 60 guineas, half what Edinburgh is paying for the same post, but still a very substantial sum.

This evidence contradicts the suggestion in David Johnson’s Music and Society in Lowland Scotland (London: OUP, 1972, p. 44) that The Aberdeen Society was never more than a provincial reflection of the Edinburgh Musical Society, unable to ‘pay the salaries of first-rate foreign performers, even if any had been found who were willing to go and live so far north’.

As well as the Italian string-players, keyboard players from the north of England combined the post of organist at S. Paul’s
Episcopal chapel with work for the Musical Society. Robert Barber, organist and composer from Newcastle, arrived in Aberdeen in 1774 and a harpsichord concerto of his was performed on 3 April 1778 and two other compositions of his (a harpsichord trio and an organ concerto) were performed a month later. In 1783, he was succeeded in both posts by John Ross (1763-1837) also from Newcastle, then aged about twenty. Ross settled in Aberdeen and married the niece of Andrew Tait, one of the founders of the Musical Society and Barber's predecessor at St Paul's. Ross remained at St Paul's until 1836, his later compositions not perhaps living up to the promise of his works of the 1790s.

A pamphlet of Regulations for the Musical Society of Aberdeen printed in May 1785, when John Smith was Praeses, survives among the Montcoffer Papers in AUL. (MS 3175) Interestingly it lists the poet and Marischal College Professor of Moral Philosophy, James Beattie, amongst the directors of the Society. Beattie (1785-1803) played the ‘cello, is said to have composed songs, and certainly corresponded with John Gregory on the expressive power of Scottish traditional music. Hugh Leslie of Powis is also listed as a director, the university still have his bound sets of Corelli Sonatas (AUL Dep Music Cor 15) as well as another set of Corelli Concerti published at Amsterdam and bound up in parts for use which it is also tempting to associate with the Society (AUL Old Music Coll. Box 4).

The close of the period of high prosperity for the Society was marked, in 1793, by the occasion when ‘one hundred and fifty ladies and gentlemen, all dressed in mourning’ attended a concert ‘in memory of the death of his late most Christian Majesty Louis XVI.’ Thereafter, as was the case elsewhere, the interests of the local élite changed and subscription concerts became increasingly hard to sustain for lack of patrons. By 1797 the minutes note ‘concerts thinly attended’; by 1800 ‘more subscribers’ are definitely needed. In December 1800, one hundred circular letters were sent out inviting subscriptions:

the Treasurer is also requested to send circular letters to the Professors of both Colleges, and to some other gentlemen who have been omitted — but the military gentlemen to be admitted as usual without subscribing.

By 1802, funds from subscriptions were down to £45.2s, in contrast to an income of over £120 per annum twenty years earlier. From the early 1800s, the Society would appear to be defunct, without funds and with many of its goods in the hands of Mr Thomson of Banchory, who eventually answers correspondence threatening legal action by asserting that he holds them on trust from ‘the late musical society’. By 1805 the Society is definitely inactive.

It appears from the minute book for August 1807 that Thomson has lodged the remaining goods of the society in the library of Marischal College (an action ‘entirely approved’ by the committee)

for the use of the Society whenever it shall be re-established, and in the meantime request that the librarian shall take charge of them…

Cosmo Alexander's painting of S. Cecilia followed later, about 1810, and thereafter the remaining possessions of the Society were sold in favour of the poor of the City. In 1820-21 there was an unsuccessful attempt at revival. The Central Library has a subscribers' list of 1820-21 which says that the number of members will be limited to 40, but there are only 36 signatures, including that of Simpson the Architect.

If we consider the history of the Aberdeen Musical Society, we see a more complex and more successful organisation than has hitherto been recognised. We certainly see a decline of public musical life in Aberdeen in the late eighteenth century following a general trend in Scotland towards the domestic performance centred on the family around the pianoforte. However, we also see a sustained period of prosperity and achievement, as well as observing two of the leading figures of intellectual life in eighteenth-century Aberdeen (John Gregorie and James Beattie) in an unfamiliar light as musical performers. From beginning to end, we see the central role of the Universities in sustaining, over a period of fifty years, regular performances of international and local music in a variety of idioms. We see the importance of the society of continental connections, both of medical study in the cultivated environment of Leiden in the Netherlands and also the visual and musical influences on those who were compelled for political reasons to spend some part of their lives in Roman or Parisian exile.

What we do not yet see is the whole tissue of connections between members — we see an overlap between those involved
in the Musical Society and the membership of the ‘Wise Club’ or philosophical society. We also see a distinct tendency to Jacobite sympathies, balanced — ambiguously in such a cohesive society — by the conforming holders of forfeited estates and of posts from which Jacobites had been ejected. Visible Catholics — Pitfodels and Cosmo Alexander — quite probably kept company with a number of their more discreet co-religionists. On the other hand the Presbyterian Ministers of Aberdeen seem to have been consistently among the members of the Society from the beginning. We see also patterns of influence and taste transmitted from teacher to pupil and also following more widespread Scottish trends of esteem for Corelli and interest in various attempts to combine Scottish vernacular elements with international musical styles.

What we cannot yet trace, although as an intellectual enterprise it would be worthy of a serious historian, are the webs of kindred and commercial association which underpinned the society, the way in which the society functioned as a meeting ground in the social life of the city and what part the society may have played in finding a way for the élite citizens of the city and county to live together again after what was, in effect, the last of a series of Civil Wars.

We put Cosmo Alexander’s painting and the scores of the Corelli concerti to their original use again this evening for the first time in about two hundred years. Our programme broadly follows arrangements devised according to the rules of 1748. Every piece tonight was in the music collection of the society or of a known member of it. You yourselves are the members, by your very presence, of a club dormant for two centuries and now revived. We hope to convene the next meeting of the Society on S. Cecilia’s day next year, by which time, further researches in the University Collections, the Aberdeen Collection of the public library and elsewhere will have produced yet more music, and yet more history of this vital and engaging aspect of the City’s and University’s history.

[The programme of the concert which followed this historical account is printed on page 41]
Inaugural Concert Programme

I
Corelli
Concerto Grosso, Op 6 no 2.
Song: “Lochaber no more”.

II
James Oswald, from Airs for the Seasons
Sonata, The ***
Sonata, The ***
?Traditional, set by Francis Peacock “The Banks of Spey”
Song: Thomas Erskine, Earl of Kellie, “The Lover’s Message”

III
John Ross
Piano Concerto in C major, Op. 1, no. 4
Song: John Ross, “Nelson of the Nile”

Directors of the Aberdeen Musical Society

Prof Christopher Gane, Praeses
Principal Rice, Old Aberdeen
Dr Iain Beavan, Secretary
Dr Jennifer Carter
Prof Peter Davidson
Prof Jane Stevenson
Dr Roger Williams.
William Chappell and Scottish Popular Music

Karen McAulay

William Chappell, an avid antiquarian music collector whose life spanned most of the nineteenth century\(^1\), is remembered today principally for his two-volume book, Popular Music of the Olden Time (1855-1859).

Much less known is his lifelong interest in Scottish popular music. On the face of it, this is surprising. After all, within seven years of his death, Henry Davey commented in his History of English Music (1895), that ‘a distinct animus against everything Scottish is perceptible’\(^2\), while in 1900, the Edinburgh music publisher John Glen devoted an entire chapter of his book on early Scottish melodies to Chappell’s perceived aberrations, largely because the latter seemed to have appropriated ‘a number of undoubtedly Scottish tunes’\(^3\).

Davey’s entry on Chappell in the Dictionary of National Biography (in 1901) reiterates his earlier statement: Davey also alluded to Chappell’s early publishing career, when a hotly nationalist Scottish employee needled him by insisting that the English had no music of their own worth speaking of. This was given as the initial impetus for Chappell’s decision to write what ended up as Popular Music of the Olden Time.

Neither of these authors, nor indeed any subsequent one, even mentions Chappell’s visits to Scotland, nor his correspondence with Scottish antiquaries. Nor do they give any hint of Chappell’s intention, declared on several occasions, to write a history of Scottish music.

The purpose of the present paper is to explore some of the highlights of his unpublished correspondence\(^4\). This correspondence demonstrates the nature of his engagement with Scottish music and the reactions of his contemporaries to some of his ideas about it.

Chappell’s interest in the topic goes back to his late twenties, when a letter to the recently-appointed Librarian of the Edinburgh Signet Library, David Laing, in 1839, alludes indirectly to his travels in Scotland\(^5\). Evidently he saw a number of the primary sources of Scottish music, including a lyra-viol manuscript, now untraced, but then in the possession of the Paisley collector Andrew Blaikie. (Indeed, he claimed to have copied most of its contents\(^6\).)

Correspondence with Laing in the late 1830s and 1840s makes clear his continuing interest, even though Chappell did not actually return to Scotland until 1856. Chappell acquired the only copy then known of Playford’s 1700 Collection of Scotch Songs\(^7\), in 1842, and lent it to Laing in 1844. Meanwhile, in 1843, Chappell bemoaned the fact that Rimbault had failed in his bid to acquire the Straloch lute-book\(^8\). Chappell also purchased what we now know as the Rowallan cantus, giving it as a gift to Laing in May 1856\(^9\).

Chappell had indeed been toying with the idea of writing a book about Scottish music, although he feared that he might not be the right person to do it. In May 1843, he told Laing that:

> A great deal might be done in Scotch Music & I regret there is no one to take it in hand. […] I should not like to do it unless I felt that I could devote the time to make it a creditable work. I am in doubt whether I shall ever attempt it.\(^10\)

Not long afterwards, he told Laing categorically that he had given up the idea\(^11\). However, he would revive his plans later.

By the late 1850s, when Chappell was writing Popular Music of the Olden Time, he brought with him some twenty years of interest in Scottish music. In fact, it would have been impossible to discuss English ballads without alluding to overlapping between the English and Scottish repertoires.
As is well known, publications associated with Thomas D’Urfey and John Playford in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries contain a significant number of “manufactured” Scottish songs; these were very much in vogue at the time, and Chappell coined the term “Anglo-Scottish” to describe them. Hence, in order to focus his work on the English repertoire, he reasonably found it necessary to examine a number of tunes whose Scottish origins seemed to be suspect, on the evidence available to him.

Chappell’s suggestions that certain Scottish tunes actually originated in England became more pointed in the opening chapters of the second volume. His later chapter on Anglo-Scottish tunes seemed to establish his reputation for an anti-Scottish attitude. His closing comments in the chapter ‘Characteristics of National English Airs, and Summary’ only fanned the flames of the controversy. Chappell’s justification, of course, was that sources of a number of Scottish songs appeared in early English publications. (Later research proves that he was not entirely right in some of his arguments; the Skene manuscript, for example, turned out to be older than Chappell had estimated.)

I have no wish to enter into the arguments as to the precise origins of individual songs; indeed, today we regard the whole notion of looking for origins in national popular music as being loaded with conceptual problems. The question of origin, however, was a major preoccupation in Chappell’s day, and nowhere was this more important than in distinguishing whether a song was Scottish or merely “Anglo-Scottish”, as he was to learn to his cost.

Between 1853 and 1859, Chappell corresponded with Andrew Wighton, a general merchant and musical instrument dealer in Dundee. Wighton was a keen and knowledgeable collector of early Scottish musical source-materials, whose library remains intact to this day. A number of Chappell’s letters are bound at the back of Wighton’s copy of Popular Music Volume 2. Chappell’s preoccupation with Playford’s publications is clear, discussing in minute detail the differences between various editions of the Dancing Master, and itemising purchases and desiderata.

The other common thread in Chappell’s letters is the question of authenticity in Scottish songs. For example, on 26 October 1853, Chappell wrote to Wighton:

Some of the tunes of Scottish character in the Dancing Master are probably Northumbrian. For instance “Cavalilly Man”.

Or again, on 23 December 1857, he wrote:

It is difficult to find really good tunes of this early date, because there is so little genuine Scotch Music in print – although plenty of Anglo Scottish.

In the meantime, on 23 November 1855, Chappell wrote to David Laing, telling him about his new publication:

I […] have to beg your acceptance of a new book upon the old subject. […] In the pursuit of English I have gained some further information about Scottish, which I know would be more interesting to you, but have not yet turned it to account. […] On 1 October 1857, three months before Chappell wrote to Wighton about his newly-published Part II, Wighton received a letter from the Aberdonian flautist, composer and teacher, James Davie. Wighton had clearly lent him parts of Chappell’s Popular Music. Whilst Chappell had not yet reached the inauspicious chapter on Anglo-Scottish songs, he had already irritated Davie, who commented that:

The work is certainly a grand idea, and I would hope it would be conducted in a spirit of fairness and liberality, but I suspect this will not be altogether the case. He depends too much upon the dance tunes in the Dancing Master in my opinion.

He went on to cite several songs which Chappell now claimed to be English, predicting that there would be more to come. He concluded,

This gentleman has no occasion to acts of appropriation to make up a very respectable work honestly come by […] The poets
and musicians have made Scotland stand in a position above any country for its music and its simple artless poetry but I am unable to pursue this subject. […] At present Scotland has little chance of a champion to stand up for her. I would fight for her […], but I want talent, time and everything except the will.”

Davie died some seven weeks later. His dark predictions proved prophetic.

On 1 September 1858, Chappell wrote to Wighton, acknowledging receipt of postage stamps for Part 13:

When you have read the article on Anglo Scottish songs I should like your opinion on it. I could fill a volume with Stenhouse’s direct lies, but only thought it necessary to touch upon the subject. What a misspent thing that man would make Scottish music to be if we were to take all he says for true?

Chappell is referring here to William Stenhouse, an Edinburgh accountant and Scottish antiquary. Stenhouse had completed a pioneering set of detailed annotations to Johnson’s Scotish Musical Museum prior to his death in 1827, but which had only achieved wide circulation posthumously, in particular with the 1853 edition. Laing had seen both editions through the press, augmenting the second edition with additional prefatory material about early sources.

Chappell’s letter to Wighton suggests that he was about to issue his Part 13 that month. Laing read the contentious material a little later than Wighton, having been abroad round about this time. He told the latter that he and Chappell had discussed Anglo-Scottish songs the last time Chappell was in Edinburgh. Laing disputed some of Chappell’s late dates, whilst acknowledging that Stenhouse undoubtedly assigned dates too early.

By October 1858, Chappell was curious about the reception of his recent writings. On 26 October, he wrote to Laing:

I hope you are not displeased at my remarks in some of the collections of Scottish music in my last part. Scotland has quite enough exquisite tunes of her own, without borrowing & it is most desirable that they should be sifted fairly; I confess that I fear to displease some overnational Scotchmen by the attempt & wish a Scotchman would do it instead of me. In fact I do not intend to do more than I have, unless it should happen that I am about to print a tune that has been claimed as Scotch, & I think it not so.

This was not the first time that Chappell demonstrated his desire for both accuracy and integrity –over a year earlier, he had written to Laing:

I wish only to print English tunes & nothing would annoy me more than to have appropriated Scotch …

By November that year, Chappell knew that he had upset Wighton, and wrote to Laing on 5 November:

I am sorry Wighton is not pleased but I cannot help it – I have endeavoured to write temperately & to produce the proofs for my assertions.

He went on to assure Laing that he would be only too happy to correct any errors if his critics could prove him wrong; indeed, he reiterated this to Wighton a week later.

Wighton finally wrote back to Chappell on 8 February 1859, quoting extensively from his own earlier letter to Laing:

Admitting that Mr Stenhouse did unfortunately fall into error … it does not appear that he did so wilfully, but I do think that Mr Chappell has left Stenhouse in the shade … by attempting to prove that some of our best airs are only Anglo-Scottish, amongst which are My mither’s aye glowrin’ o’er me, Corn riggs, My Nannie O etc, etc, and even Bonnie Dundee. … Mr Chappell is determined to claim all the T unes with Scotch names or with songs in the Scottish dialect, that have been published by “Playford”, “D’Urfey” &c …

In London about a year ago … he produced as his authority the above works… I said that I could not take the circumstance of these appearing there, as an authenticity… the Scotch musicians etc were then averse to printed music and that same aversion
still exists to a considerable extent … I concluded that it would be more easy and satisfactory to prove whether the Tunes were Scotch or English, by their Characteristics, etc…\textsuperscript{28}

Bonnie Dundee, in Wighton’s opinion, was a prime example of a Scottish tune. Finally, Wighton was convinced that Scottish courtiers and music must have predated D’Urfey in London by at least half a century.

Surprisingly, Chappell seems to have maintained a dignified silence with regards to Wighton’s outburst\textsuperscript{29}; the next letter preserved by Wighton was dated 25 July 1859 – when Chappell wrote of his respect for Wighton, extending an invitation to visit him in London.

Between 1857 and 1859, Chappell revived the idea of writing a modest contribution to the history of Scottish music and further correspondence alluded to a collection of Scots songs, to be harmonized by Macfarren. Chappell’s letters to David Laing made no further mention of these plans after Wighton’s enraged letter to Chappell in February 1859. Nonetheless, he must have kept his materials intact, for in 1877 he lent two boxes of books and manuscripts to John Muir Wood, for his new edition of Songs of Scotland. Chappell told Laing:

\begin{quote}
I feel sure that it will be the best ever issued. I placed in his hands all my memoranda on these subjects, & my transcripts of Andrew Blaikie’s, the Skene, and other Scotch MSs. I had also a large collection of my own forming, and he is using some of it now.
\end{quote}

The late Robert Chambers urged me to print a collection of Scotch music, but I felt convinced that the Scotch would prefer it from the hands of their fellow countryman…\textsuperscript{30}

Two years later in 1874, Chappell was to publish the first volume of his History of Music (Art and Science), from the earliest records to the fall of the Roman Empire. Of course, Wighton had died by this time, but as it turned out – not surprisingly, given the period under discussion - there was nothing in the book to cause concern even to the most ardent Scotsman.

Furthermore, Chappell reveals that Volume 2 was to be ‘Dr Ginsberg’s History of Hebrew Music’\textsuperscript{31}; that he himself would be writing about the Middle Ages, and his friend Dr Rimbault was planning to write a new history of modern music, ‘commencing where I may leave off’\textsuperscript{32}. In other words, there was little chance of Chappell going into print at any length on the topics which had so inflamed Messrs Wighton and Davie.

What, then, are the implications of the controversies raised by Chappell’s forays into Scottish music in his Popular Music of the Olden Times? Certain facts are inescapable.

Firstly, although Stenhouse had made a worthy start with his commentary on the Scots Musical Museum, it is clear that his successors found much of his work flawed. Chappell was outspoken in his criticisms, whilst Wighton was staunchly defensive of Stenhouse, though he conceded that mistakes had been made. Laing was more prepared to adopt a middle position – maybe Davie was right in asserting that ‘Laing would not enter into a controversy’\textsuperscript{33}.

Secondly, it would appear that David Laing, Andrew Wighton and James Davie made a valid point when they commented that Chappell was over-dependent on the Dancing Master and other Playford publications. Chappell’s regular references to his collecting activities bear out the fascination that these books held for him.

It is clear that the Scottish antiquarian community was as anxiously trying to establish a claim on their old Scottish tunes, as Chappell was in insisting that some of them might originally have been English. Even John Glen, while roundly condemning Chappell for some of his assertions, conceded that Popular Music of the Olden Time ‘was written to refute the common assertion that England possessed no national music whatever’\textsuperscript{34}.

As I mentioned initially, my purpose is not to prove or disprove Chappell’s theories; nor to establish the provenance of the tunes. However, this examination of contemporary correspondence does highlight the burning issues of the day.
The view of Davey and Wighton that Chappell was anti-Scottish does not seem to have been propagated by others, at least not in Chappell's lifetime and not in print. However, it re-emerges with some force soon after his death. I have already alluded to Davey's History of English Music, and to his subsequent entry in the Dictionary of National Biography in 1901. In both publications, Davey cited Chappell's book, Popular Music, as further evidence of an anti-Scottish attitude.

However, an examination of the correspondence enables scholars of today to re-evaluate the cross-currents existing within the culture of the time. The study of historiography allows us to trace the evolving thought-processes, and to understand better how we have ended up with our current perceptions and attitudes towards Scotland's musical history.

William Chappell clearly enjoyed a continued interest in Scottish music, and was meticulous in his efforts to set the record straight as he perceived it. Admittedly, some would argue that his theories might have been misguided – nobody's perfect! Yet arguably it was not this, as much as the sensitivity of nationalist epistemologies that caused such upset.

Nonetheless, does it not seem likely that a further examination of contemporary sources might well enlighten us as to the views and attitudes of other key nineteenth century protagonists? At the moment, this research is still in comparatively early stages. It will be interesting to see what further insights might be revealed in due course.

Endnotes

1. William Chappell was born 1809, and died in 1888.
3. John Glen, Early Scottish Melodies (Edinburgh: J. & R. Glen, 1900). Prior to this publication, John Glen had published The Glen Collection of Scottish Dance Music (Edinburgh: John Glen, 1891 and 1895). His criticism of Chappell began in the introduction to that publication, where he he asserts, 'According to Mr Chappell, when Scotsmen went to England they had no music of their own, but went to learn; and, when Scottish tunes first happen to appear printed in England, they are claimed by him as English.' The latter might be a fair reflection of Chappell's views, but the former is something of an exaggeration.
4. Now preserved in the Wighton Collection (Dundee) and Edinburgh University Library.
5. David Laing, son of the Edinburgh bookseller William Laing, was elected librarian to the Society of Writers to H. M. Signet on 21 June 1837. (New Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, entry by Murray C. T. Simpson.)
7. Chappell to Laing, 17 August 1842 EUL La. IV.17 fol.1703
8. Chappell to Laing, 24 April 1843 EUL La.IV.17 fol.1704
9. Chappell to Laing 8 May 1856 EUL La.IV.17 fol.1719
10. Chappell to Laing 12 May 1843 EUL La.IV.17 fol.1706r
11. Chappell to Laing 23 December 1844 EUL La.IV.17 fol.1711r
12. We know that in addition to “Anglo-Scottish” materials in Playford's and D'Urfey's works, there were manufactured “Scottish” materials in Ramsey’s Tea-Table Miscellany (1723- ?) and William Thomson's Orpheus Caledonius, London, 1725.
13. Chappell, Popular Music of the Olden Time, pp. 789 to 797
14. Other early MSS have since come to light, too – see Stell, Evelyn Florence Sources of Scottish Instrumental Music 1603-1707: a thesis submitted to the Dept of Music, University of Glasgow, in fulfilment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. (Glasgow, 1999. 2 vols.)
15. Andrew Wighton was born in 1804 and died in 1866.
16. Chappell to Wighton 26 October 1853 Dundee City Library 31996.
17. ibid.
18. Chappell to Laing 23 November 1855, EUL La.IV.17 fols.1714-1715
19. James Davie to Andrew J. Wighton 1 October 1857 Dundee City Library, Wighton Collection: Correspondence with James Davie and others (unbound, shelfmark pending. Inventory Part A, letter 48
20. ibid.
21. Davie died in Aberdeen on 19 November 1857 (Baptie, Musical Scotland, p.41)
22. Chappell to Wighton 1 September 1858 Dundee Central Library, Wighton Collection 31996.
23. The Scottish musical museum … now accompanied with copious notes and illustrations of the lyric poetry and music of Scotland by … William Stenhouse. Edinburgh, 1839; the later edition was entitled The Scots Musical Museum … now accompanied with
copious notes and illustrations of the lyric poetry and music of Scotland by … William Stenhouse. Edinburgh, 1853.

24. ibid, letter 30 September 1858, David Laing to Wighton.
25. Chappell to Laing, October 26 1858, Edinburgh University Library, Laing Collection, La. IV.17 fols. 1739-1740.
27. Chappell to Laing, November 5 1858, Edinburgh University Library, La.IV.17 fols. 1741-1742.
28. Wighton's copy letter of his reply to Chappell, 8 February 1859, Dundee City Library, Wighton Collection, 31996
29. Incidentally, Wighton was not alone in objecting to some of Chappell's conclusions. For instance, a Charles Neaves wrote to Laing a full decade later, querying the history of Ye banks and braes. (Neaves to Laing, 1 January 1869, Edinburgh University Library La.IV.18 fols. 395-396.)
31. Chappell, William The History of Music (Art and Science) vol.1 (London, [1874], xl
32. ibid, l
33. Dundee City Library, Wighton Collection, letter 48, James Davie to Wighton, 1 October 1857.
34. John Glen, Early Scottish Melodies, Edinburgh (1900), p.14
Continental Europe and Scotland: Marjory Kennedy-Fraser – Music Student, Lecturer, and Teacher

Per Ahlander

Late Victorian and Edwardian Scotland may have been somewhat removed from the rest of Europe, but some individuals were certainly acquainted with the continental European scene. One of them was Marjory Kennedy-Fraser. Her Hebridean song-collecting work is rather well-known, and, instead, my paper will focus on her musical training and career, before she arrived in Eriskay in 1905, famously murmuring Pelléas et Mélisande when she ‘knelt down on the mossy quay, […] looking into the oily depths’ (Kennedy-Fraser 1929:117). Furthermore, I will discuss her student years in Milan, and give some insights into the world of singing of the period.

Who was Marjory Kennedy-Fraser then? She was born Marjory Kennedy, in Perth in 1857, thus contemporary with both Patrick Geddes (1854-1932) and Phoebe Anna Traquair (née Moss, 1852-1936), two other important personalities in the avant-garde Arts & Crafts circles in Edinburgh. She was the daughter of David Kennedy (1825-86), the foremost exponent of Scottish Lowland songs of his time, who toured the British Empire during a period of twenty-five years. Marjory learnt to play the piano at an early age; she started studying the art of accompaniment with her father when she was twelve years old, and she made her first appearance as his accompanist in Lanark on 14 February 1870. In 1871, Marjory and three of her brothers and sisters formed a vocal ensemble, with Marjory singing the contralto part. After a successful début in the Music Hall in Edinburgh, they kept the quartet together for almost ten years.

David Kennedy had trained as a singer in Edinburgh and London, and he could probably have made a career in opera, like his predecessors, the Scottish tenors John Wilson (1800-49) and John Templeton (1802-86), but instead, he decided to devote himself entirely to Lowland Scots songs. When Sir Michael Costa (1808-84), who had advised him to concentrate on oratorio singing, learned of his decision, ‘he told [David Kennedy] he was a fool’ (Kennedy-Fraser 1929:5n). It was, however, David Kennedy’s personal ambition to bring the songs of the homeland to all those who had had to leave Scotland, and in 1866-68, he toured in Canada and the eastern parts of the USA, continuing via Panama to San Francisco in 1869.

After a few years back in Scotland, David Kennedy was again eager to travel, and in March 1872, together with his wife and older children, he embarked on a world-tour. The six youngest children, in the meantime, boarded in Edinburgh with an old friend of his, who also acted as their teacher. Their first goal was Melbourne, Australia. Far away as it was, Melbourne had nevertheless an active cultural life, and within some weeks in the city, they had had the opportunity to attend performances of both Donizetti’s Lucrezia Borgia and Meyerbeer’s L’Africaine, given by the city’s first-rate Italian Opera Company. The Kennedys’ own performing in Melbourne started soon after their arrival, and for about three months, they would be singing up to six nights a week, giving fifty-two concerts in the new Temperance Hall in Russel Street which had a capacity of over one thousand seats. They became extremely popular – not only with the Scots – and they could probably have continued performing in Melbourne for quite some time, but their plan was to tour the Australasian continent extensively. After eighteen months in Australia, New Zealand was their next goal.

Notwithstanding New Zealand’s geographical remoteness, the country was experiencing an entertainment boom in these years, and the Kennedys were far from unique in their touring as professional, colonial entertainers. The three essentials needed for a flourishing entertainment industry – wealth, population, and transport – had been in place since the Otago gold discoveries in the early 1860s, and ten years later, ‘most centres of any size had buildings suitable for theatrical performances’ (Simpson 1995:154-155). ‘Although proximity encouraged a strong American presence in the industry’, Adrienne Simpson points out, ‘New Zealand entertainment was predominantly of British origin. Since the majority of migrants still looked back to Britain as “home”, reminders of that home could exercise a powerful effect.’ (Simpson 1994:17)

Via Australia, Honolulu, San Francisco, Salt Lake City, Chicago, and Detroit, the Kennedys came back on to British soil in Canada, where they continued to Toronto and were ‘delighted to find [themselves] in a community so strikingly British’ (Kennedy, David 1887:202), as Marjory’s brother, David Kennedy Jr, wrote in his book of their travels. From the autumn of 1875 until the following summer, they toured extensively in Canada. ‘As we sang in six towns per week and two
Presbyterian churches on Sunday, I cannot record our doings in detail!' (Kennedy-Fraser 1929:39), Marjory commented on their continuous travelling. They left Canada from Halifax, and when they finally sailed into Liverpool harbour seven days later, the four and a half years' tour was over, and Marjory Kennedy was eighteen years old.

New tours followed through various parts of the British Isles. In the autumn of 1877, they gave fifteen successful concerts in the St James's Hall in London at their own risk, followed by a tour of all the larger English towns. They normally visited Dublin, Belfast, and the smaller Irish towns in the spring, and during the summers, there were tours in the far north of Scotland. In Edinburgh, David Kennedy had remained in touch with the Nicholson Street U.P. Church, where, previously, he had worked as precentor. While at home, he sang in their concerts and at their social meetings, and ‘he gave many concerts to the poor in the mission district of the Potterrow’ (Kennedy, Marjory 1887:50-51). These years were also dedicated to musical studies, enabling all the brothers and sisters to acquire the profound knowledge of music that was to become so useful for all of them, in various ways, later in life.

In 1879, Marjory and her father toured in South Africa, while Robert and James Kennedy went to Italy, in order to continue their singing studies on a more advanced level. The family was thus split in three groups: Edinburgh, Milan, and South Africa. Thanks to the extensive Italian correspondence held by the Edinburgh University Library (EUL), it is possible to follow closely the everyday cares of the young Scottish music students, but furthermore, the weekly letters give a rare insight into the Milanese way of life and the Italian opera world of the period. Comments about singing teachers and comparisons between different methods of singing are frequently recurring topics in the correspondence.

Choosing the right singing teacher has always been an intricate business, and, being a world-famous centre for opera, Milan obviously offered innumerable possibilities. Up until then, Robert and James Kennedy had mainly studied vocal technique with their father, and as all of the Kennedy children, they had had a solid general musical training. While in Italy, they wanted to focus on mastering the bel canto, and learn the Italian language properly. Singing lessons at the time were taken daily, and additionally, there were the separate sessions with the accompanist, and the sessions with the Italian language coach. Their first teacher was Pauline Vaneri Filippi, Professor at the Royal Conservatory 1878-1908 – the Conservatory's first female teacher (Salvetti 2003). She was a well-known and respected teacher of singing in Milan, she had sung in Britain, she spoke English, and it is not unlikely that they might have been acquainted with her even before arriving in Italy. Vaneri Filippi was apparently happy with their previous vocal training, and both Robert and James found her teaching useful. A letter from 1879 says: ‘We are beginning to understand that Madame Filippi is about the best teacher we can get here, and when we have thoroughly got over the prejudice against a Woman teaching male Singing, we'll like her all the better’.

From South Africa and Milan, they all returned to Edinburgh for the summer. For the next season, a concert tour around the Indian subcontinent was planned, but this time, Marjory was not to be a member of the team, as, instead, she joined her two brothers when they went back to Milan in the autumn. She began her Italian singing studies with Vaneri Filippi, and James was rather impressed by his sister's progress, hoping for his own vocal development to be as successful; ‘surely if Madge has now got a head voice that really delights Mme Filippi, why can’t I develop something with care, which will tend to improve my upper falsetto?’ A month later, however, James wrote to their family in India that Marjory had found a new teacher. Her new teacher was La Gambardella, an elderly opera singer, who, as a young girl in Bologna, had studied with Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868).

She was held in high esteem as an excellent singing teacher, but she was also feared because of her notoriously fierce temper. Signora Gambardella was very impressed by Marjory's general musicianship, and, in particular, by her ability to transpose at the piano at sight, a talent hardly heard of among the Italian singers. On the other hand, she found it unbelievable that Marjory was unable to identify the correct tone quality required for each note within her range. Sometimes, Marjory's lessons with Gambardella progressed really well, whereas on other occasions, ‘when my head doesn't feel very clear I can’t take the higher notes at all, everything goes to pigs and whistles (she calls me “bestia” and wants to know why I “fisciare [sic] invece di cantare” [why I am whistling instead of singing])’, Marjory wrote in 1879. She was definitely making progress, however. In November, Robert reported that ‘her voice is coming on very well indeed – up to A!!’, and by January, she had eventually found her top C: ‘the old lady getting quite gracious, and she was as proud as punch when she swindled Madge up to the high C without her knowing it!! A high C. properly taken too!!’
Vocally, Marjory Kennedy had considered herself a high tenor, but Signora Gambardella's belief was evidently that she was fully capable of singing soprano parts, and, very much to her own astonishment, she was given music from Bellini's La Sonnambula to study (Kennedy-Fraser 1929:61). Gambardella's teaching was based on five well-known vocal principles: an open throat, a loose lower jaw, tension at the nostrils, a heady emission without any attack, and no choking oneself with breath (Kennedy-Fraser 1929:63-64). Thanks to her, Marjory acquired a solid bel canto technique that she would value highly for the rest of her life. The compass of her voice expanded considerably, and even if her tessitura, i.e. the comfortable centre of the vocal range, essentially remained that of a contralto, she was apparently fully comfortable in the soprano range. On publicity leaflets for series of concerts in Edinburgh and Glasgow in 1884 and 1885, she is listed as soprano 6, whereas, on other occasions, she seems to have reverted to a lower pitch. After an A Nicht wi’ the Jacobites recital in Edinburgh, one critic specifically commented on her unusually large vocal range.

Miss Marjory, whose rendering of our national melodies is greatly relished, contributed two songs to the evening's entertainment, and was deservedly accorded the highest applause by the audience. Her voice has unusual range for a soprano, and she shows considerable judgment in choosing airs which are best suited to her peculiar capabilities.

While Marjory studied with Gambardella, her brothers took lessons from Francesco Lamperti, who was an internationally famous teacher of singing with his own well-established method. He might have been somewhat beyond his prime in the late 1870s, but even in his early years, he is said to have taught mainly sitting or lying down because of his weak nerves. He based his teachings on the same fundamentals as Manuel García and the old Italians, but he introduced something new – a beautiful vibrato. (Lewenhaupt 1988:62) Marjory Kennedy was certainly impressed by Signor Lamperti's teaching and she wrote home:

The system (both the breathing and the singing in the head) is very hard to carry out, and the worst of it is that the teachers all seem to get a part of it but none of them the whole except Lamperti I suppose.

Marjory Kennedy and her brothers enjoyed life in Milan in general, but it was the Milanese opera season that really engulfed them. Teatro alla Scala was obviously the main stage, but the Carcano was also an important operatic venue. They quickly adopted the local habit of attending a production several times, – 'it is the custom to go about six times to an opera here' – and their letters are full of comments about the different operas and singers they came across.

We were at the “Aida” again last night and every time I hear it the more I’m enamoured of it - Oh there’s much more in Italian Opera than ever I used to think Father, when you know the language and can put yourself in the spirit of the thing, there’s not a moment in the performance that isn’t full of interest besides the exquisite enjoyment of good music and good artistes.

Possibly different from her previous experiences, opera in Milan was a subject fervently discussed among all strata of society, and she observed once, while chatting with Adele, the housemaid: ‘We were speaking about singers and mutually admiring Lassalle [presumably Jean Lassalle (1847-1909), French baritone], and she’s a poor little donna di servizio 16 years old.’ Adelina Patti (1843-1919, Italian soprano) and Joséphine De Reszke (Józefina Reszke, 1855-91, Polish soprano) were also among her favourite singers; ‘after hearing Patti as Leonora [in Verdi’s Il Trovatore], one really can’t stand any other duffer’.

In spoken theatre, however, Marjory missed the music; ‘[e]verybody says the Theatre is a good place for the language so I suppose we must go sometimes, tho’ it always seems to me a waste without music’. Notwithstanding this rather lukewarm interest in theatre, as a complement to their musical studies, Marjory and her brothers took lessons in speaking from Ristori, brother of the famous Italian actress (Kennedy-Fraser 1929:64). In addition to the singing technique she acquired while in Milan, Marjory Kennedy thus also mastered an extremely useful speaking technique: ‘To his training I owe the fact that I can still alternately sing and speak in public for two hours without fatigue.’ (Kennedy-Fraser 1929:64) In addition to her
studies, Marjory was organist in the English church in Milan.

In 1881-82, while on tour in America, Marjory arranged for herself and her sister Helen to take singing lessons with Mathilde Marchesi in Paris, ‘at that time probably the most celebrated maestra del canto in the world’ (Kennedy-Fraser 1929:74). After an initial interview with Madame Marchesi, they were both admitted to her school. Marchesi did not operate a system of individual lessons at fixed hours; instead, all her students were seated in her large studio from nine in the morning, waiting for their turn to sing ‘to the maestra as she sat at the piano and dispatched one singer after another, mostly with scathing sarcasm. We all believed that she enjoyed her own cruelty’ (Kennedy-Fraser 1929:75). Marjory found Mathilde Marchesi ‘an extraordinarily clever woman’, and was impressed by her vast knowledge of both opera and languages and by her ‘enormous will power’, but she did not find her teaching ‘of lasting value’, not being as analytical as she preferred (Kennedy-Fraser 1929:76-77). Instead, in her view, Marchesi’s teaching consisted mainly in the passing on […] of traditional renderings. These the students were expected simply to lap up and reproduce.’ (Kennedy-Fraser 1929:97) Her frequent showing of a dried human larynx was apparently an attempt at introducing a physiological aspect into her teaching, but, as Marjory Kennedy-Fraser later remembered:

if one had any imagination, that leathery larynx was likely to suggest only tightness at the throat; whereas the old Italian teachers, to guard against such suggestion, were wont to say, contrariwise, the good singer non ha gola – has no throat! (ibid.)

Mathilde Marchesi was firmly convinced that courage was of paramount importance to a singer, and she ‘used to show her class a closed fist and say that a “career” lay in that’ (Kennedy-Fraser 1929:76). Marchesi’s daughter, Blanche Marchesi de Castrone (1863-1940), was in many ways the personification of her mother’s ideals. Disregarding the fact that her voice was rather small, she was determined to have a career in opera, and she made her operatic début as Brünnhilde (of all things!) in Wagner’s Die Walküre in Prague in 1900, later appearing in similar roles in London, with the Moody-Manners Opera company at Covent Garden, to little critical acclaim; she was once referred to as ‘the greatest singer in the world without a voice’.

Marjory Kennedy heard Blanche ‘sing once when her mother was out of the room’, and thought ‘she had no natural gift of voice whatever’ (Kennedy-Fraser 1929:76), but she did acknowledge her technical abilities.

A performer with little tone-variety is technically very inadequately equipped […] whilst a Blanche Marchesi with her wonderful command over tone-colour and gradation is in no wise inferior technically to a Melba with her marvellous beauty of tone and flexibility and comparative want of tone-variety.

Marjory Kennedy might not have benefited much vocally from her studies with Mathilde Marchesi, but she certainly enjoyed the multilingual atmosphere in her Parisian studio, and the familiarity it gave her with the international top-level singing tuition of the period. In the years to come, in lectures and elsewhere, she would often refer back to what she had experienced in Paris in the spring of 1882. In 1915, in a paper read to the Edinburgh Musical Education Society, she compared one of their scientific demonstrations with what she had experienced in Paris some thirty odd years earlier, presumably in order to highlight the Society’s position in the forefront of research.

And whereas, in Mathilde Marchesi’s studio in Paris […] we had been shown only a leathery dried specimen of the throat, Dr. Struthers showed us a fresh larynx, a demonstration of the nature of the vocal chords (as they are so inaptly named) which has ever since been with me when I have had occasions (as I so frequently have) to describe the vocal organs and their supposed action to my pupils.

The time spent in Marchesi’s studio in Paris, Marjory Kennedy-Fraser later considered ‘a turning-point in [her] life’ (Kennedy-Fraser 1929:78), as the linguistic variety she had experienced there had made her reflect upon her own Scottish background, and back in Edinburgh from Paris, she decided to take up singing in Gaelic – the language of her ancestors. She arranged a number of recently published Gaelic songs as unaccompanied trios for three equal voices (Kennedy-Fraser 1929:78), and sang them with her sisters, Helen and Margaret. David Kennedy was very positive about his daughter’s idea of introducing ‘the Gaelic tongue on the concert platform’ (Kennedy-Fraser 1929:78), even if he almost never ventured to sing in Gaelic himself. From then on, most of their recitals around the world would include some Gaelic songs, performed by ‘The Misses...
In 1883-84, the Kennedys went back to Australia. They gave twelve concerts in Melbourne's large Town Hall, but as they only performed three nights a week this time, they had a chance to listen to other artistes performing in the city. One night, they attended a big local benefit concert, where one of the performers was said to be a very talented amateur singer, a Mrs Armstrong, the daughter of a Scotsman who had arrived in Australia some twenty years earlier and been financially most successful. Mrs Armstrong had trained in Melbourne according to the Italian singing tradition, and she sang beautifully from Verdi's La Traviata. Marjory later remembered commenting to her sister Helen, after the concert: 'If that is an amateur, then all the professionals may hide their heads.' (Kennedy-Fraser 1929:80-81) They were to hear more about this talented singer when, after having studied opera with Mathilde Marchesi in Paris, she amazed the world as La Melba.

David Kennedy died on tour in Canada, in 1886. For Marjory, who had been his accompanist for seventeen years, since her public début in Lanark in 1870, it was also the end of a significant phase in her musical career. In 1887, she married Alec (Alexander) Yule Fraser, her mother's younger cousin, born in 1857, who had completed his MA with Honours (I Math.) at the University of Aberdeen in 1881 (Johnston 1906:176). The first time Marjory Kennedy met her husband-to-be was incidentally in Aberdeen, in 1882, when he came to see his cousin Elizabeth Fraser, Marjory's mother, after one of the Kennedys' recitals in the Music Hall, and it seems to have been love at first sight. Alec Fraser was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1885 (Johnston 1906:176), he was promoted science master at George Heriot's Hospital in Edinburgh, which then was being converted into a technical college, and, in 1889, he was appointed headmaster of Allan Glen's Technical School in Glasgow, where the family moved. His health was rapidly deteriorating, however, and Glasgow's climate proved too much for his lungs. Hoping that sunshine and drier air would cure him, he and Marjory travelled to South Africa, a country she knew from family touring. While there, Alec's health improved considerably, but back in Glasgow, he was soon ill again. Plans were made for another trip to South Africa, but a week before the intended departure, in November 1890, he died of pneumonia. At the age of thirty-three, after less than four years of marriage, Marjory Kennedy-Fraser thus found herself a widow, with her two small children, David and Patuffa, to look after and support. (Kennedy-Fraser 1929:92-93)

Having moved back to Edinburgh and settled down with her mother, she took to teaching music. She read music for Professor Frederick Niecks (1845-1924) at the University of Edinburgh, as one of the university's first female students, and she presided over the musical section of Patrick Geddes's Edinburgh Summer Meetings in the 1890s, covering a wide range of musical subjects. A busy teacher in Edinburgh and Glasgow, she taught according to Lamperti's and Marchesi's singing methods. An undated publicity leaflet from about 1907 reads:

"Studied Voice Production first in Italy, and later in Paris with Madame Mathilde Marchesi. In addition to careful Voice Placing and attention to Articulation, Mrs Kennedy-Fraser takes Advanced Pupils through a complete Repertoire of English, Italian, French, and German Vocal Music, also Songs of the Hebrides and Lowland Scots Songs."

In the summers, Marjory would often travel on the Continent with her sister Margaret, and in 1899, they went to Bayreuth to hear Wagner's Parsifal. Marjory was not impressed by the level of singing in Germany at the time, however. In towns like Leipzig and Frankfurt, she thought 'the singing of Italian opera was very poor' (Kennedy-Fraser 1929:99). Only in Munich, in the vicinity of Italy, did she find the beauty of tone, elasticity, and slancio, without which 'Italian opera does not exist', and in Bayreuth, 'there was too much spitting and barking of the words on the part of the singers, and one wished for a heavier dose of the orchestra to cover it' (Kennedy-Fraser 1929:99). Her vocal ideal was clearly the Italian bel canto. Half a century later, similar thoughts were expressed by the prominent Swedish soprano Birgit Nilsson (1918-2005), who maintained that a Wagner singer with a sound technique should also be able to sing Italian opera, and that even if Wagner's musical style is different, he must be sung bel canto, just as well as the Italian classics (Nilsson 1977:80).

In this period, Marjory had become interested in the music of Richard Strauss (1864-1949), a new and exciting composer at the time, and in 1903, she wrote a paper on Strauss' ways of thinking and expressing himself in music. The Lecture-Recital on Richard Strauss in the Oak Hall in Edinburgh was an immediate success, and the beginning of a long series of performances on 'Songs and Songwriters', which would continue until 1907.
This was in March 1903 and with such favourable response on the part of the public that from that time forward for many years I gave regular series of such Lecture-Recitals and chose to illustrate them mainly by songs for voice and pianoforte and that with a special purpose in view. The aim was to bring home to the ordinary music-lover (what ought to be impressed upon every student of the art and every aspirant to the status of teacher and guide to others) that music is a definite emotional speech and not a mere succession of pleasing arabesques.

Art songs are sometimes perceived as oceans apart from folk songs, but however differently the styles might be labelled, in the end, there is but a human voice singing them. Arrangements of folk songs, suitably arranged for the salons of the bourgeoisie, had been popular for a long time, and many composers of the period had tried their hands at the genre, but they rarely appeared in concert halls, until the three Swedish sopranos, Jenny Lind (1820-87), Signe Hebbe (1837-1925), and Christina Nilsson (1843-1921), who sang at all the major European concert venues of the time, introduced them as part of their standard repertoire (Ling 1997:202). Christina Nilsson to such fame that French composer Ambroise Thomas (1811-96) incorporated a Swedish folk song in his opera Hamlet (1868). During the nineteenth century, when the arranged songs thus moved out of the homes to the realm of the professional singers,

[the arrangements [...] changed in style and character [...] from simple, idyllic melodies with a chorale-like style to arrangements with more demanding piano accompaniments and individual styles of compositions (Ling 1997:202).

Equally, the songs became more demanding for the singers, requiring greater technical and expressive abilities than had previously been necessary. Let us remember, however, that these arrangements and compositions were intended to be sung by trained singers. The idea of putting untrained singers on the concert platform seems to have been beyond imagination until fairly recently. The reasons for this were partly practical; singers need to be heard after all. Until amplification was made possible by the introduction of the microphone, larger concert halls necessitated well-projected and rather large voices.

At the beginning of the Edinburgh International Festival, in the late 1940s, the organisers made an effort to include performances of traditional music in the programme, and there were a few concerts featuring Gaelic music, where various local singers performed. The outcome was not entirely satisfactory, at least not according to the press comments, some of which were surprisingly outspoken. To give an example of the tone of the discussion, one reader wrote to the Editor of The Scotsman:

The Festival visitors are entitled to the best representative material and presentation, from a musical, not a folklorist or a kirk soirée, point of view. No correspondent has yet asserted that the concert-organisers offered this year the best available. Controversy seems to revolve about the degree of badness reached. By the international musical standards of Festival visitors the degree was rather low.

Different countries classify singing in different ways. Where social hierarchies were less rigid, folk material seems to have moved quite freely between different groups in society; in other countries, irrespective of strong class barriers, it became fashionable at the courts and with the nobility. The famous opera divas frequently sang folk songs at their recitals, and in Italy, everybody enjoyed tunes from the popular operas, a phenomenon Marjory Kennedy-Fraser experienced while living in Milan. In Britain, however, the strict stratification seems to have remained longer than elsewhere. Ezra Pound voiced similar thoughts in November 1918, reflecting upon the London concert season.

The sense of rhythm is not dead in this island. I have heard costers singing not only with rhythm but also with true tone, as true as you would find among boasted continental peasant singers. An “artistic” nation would have taken its singers from the donkey-barrows and coster carts. Even La Duse still calls herself “contadina” [countrywoman], and once wore the Venetian black shawl. But no, the black curse of Cromwell, and the anathema of Victoriana and genteelessness have put a stop to that sort of permeation in England, and the concert-performer is chosen from the exclusively eviscerated stratas of the community.

(Schafer 1978:141-42)
To become a musician was apparently not a very good idea, if you wanted to be a well-respected member of society in Britain. Discussing eighteenth century Scotland, John Purser rhetorically asks why there were so few achievements in serious music, from a country capable of producing so many great writers and thinkers. ‘The answer’, he says, ‘is simple enough. To be a painter or a writer was respectable. To be a musician was to be a servant.’ (Purser 1992:194) David Kennedy was always well-received by the Scottish clergy, however, owing to his long-standing good connections with the church, and the Kennedys’ concerts were thus considered respectable events, which facilitated their concert touring in Scotland. Society was also gradually changing, but many Scots still had strong views on music and musicians. Cabinet member Richard Haldane’s sister, Elizabeth Sanderson Haldane (1862-1937), five years younger than Marjory Kennedy-Fraser, recalled from growing up in Perthshire, that:

we never of course went to an opera and hardly ever heard music properly rendered. There was still the Puritan dread of pleasure – even artistic pleasure – unless it were to lead to something useful to mankind. Could we use it for the service of God and of our fellows? Otherwise it might draw us into evil ways. (Haldane 1937:61)

Endnotes

2. Letter from James Kennedy, Milan, to the Kennedys in Edinburgh, 14 Oct. 1879 (EUL Gen. 519).
3. Letter from Marjory Kennedy, Milan, to Kate Kennedy, Edinburgh, Nov. 1879 (EUL Gen. 519).
4. Letter from Robert Kennedy, Milan, to the Kennedys in Edinburgh, 13 Nov. 1879 (EUL Gen. 519).
5. Letter from James Kennedy, Milan, to the Kennedys in Edinburgh, 8 Jan. 1880 (EUL Gen. 519).
8. Francesco Lamperti (1813 - 92). Italian singing teacher, co-director at the Teatro Filodrammatico in Lodi; Professor of singing at the Milan Conservatory 1850 - 75 (Kennedy 1996)
9. Manuel Patricio Rodríguez García (1805-1906). Spanish bass, singing teacher from 1829. Professor of singing at the Paris Conservatory 1847-50, at the Royal Academy of Music in London until 1895. Teacher to Jenny Lind (1820-87) and Mathilde Marchesi (1821-1913). His two sisters, Maria Malibran (1808-36) and Pauline Viardot-García (1821-1910), were both internationally well-known mezzo-sopranos; all three of them had been trained in singing by their father, the Spanish tenor Manuel del Pópulo Vicente García (1775-1832). (Kennedy 1996) For an exhaustive and fascinating description of the elder Manuel García’s life, see Radomski 2000.
12. Letter from Marjory Kennedy, Milan, to the Kennedys in Edinburgh, 2 Jan. 1880 (EUL Gen. 519).
14. Letter from Marjory Kennedy, Milan, to Kate Kennedy, Edinburgh, Nov. 1879 (EUL Gen. 519).
15. Letter from Marjory Kennedy, Milan, to the Kennedys in Edinburgh, 2 Jan. 1880 (EUL Gen. 519).
17. Mathilde Marchesi de Castrone (née Graumann, 1821-1913). German mezzo-soprano and singing teacher. Pupil of Manuel García [Jr], on whose teachings she based her own vocal method. Professor of singing at the Vienna Conservatory 1854-61 and 1869-78, and at the Cologne Conservatory 1865-68. Taught privately in Paris 1861-65, where, in 1881, she opened her own school of singing, which would attract students from all over the world for more than twenty-five years. (Forbes 2006, Kennedy 1996) One of Marchesi’s pupils was Ilma de Murska (Ema Pukšec, 1834-89, Croatian soprano), and Marjory Kennedy-Fraser referred to her as an example of the type of coloratura singers Mathilde Marchesi was famed for turning out […] and especially for their technique of the note picchettate order (i.e.hammered notes)’ (Kennedy-Fraser 1929:76).
19. Paper by Marjory Kennedy-Fraser, dated 2 Apr. 1900, read to the Edinburgh Musical Education Society in April 1900, re-read in the 1900-01 season (EUL Gen. 285).
20. Presumably, Marjory Kennedy-Fraser preferred the anatomically correct term 'vocal folds' to the more common 'vocal cords'.
22. In 1886, Messrs. Logan & Co., Inverness, advertised The Inverness Collection of Gaelic Songs; with English translations, By Professor Blackie, Nether-Lochaber, Norman Macleod, and others, Arranged with Symphonies and Accompaniments for the Pianoforte, containing seventeen songs. A Collection of Popular Gaelic Songs (Inverness & Aberdeen: Logan & Comp., [no date, but between 1873 and 1882]) is in the Marjory Kennedy-Fraser collection in the Edinburgh University Library (EUL Gen. 277). It contains five songs, all of which are among those in The Inverness Collection of Gaelic Songs, referred to above. A contemporary comment tells that Logan's Inverness collections 'sold largely', and did 'much to introduce many of our beautiful Gaelic melodies to public notice' (Baptie 1894:103). Marjory Kennedy arranged various songs for three female voices. Thirty-one such trios are preserved in a manuscript book, stamped T. Claxton, Music Dealer, Toronto (EUL Gen. 279)
23. See ‘Scrapping: Songs of Scotland - Programmes 1882-6’ (EUL Gen. 519)
24. (Dame) Nellie Melba [stage name for Helen Porter Armstrong] (1861-1931). Australian soprano. Pupil of Mathilde Marchesi. Her stage name was a tribute to the city of Melbourne. (Kennedy 1996)
25. For a recent article on Frederick Niecks, see Campbell 2005.
26. Publicity leaflet: ‘Mrs Kennedy-Fraser, Teacher of Voice Production and Singing’, [no date] (EUL Gen. 282)
28. Ling (1997) refers to Jenny Lind and Christina Nilsson, but Lewenhaupt (1988) has shown Signe Hebbe's contribution to be of comparable significance
29. The Swedish folk song referred to is 'Näckens polska'
31. Eleonora Duse (1859-1924). Italian tragedienne. Of humble origin, she became one of Italy's most prominent actors, and when she appeared in London in 1895, she was considered a rival of Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923, French tragedienne). (Pickering 1996)

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57
Hamish MacCunn: Beyond The Land of the Mountain and the Flood

Jane Mallinson

To many people the name of Hamish MacCunn is totally unknown. To some, he may be known as the composer of the jaunty theme which was the signature tune to Sutherland’s Law, the 1970s television series set in the fictional Scottish town of Glendoran. A few more knowledgeable people may be able to name the theme as the second subject of MacCunn’s concert overture The Land of the Mountain and the Flood (1887) but very seldom can anyone volunteer any further information about one of Scotland’s most successful composers of the late nineteenth century.

Hamish MacCunn was born James MacCunn in Greenock in 1868. In early adulthood, he adopted the name ‘Hamish’ to differentiate himself from his father, who was also called James. MacCunn had the good fortune to be born into a wealthy family and into what he himself described as ‘the most sympathetic musical atmosphere’ (GUL MS Farmer 264, 3). His mother had been a private pupil of Sterndale Bennett, and his father, a ship-owner, was an accomplished amateur musician and littérateur. MacCunn received his initial musical education in his home town in piano, violin, organ, harmony and composition. In 1883, at the age of fifteen, he won one of the 50 scholarships to the newly founded Royal College of Music in London where he studied composition under Parry and Stanford, and also piano and viola.

MacCunn enjoyed early success with his overtures Cior Mhor (1885) and The Land of the Mountain and the Flood both being performed at Crystal Palace under the direction of August Manns who did much to encourage and promote British composers. By the age of twenty-one, MacCunn was sufficiently interesting to be the subject of an article by George Bernard Shaw who described him as one of ‘the lions of the season’ (Shaw 1937:12). In later life he composed, and conducted both light opera and grand opera, including the first performance in English of Tristan and Isolde in 1899. He was professor of harmony at the Royal Academy of Music from 1888-1894 and he also taught at the Guildhall School of Music for a brief period in 1912. His private pupils included Liza Lehmann (1862–1918) of ‘There Are Fairies at the Bottom of My Garden’ fame; Charles O’Brien (1882–1968), who for many years played an active part in Edinburgh’s musical life; John Ansell (1874–1948), conductor of the SLO Orchestra from 1926 to 1930; and Mary Comber Benedict (1858–1911), widow of Sir Julius Benedict.

In 1889 MacCunn married Alison, daughter of the Scottish artist John Pettie who painted him several times. Perhaps his best-known portrait is Two Strings to her Bow, owned by Glasgow Art Galleries. Set in a country lane, it portrays a simpering young lady accompanied on either side by a young man, one of whom is Hamish MacCunn. MacCunn died in London in 1916, at the relatively young age of forty eight.

Today MacCunn is known, if at all, for his concert overture Land of the Mountain and the Flood, which was the best known of all his works during his lifetime. It had nine performances at Crystal Palace in the years 1887–1898 (Bashford 2001). It quickly became a work which was seen to embody Scotland, both in the United Kingdom and further afield. It was performed at the opening concert of the Usher Hall (The Scotsman 18 Feb 1914, 1). In Melbourne, it was performed at the Conversazione which marked the opening in 1901 of the First Federal Parliament of Australia in the presence of the Duke and Duchess of York (Carne 1954: 131). It was first broadcast on radio in 1924, but it was not until 1968 that it was recorded by Sir Alexander Gibson and the Scottish Symphony Orchestra. In the 1970s it was brought to a much wider audience when its second subject was used as the signature tune for the above-mentioned BBC television series Sutherland’s Law. Since then, it has had frequent performances in the concert hall, has been recorded several more times and today features regularly on
playlists of radio stations worldwide. In 2003, it was placed at number 203 in the Classic FM Top 300, a few places higher than The Rite of Spring and Mahler’s Symphony No. 8.

MacCunn did write other orchestral works. The ballad overtures The Dowie Dens o’ Yarrow and The Ship o’ the Fiend, both composed in 1888 use as stimulus traditional Scottish Border ballads, but most people are unaware that the majority of MacCunn’s compositions are for the voice, and that choral works – cantatas, choral ballads and some occasional pieces – make up a large part of his worklist.

There are several reasons why MacCunn should have composed such a number of choral works. The first is that he did not wish to write abstract music (Shaw 1936: 112) – there are no MacCunn symphonies or concertos. Other reasons are related to the prevailing musical climate in nineteenth century Britain. Previously, choral singing had been the domain of the cultured and aristocratic classes, but the advent of the sight-singing movement, which used music as a vehicle to educate and improve the working classes, opened up choral singing to a much wider audience. Not for nothing did Mainzer call his singing manual Singing for the Million (Mainzer: 1841). There was a corresponding and rapid growth in choral societies throughout the country, which in turn created a market for choral works. It was also a period when music festivals e.g. Three Choirs, Birmingham, Leeds, Bristol and Norwich regularly commissioned new works, both choral and orchestral. There was also the academic exercise – the requirement that musicians presenting themselves for music degrees at Oxford and Cambridge write an oratorio and then have it performed.

As early as 1904, Rosa Newmarch (Newmarch 1904:14) was referring disparagingly to the output of choral music of nineteenth century England as ‘the oratorio industry’. This opinion was repeated in the 1960s when Percy Young’s assessment of the second half of that century was: ‘Mediocrity in spate – the period […] when so much deplorable [choral] music [was written] by so many experienced composers’ (Young 1962: 236). It is against this rather depressing backdrop that MacCunn's choral music is presented, with the hope of dispelling and disproving these rather sweeping generalisations. With the benefit of distance these works can be set in their historical context, and can be examined more objectively and with greater understanding than was previously possible. It is no longer acceptable to dismiss all nineteenth-century British choral works out of hand.

By 1986 attitudes were beginning to change. This year saw the publication of an entire issue of Victorian Studies devoted to Victorian music (Victorian Music (1986) 31(1)), later published in book form (Temperley 1989a). In the introductory essay, ‘The State of Research in Victorian Music’ there is an excellent summary of what had already been achieved and what yet remained to be done. In particular, the need to ‘evaluate Victorian music as art music’ is underlined (Temperley 1989b: 5) and attention is drawn to the fact that there is no living performance tradition.

The number of people who can read a score in a library and imagine how it would sound is quite small. For wider assessment, one needs performance and recordings. They cost money, time and trouble, which few are willing to invest on untried bodies of music (Temperley 1989b: 14).

In more recent years there are encouraging signs that more late nineteenth and early twentieth century choral music is being revived – in recent years works by Parry, Sullivan and McEwen have been released on CD.

MacCunn wrote choral works throughout his compositional life and Table 1 below lists those which received public performances.

| Table 1 – Choral Works of MacCunn |
It is immediately obvious how many of the works listed in Table 1 are inspired by Scottish texts or themes. Only two authors, Longfellow and Horne, are not Scottish, but Horne’s text is about David Livingstone, explorer, doctor, missionary and iconic Scot. The only texts with no obvious Scottish connection are Longfellow’s The Wreck of the Hesperus and Psalm VIII.

During his lifetime, MacCunn’s most successful choral works were Bonny Kilmeny, Lord Ullin’s Daughter and The Lay of the Last Minstrel (all performed for the first time in 1888, just one year after The Land of the Mountain and the Flood was premiered at Crystal Palace) and The Wreck of the Hesperus commissioned in 1905 for performance in the recently opened Coliseum Theatre.

The Lay of the Last Minstrel was commissioned by the Glasgow Choral Union. It had its first performance in Glasgow on 18 December 1888 and was performed at the Crystal Palace two months later in February 1889. At it is MacCunn’s most substantial cantata, I intend to draw on it

- firstly to illustrate some points about MacCunn’s music and
- secondly to challenge some preconceived ideas about MacCunn.

The Lay of the Last Minstrel, an epic poem in six cantos, published in 1805, was Sir Walter Scott’s first major work. It is a metrical romance based on an old Border legend and is narrated by an ancient minstrel, the last of his race. The poem has irregular stanzas, each line consisting of four accents and seven to twelve syllables. The libretto, prepared by MacCunn’s father James, focuses on three episodes in Scott’s poem and presents them in a highly edited form, a fact noted by contemporary reviewers: ‘The cantata as it stands presents a series of scenes from the poem, with little attempt at cohesion or continuity’

### Table 1: Jane Mallinson: Hamish MacCunn

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENRE</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>LIBRETTO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cantatas</td>
<td>The Moss Rose</td>
<td>1884</td>
<td>Krummacher trans. Brainard/ James MacCunn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bonny Kilmeny</td>
<td>1886</td>
<td>James Hogg/ James MacCunn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Lay of the Last Minstrel</td>
<td>1888</td>
<td>Walter Scott/ James MacCunn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Queen Hynde of Caledon</td>
<td>1891</td>
<td>James Hogg/ James MacCunn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choral Ballads</td>
<td>Lord Ullin’s Daughter</td>
<td>1888</td>
<td>Thomas Campbell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Cameronian’s Dream</td>
<td>1890</td>
<td>James Hyslop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Wreck of the Hesperus</td>
<td>1905</td>
<td>H.W. Longfellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kinmont Willie*</td>
<td>1913</td>
<td>Traditional Border Ballad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Jolly Goshawk*</td>
<td>1913</td>
<td>Traditional Border Ballad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lamkin*</td>
<td>1913</td>
<td>Traditional Border Ballad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Death of Parcy Reed*</td>
<td>1913</td>
<td>Traditional Border Ballad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasional Pieces</td>
<td>Psalm VIII</td>
<td>1890</td>
<td>King James Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Livingstone the Pilgrim</td>
<td>1912</td>
<td>C. Silvester Horne</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates posthumous performance
Musica Scotica: Proceedings from the 2005 and 2006 Conferences

(The Glasgow Herald 19 Dec 1888, 3). They also criticised the addition of the final stanzas as being unnecessary. ‘Another defect of the libretto, to our mind is the manner in which it ends, the famous stanzas “Breathes there the man” and “Oh Caledonia” being palpably “tagged on” to a story that is already complete in itself ‘ (The Scotsman 19 Dec 1888, 7).

It should also be noted that in addition to compressing Scott’s tale, James MacCunn frequently shows little regard for Scott’s verse patterns. Table 2 shows how the rhyme scheme of the original – ABAB AA CDCD – is reduced by a process of excision and rearrangement to a series of rhyming couplets.

### Table 2 – Comparison of libretto with original text

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original (Scott)</th>
<th>Libretto (Scott arranged MacCunn)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In sorrow o’er Lord Walter’s bier</td>
<td>In sorrow o’er Lord Walter’s bier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The warlike foresters had bent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And many a flower and many a tear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Teviot’s maids and matrons lent:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But o’er her warrior’s bloody bier</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ladye dropp’d nor flower nor tear!</td>
<td>The Ladye dropp’d nor flower nor tear!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vengeance, deep-brooding o’er the slain,</td>
<td>Vengeance, deep-brooding o’er the slain,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had locked the source of softer woe:</td>
<td>And burning pride and high disdain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And burning pride and high disdain</td>
<td>Vengeance that locks the source of woe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forbade the rising tear to flow.</td>
<td>Forbade the rising tear to flow.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The action takes place in the sixteenth century in the Scottish Borders, in Branksome Castle and in Melrose. An attack on the castle by the English forces is imminent. Lady Buccleuch, the chatelaine, who is skilled in the magic arts, sends Sir William of Deloraine, one of her knights, to Melrose Abbey to retrieve from the grave of the wizard Michael Scott his Magic Book whose powers will save the house of Buccleuch from the approaching English invaders. Romantic interest is added with the inclusion of a sub-plot – a Borders version of Romeo and Juliet. The lovers are Lady Buccleuch’s daughter Margaret and Lord Cranston, a member of a rival family. While they are meeting secretly outside the castle, they are discovered by Deloraine. The two men fight and Deloraine is wounded. The English invaders, who have captured Lady Buccleuch’s son, challenge Deloraine to fight in single combat against their champion to decide the boy’s fate. But Deloraine is wounded. Will he be able to fight? Apparently magically recovered, he arrives in time to fight and strikes down his opponent. The victor then raises his visor to reveal that it is not Deloraine, but Cranston in Deloraine’s armour. He returns Lady Buccleuch’s son to her and at the same time claims the hand of her daughter Margaret. Lady Buccleuch agrees to abandon her opposition, and the whole company join in singing to their native land.

MacCunn’s response to the text is sympathetic and there is good contrast between movements – expressive lyricism contrasts with the robustness of war-like movements and the tension of dramatic scenes. The text of the libretto is freer than that of a Border ballad but there is always the possibility that the musical setting could be tedious or humdrum if not well handled. MacCunn avoids monotony by extending phrases, by the occasional judicious repetition of text, and by altering the stresses of the line while still respecting the text. For example:

**They were all knights of mettle true**

**Kinsmen to the bold Buccleuch**

(2 lines each with 4 strong beats)

is set:

**They were all knights of mettle true**

**Kinsmen to the bold, the bold Buccleuch**
The work opens with a short orchestral introduction in which the opening melody of the first chorus is heard four times. We also hear the martial sound of trumpet fanfares accompanied by side drums, the rhythm of horses at speed, and in the bass the sound of heavy charging cavalry and thus we are introduced to the Scottish knights as they approach Branksome Hall.

In The Lay of the Last Minstrel MacCunn shows he is the master of a good tune – whether it be a rousing sturdy melody for the chorus or a more lyrical air for soloist. A good example of the latter is the tenor solo which begins Part 2. The secret meeting of the two lovers Margaret of Branksome and Lord Cranston is described by the tenor soloist who is later joined by the chorus.

MacCunn uses his orchestra very effectively. Besides being the instrument of accompaniment, it serves to describe and comment on the action – in the military movements, we hear galloping horses, soldiers marching, the trumpets and drums of war; in more lyrical moments, suggestions of bird-song and tranquillity; in the dramatic scene in Melrose Abbey, the religious setting is implied by means of solemn harmonies in the brass. Although a minstrel tells the tale, it should be noted that MacCunn has not included a harp in his instrumentation, nor has he attempted to mimic it in his orchestration.

Like so many composers of his time, MacCunn was influenced by Wagner. There are Wagnerian features in most of his choral works, but The Lay of the Last Minstrel is the one in which they are most evident. Probably the most noteworthy feature of The Lay of the Last Minstrel is MacCunn’s use of leitmotif and recurring themes.

Three of the principal motifs are:

**William of Deloraine**

Deloraine is the knight who rides to Melrose to retrieve the Mighty Book. He is summoned by Lady Buccleuch as ‘Sir William of Deloraine, good at need’ (Figure 2a). This figure is then heard throughout the work in various guises:

- in augmentation as a greeting – Gallant William of Deloraine (Figure 2b)
- transformed into the minor, to indicate that he is wounded (Figure 2c)
- in a transformation in which both the contour and tonality are altered, indicating that this is an imposter, not the true Sir William (Figure 2d)
- transformed into the minor when Deloraine engages with magic(Figure 2e)
Lo! 'tis he! The knight of Deloraine.

Figure 2d: Not Deloraine – Cranston in Deloraine's armour

Then Deloraine in terror took

Figure 2e: Deloraine + magic

And the cross of blood dyed red,

Figure 3: Mighty Book/magic motif

This motif is used initially to represent the Mighty Book, but is later used figuratively to denote magic at work, and in combination with the Deloraine motif to illustrate the action of magic (Figure 2e opposite).

Mighty Book

Cranston

The Cranston motif appears just twice and does not undergo any significant transformation. Its use is rather enigmatic because its first appearance is in the orchestra, and its meaning is only revealed on its second occurrence when Cranston sings to it the words ‘Cranston am I of Teviotside’. The two other motifs mentioned – Deloraine and the Mighty Book – occur for the first time in a vocal context thus making their meaning immediately obvious. Thereafter the Deloraine motif appears only in vocal lines, whereas the Mighty Book motif is used both in vocal lines and in the orchestral accompaniment.

At the climax of work, when Deloraine, who is wounded, has to meet the English knight Musgrave in single combat, the three motifs are used in one number to indicate in turn:
- The wounded Deloraine (Figure 2c)
- Mighty Book/magic (Figure 3)
- The arrival of Cranston (Figure 4)
- Mighty Book/magic (Figure 3)
- Cranston in Deloraine's armour (Figure 2d)

Overall what is remarkable about MacCunn's choral writing is how much he focuses on and enhances the dramatic content of the libretto. He excels at setting speech and many of his choral works have an operatic quality. This is nowhere more evident than in his setting of the dramatic scene in Melrose Abbey where Deloraine and the Monk open the grave of the great wizard Michael Scott to retrieve his magic book. The exchanges between Deloraine and the Monk are vivid and strong, and MacCunn astutely avoids those clichés, in particular the excessive use of diminished seventh chords, which turn drama into melodrama.
In The Lay of the Last Minstrel, as in the later cantata Queen Hynde of Caledon, stage directions are included in the score – not often, but enough to indicate that MacCunn was thinking in a dramatic, visual manner. As two of the three classical unities – place and time – are adhered to, it would be relatively easy to stage the cantata as opera. Given the vividly descriptive, cinematic nature of the orchestral interludes, for example Sir William’s ride from Branksome to Melrose, a filmed performance would also be an interesting possibility. In many respects The Lay of the Last Minstrel is a product of and written for a time when British audiences were indifferent to British opera but readily accepted and welcomed any kind of choral work.

MacCunn is always described as a Scottish composer. Of course, he was born in Scotland and his categorisation as ‘Scottish’ stems partly from his own deeply felt and strongly expressed Scottishness. His nationalism, if it could be called such, was not political, but cultural. He keenly wanted to establish a Scottish School of Music – not a School of Scottish Music. In a letter to Janey Drysdale, sister of the composer Learmont, MacCunn says:

One most important point is to make it very clear indeed that it is the **spirit** of Scottish music poetry & painting that it is sought to conserve & develop, & not the vernacular “wha’-hoo-hooch-aye” side of the art. (GUL MS Farmer 253/3)

Some of MacCunn’s works definitely deserve the label ‘Scottish’ – amongst these one would include the overtures The Land of the Mountain and the Flood and The Dowie Dens o’ Yarrow and the choral works Bonny Kilmeny and Lord Ullin’s Daughter. However there are others, which while having a Scottish stimulus, can easily stand within the wider tradition of Western European art music. The Lay of the Last Minstrel is an obvious example. It is set in Mediaeval times, a tale of wars, kidnap, forbidden love, magic powers, single combat, revenge, and ultimately the triumph of ‘love, neighbourliness and patriotism over hatred, feud and sectional interest’ (Hail Caledonia: 2004, 3). As such, it is only a small step away from the European operatic tradition, of which such tales are the stock in trade.

By launching his compositional career with works of Scottish inspiration, MacCunn seems to have attracted a label that has been hard to shake off. Contemporary reviews of his music always comment on the infusions of local colour whether or not they are present. In The Lay of the Last Minstrel, features usually associated with Scottish music are noticeably absent. There are no gapped scales, no Scotch snaps, no double tonics, no imitation of fiddles or bagpipes, not even an impression of bardic or Ossianic accompaniment. Many reviewers, by focusing on a Scottish text set by a Scottish composer, failed to see the work in its true context – the wider European rather than the narrower Scottish. This has been to MacCunn’s disadvantage since he has been placed in the box marked “Scottish” to be treasured like a well-aged malt, rather than being released for blending and general consumption. Once the label has been stuck on, it is difficult to remove.

As Scots, or as researchers working on Scottish themes, we are proud of Scottish composers and recognise their achievements, but perhaps what we should do, in the case of MacCunn at least, is promote him as a European composer who sometimes speaks with a Scottish accent. Even with the accent, he is perfectly understandable within the wider European context.

**Endnotes**

1 The programme ran for four years and starred Iain Cuthbertson as John Sutherland, the town’s Procurator Fiscal and Maev Alexander as his secretary Christine Russell.

2 ‘Hamish’ is the Anglicised version of Seumas, the Gaelic equivalent of James.

3 Music of the Four Countries Scottish National Orchestra, conducted by Alexander Gibson. EMI ASD2400, 1968.

4 http://www.classicfm.com accessed on 30 Apr 2005

5 Adapted from Hail Caledonia! [programme of The Eildon Singers’ performance of The Lay of the Last Minstrel, Melrose Parish Church, 23 May 2004], 4–6

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The Flyting of Fergusson and McDiarmid

William Sweeney

Fiddlers! Your pins in temper fix
And roset weel your fiddlesticks;
But banish vile Italian tricks
From out your quorum;
Nor fortes wi’ pianos mix; -
Gie’s Tullochgorum.¹

Thus wrote Robert Fergusson in his poem ‘The Daft Days’, in the 1770s.

More than 150 years later, another Scots poet, Hugh MacDiarmid, wrote:

They canna learn, sae canna move,
But stick for aye to their auld groove
The only race in history who’ve

Bidden in the same category
Frae stert to present o’ their story,
And deem their ignorance their glory.

The mair they differ, mair the same,
The wheel can whummle a’ but them,
They ca’ their obstinacy ‘Hame’,

And ‘Puir Auld Scotland’ bleat wi’ pride,
And wi’ their minds made up to bide
A thorn in a’ the wide world’s side.²

At around the same time, in a series of articles written for the Scottish Educational Journal (later collected as Contemporary Scottish Studies), and under his own name – Christopher Murray Grieve – he has this to say (quoting a “correspondent” whose style is uncannily close to that of CMG’s own):

Money is being collected and plans are being laid for the foundation of an Academy of Music in Glasgow……the raison d’etre of the Academy….seems to me dissatisfactory and hopeless as far as the fostering of creative culture in Scotland goes. The true aim of the Academy…should be the creation and development of a school of composition that is racially Scottish and that is technically on a level with the best Continental schools…. Now the aims of this Scottish Academy, as set forth…. seem gratified with the mere granting of degrees and diplomas and the elimination of the necessity for students to study in London or abroad. If these aims are carried into practice, they will become a mere cramming shop for non-creative people, whose only purpose is teaching in schools and playing in churches or orchestras (all very necessary of course); and it will be a fortress for ideas and practices 20 or more years behind the times. It will, in brief, become a backwash of London schools, and wholly untouched by energising influences from the Continent³.

The sense of “racially” in this context is some distance from our contemporary usage. It is used here in place of the complex of cultural, historical and psychological factors distinguishing what MacDiarmid saw as positive features of the Scottish traditions, in opposition to the acceptance of what the historian John Foster has characterised as ‘complementary subordination’ to English economic and cultural domination in its imperial phase.
So we have Fergusson's 'vile Italian tricks', to be renounced in favour of a retreat to our own familiar traditions, posed against MacDiarmid's appeal for openness to 'energising Continental influences'.

Fergusson's bold dismissal of these 'vile Italian tricks' might be belied by his professional experience in providing additional verse for a production of Arne's opera Artaxerxes in 1769, while his artistic sympathies could hardly have run wholly counter to the development of a friendship with the famous castrato Tenducci. David Johnson notes:

…he had a most exact knowledge of what an opera orchestra sounded like. Fergusson was certainly a person who knew his way round the classical music culture.

To explain the squib, Johnson suggests a change of heart on Fergusson's part, but in the context of the publishing, performing and composing repertoires of the eighteenth century, his position may be better understood as representing a persistent duality in the national psychology when presented with problems of identity and internationalism, or tradition and modernism. The consequences of this dualism for Scottish art music of the nineteenth century were likened by MacDiarmid to a "specific aboulia" i.e. what the Oxford Dictionary refers to as "an absence of willpower or an inability to act decisively, a symptom of schizophrenia or other mental illness".

The fact that this is no long-dead debate could be gleaned from the letters page of The Herald during January 2004, where a controversy sparked off by a poll on public funding of the arts had some correspondents excoriating, '…non-indigenous classical art-forms rooted in feudal patronage' and '…powerful minority support for an elitist and alien cultural art-form', while others made the case for, '…enough cash for all the arts to flourish and…a traditional broad-based Scottish education that gives the arts their place among life's more utilitarian demands'. An appeal to modernity and internationalism was posed by the rhetorical question, 'Do you want Scotland to be a laughing stock in Scandinavia for the paltry level of its public funding for classical music, opera…?', while an article by the music critic Conrad Wilson went so far as to suggest that '…by their ability to stage the Ring, civilised countries must be musically judged…'.

That such controversies can still rage, between different factions and even (or especially) within the same individual, may indicate that John Purser's chapter heading, "The Classical Takes Root" in his Scotland's Music, might have to be taken as an expression of hope rather than as an unchallengeable statement of secure achievement.

While defining the border areas which Art (or classical) music shares with traditional, national and even popular styles can be fraught with difficulty, nevertheless the widespread assumption of such distinctions, even if sometimes misconceived in specific cases, points to a significant culturally embedded set of evaluations; and while the notion of external influence can be understood as value-free exchange between localities, the concept of foreign, or alien, influence brings in questions of social values and identity, privileging and authenticity.

The sharp division of literature into Scots or English characteristic of the late eighteenth century, or musical repertoires displaying a similar dualism (Italian, or Italian-influenced works side-by-side with 'National' songs) is only possible with the existence of a strong sense of a distinctive culture with its own idioms, associations, iconography and values; but the flight from one idiom to the other demonstrates a cultural, even psychological crisis, reflecting uncertain reactions to the growing hegemony of economic, linguistic and moral values deriving from the syndrome characterised as "complementary subordination".

It is clear that the fear, the sense of impending loss, is tangible in Fergusson, but the important question must be: was the object of his criticism the Italian repertoire presented in the eighteenth century concert rooms of Scotland, or was it the Italianate arrangements of Scots songs? Certainly, some of our above noted correspondents in The Herald would leap to the former interpretation, but it is quite possible that Fergusson had their self-same eighteenth century compatriots in his sights.

Lasair Dhe (The Flame of God), a fairly recent "massive celebration of new Gaelic spiritual music", would be a case in point. There is no doubt that those protesting against "elitist and alien" art forms will have given it their full approval. In the event,
the harmonies, textures, instrumentation and rhythmic impetus of almost all of these “new” spiritual artefacts displayed pallid reflections of a number of sources: school-book harmony, Mrs Kennedy-Fraser, and a limp impersonation of the rhythmic verve of Nashville. None of the distinctive features of the gaelic psalm-singing tradition were developed, most notably its impassioned sincerity projected as the artistic expression of the whole personality through the act of worship.

The tendency towards the free adoption of the outward trappings of foreign styles, as long as they are religiously or socially privileged, and even where the result is the obscuring or distortion of a distinctive art, rather than the development of its essential features, is therefore still extant.

Fergusson’s point of view, at first sight so unequivocal, seems now a little more complex, his recruitment to one side or the other a little less certain.

This brings us back to MacDiarmid: what kind of foreign influence does he advocate? (Certainly it is not the influence of our larger, southern neighbour.) In another article in Contemporary Scottish Studies, he gives us the example of the composer Mackenzie:

Of men like Mackenzie, Forsyth well says:
A man of this sort often begins with great natural talent, and if it were possible for him to exercise that talent in a vacuum he would no doubt achieve much. But he does not live in a vacuum. He lives in a closely-packed continent throbbing with the highly developed and strongly differentiated groups of men which we call nations. As a rule he goes to Germany – the country whose technical proficiency is beyond question. There he masters all that the Germans can teach him. But when he returns home, he does not ask himself whether after all his musical attainment is merely a brilliant sleight of hand, which anyone can pick up with cleverness and application. He does not say: ‘I have learned so and so from the Germans: how did they learn it?’ He accepts the German art of his day as a boy accepts a Christmas present of a box of tricks. He never honestly knows why the tricks are done and so is never able to invent a new one.12

To which MacDiarmid adds:

This is the lesson Scotland has still to learn: until it is learnt Scotland can have no music of her own that is not mere translation of foreign idioms.13

This is in the context of an article proposing Francis George Scott as a counterweight to the prevailing tendency, and ten years later, in the second of two articles in which he tries to define the specific nature of the “Caledonian Antisyzygy”, (his own adopted image of the essence of the Scots creative instinct), he again invokes Scott and says:

…this insistence on the established fiction….that led the music critic of the Glasgow Herald to the inanity of saying of the song settings of Scott: “The sudden outbursts that he indulges in are not characteristic of our nation: but reflect rather the mercurial and almost volcanic natures that are to be found in Eastern Europe. The true Scot makes his meaning clear in more subtle ways, and can be, for that reason, more impressive because more controlled.”14

MacDiarmid’s retort is from Thomas Robertson’s Inquiry into the Fine Arts of 1784:

I will only quote what is said by his biographer of Thomas Erskine, the sixth Earl of Kellie (born 1732), one of the few musical geniuses Scotland has so far produced, and you have only to compare my quotation with the Glasgow Herald critic’s remarks to understand the obligation imposed by the established fiction to insist that everything really Scottish is un-Scottish. “In his works”, we read, “the fervidum ingenium of his country bursts forth, and elegance is mingled with fire. From the singular ardour and impetuosity of his temperament, joined to his German education, under the celebrated Stamitz…this great composer has employed himself chiefly in symphonies, but in a style peculiar to himself. While others please and amuse, it is his province to rouse and almost overset his hearer.
Loudness, rapidity, enthusiasm, announced the Earl of Kellie. What appears singularly peculiar in this musician is what may be called the velocity of his talents. While this judgement places Kellie well within the ambit of MacDiarmid’s attempts to define the “true characteristics” of the Scots intellectual temperament, it delineates an important development in the ideological divide which had hitherto represented itself in terms of the attitude struck by Fergusson in the quotation at the beginning of this paper. Now the duality, if fleetingly, is represented within the bounds of the art music itself and the most advanced style in the development of musical thought is represented as a throwback to manners of speech, gesture and intellectual temper which the enlightenment forces rejected as Scoticisms.

What MacDiarmid proposes is a redefinition of the Scots style as a psychological feature. Not the either/or of Italianate (or German) idioms against Scots, but both at once, so long as it is the creative essence of both and not just the outward technical features. This is why he says of those behind the new Scottish National Academy (and the Chair of Music at the University of Glasgow):

What a pity that these people have so far given no earnest either of their zeal for a distinctively Scottish music or their ability to produce it – no earnest even of their realisation of the issues involved and their relation to other factors in our national life. Jove leaping fully armed from the head of Minerva is not in it with these people… (who) are… to resolve problems that are mainly psychological by a provision of external facilities.

What kind of education does MacDiarmid propose in order to promote his new definition of the Scots creative psychology? In yet another article in the SEJ, he says (using the term Dadaist to denote the whole modern movement):

The difference between a Dadaist and a respectable product of the Scottish Educational System [RPSES] is that the latter likes something he can understand and the former something he can’t. It is obvious that the Dadaist must carry a process of elimination a good distance before he arrives at a point at which he can derive any satisfaction, whereas the R.P.S.E.S. needn’t move off the bit. It is also obvious that liking something you can understand means throwing bouquets at your powers of comprehension all the time, while the Dadaist, on the other hand, is looking for culs-de-sac to bat his head against. The latter is, of course, a comparatively religious process. From the point of view of Education, the R.P.S.E.S. has little, if any, use for more than the minimum of it he can evade - the minimum he can practically apply –while the Dadaist doesn’t become one till, in some direction or other, he has learned all that can be taught and entered into unexplored territory for himself. Pedagogic interest, therefore – on a long view - lies with the latter. Apart from that it is surely a matter of personal honour. This stupid insistence on mere meaning, on values that, however idealistic at first glance, are all at best in the last analysis utilitarian, this disinclination for the incomprehensible, for what is beyond us…are all dishonourings of our minds, panderings to what is commonest and basest in us, sloth, the fear to be different from other people.

Perhaps it was inevitable that Fergusson’s search for identity and authenticity presents itself, at least in a first reading, as closing doors to the outside world. But MacDiarmid’s proposed opening, not only of doors, but of all of the windows (and probably blowing off the roof into the bargain), poses a number of questions for our musical community – composers, performers and educationalists - which still remain unresolved.

He says of Dostoevsky’s Russian Idea:

– in which he pictured Russia as the sick man possessed of devils but who would yet ‘sit at the feet of Jesus’. The point is that Dostoevsky’s was a great creative idea – a dynamic myth – and in no way devalued by the difference of the actual happenings in Russia from any Dostoevsky dreamed or desired.

When he says this, he seems to take his argument to the bounds of rationality, but surely the justification is poetic, like Rilke’s unicorn, who was:
… fed .. not with corn,
but only with the possibility
of being. And that was able to confer
such strength, its brow put forth a horn. One horn.\textsuperscript{19}

He also justifies it in the following (slightly edited) passage:

The essential point is that all fixed opinions – all ideas that are not entertained just provisionally and experimentally -
…are anti-Scottish – opposed to our national genius which is capable of countless manifestations at absolute variance
with each other, yet confined within the ‘limited infinity’ of the adjective “Scottish”\textsuperscript{20}.

So perhaps the apparent contradiction between Fergusson’s verse and the artistic fare he actually enjoyed was in fact an act
of pioneering antisyzygium – it would surely break the heart and spirit of any artist to be allied with those who ‘deem their
ignorance their glory’.

Of course, this antithetical identity has its dark side – as, for example, is manifested in the persistent sectarianism which still
disfigures Scotland, and perhaps also exemplified in the dire example of some of the Covenanters of the late seventeenth
century who devoted their energies, in their time of greatest oppression and want, to discovering heretics within their ranks
and excommunicating them.

Perhaps our little community of thinkers and researchers into Scottish music should ponder this latter example while nurturing
the fire of the Scots creative spirit.

\textbf{Notes}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Fergusson
\item MacDiarmid, A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle, ed. Kenneth Buthlay, 1987, 188
\item MacDiarmid, Contemporary Scottish Studies, ed. Alan Riach. 1995, 412
\item Johnson, 2003, 192.
\item Johnson, 2003, 192-3.
\item The Herald, Glasgow, 27 January, 2004, 17.
\item The Herald, Glasgow, 29 January, 2004, 19.
\item The Herald, Glasgow, 22 January, 2004, 19.
\item The Herald, Glasgow, 14 February, 2004, 2.
\item Purser, 1992, 243.
\item MacDiarmid, 1995, 108
\item MacDiarmid, 1995, 108
\item MacDiarmid, 1993, 304-05
\item MacDiarmid, Scottish Eccentrics, ed Alan Riach, 1993, 304
\item MacDiarmid, 1995, 412
\item MacDiarmid, 1995, 404
\item MacDiarmid, Selected Essays, ed Duncan Glen, 1969, 67
\item Rilke, Trans. J.B.Leishman, Selected Poems, 1964
\item MacDiarmid, Selected Essays, ed Duncan Glen, 1969, 68
\end{enumerate}

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The Persistence of Parody in the Music of Peter Maxwell Davies

Richard McGregor

It is all about time. Indeed there is not a single piece of musical composition that is not in some way about time. For Davies the manipulation of time is rooted in his understanding of late Medieval and early Renaissance musical techniques and practices refracted through post twelve-note pitch manipulation.

In this article I take to task the uncritical use of terminology in relation to the music of Peter Maxwell Davies. Though my generating text is the quotation from John Warnaby's 1990 doctoral thesis:

Since parody is implied in the notion of using pre-existing material as a creative model, it can be argued that, as traditionally understood, it is rarely absent from Maxwell Davies's music.

this is in no sense a criticism of Warnaby for whom I have much respect, particularly for his ability to be able to perceive patterns, trends and unifying features between works and across extended periods of time. Rather, it is a commentary on particular aspects of Davies's music which are often linked together under the catch-all term "parody".

Example 1: Dali’s The Persistence of Memory

I take as my starting point the painting The Persistence of Memory by Salvador Dali, a painting which operates on a number of levels, the most obvious, because of the immediate imagery, being that is has something to do with time. But, as to what it has to do with time in relation to memory is not easy to answer unequivocally.

What do we see in this picture? The background is a quasi-realistic scenic vista whose lines are unrealistically sharp and whose colours, though they look natural, are also unnatural. In the foreground is an unidentified raised box into which a dead tree is planted. Also in the foreground is a strange shaped object, having some elements of a shell but dominated by what is actually a self-portrait of Dali's eyebrows. Draped across these three items are what catch our eyes first: typical gold and silver coloured timepieces which have stretched or maybe melted – suggesting time bending, elongating, distorting.

Although the picture is surreal and to a degree absurd, we do not perceive this image of time to be a parody, and for that reason I want to use it as a metaphor for some of the processes found in Davies's music and particularly to frame those which have traditionally been labelled as parody in his work.

If not parody, then what?

Dali's scenic background evokes, among other things, those backgrounds found in late Medieval and Renaissance paintings. In the same way Davies underpins sections, if not whole movements, with long-term structural components operating in the background, and related to early music models, as I will explore in due course. These form the musical substructure, the background, on which the other musical components operate. Nicholas Jones has examined some of these background elements as expressed through the harmonic elements of the third and sixth symphonies in his recent Musical Times article, and the sketches for the third symphony show that the opening of the first movement, for example, is based on a long-term unfolding of two distinct middle-lying thematic lines functioning as the background for this part of the movement.

This suggests the kind of fifteenth and sixteenth century structural techniques which Davies in fact makes explicit in his programme note for the first symphony when he declares that the ‘voice or part which unifies the harmony is not necessarily a bass line, but often a “tenor” which usually has long notes’. These long notes are derived from the plainsong manipulated through the magic square in an extension of the organising principle of the cantus firmus mass. In that Davies uses this idea constantly, this clearly defines a relationship with earlier practices, which, while obvious, has received comparatively little
attention, and I shall return to it later.

This paper is primarily concerned with parody. For most people the concept of parody will be unambiguously parsed as the mocking of some *gestalt* such that its essential meaning is distorted, and often turned into a focus for ridicule. So, when King George intones ‘Comfort ye’ in *Eight Songs for a Mad King* (1969) that is parody. Or is it?

In that Davies quotes the original Handel, or more precisely, borrows it, then it is a parody in the musical sense but it is not quoted exactly since the accompaniment leading up to it is reworked into a swing rhythm

![Example 2: 'Country Dance (Scotch Bonnet)', No 7 of Eight Songs for a Mad King](image)

and, strictly interpreted, the more likely early music antecedent is paraphrase not parody.

Thereafter, the original Handel is quite clearly being paraphrased in the succeeding musical material, as for example in the exaggerated trill and ensuing vocal pyrotechnics. As far as the character of the King is concerned we are not being asked to think of this as a parody but as pathos: if we view the musical texture as parody in the generally accepted sense then we miss the point. It is, I admit, a close run thing as to how this is perceived since one is bound to interpret the jazzy-up accompaniment as essentially humorous – this is one of the problematic areas of the work – but, in retrospect, it is at least a biting sweet humour. Davies’s 1996 note on the printed score for *Miss Donnithorne’s Maggot* (1974) underlines this. In it he refers to *Eight Songs* as ‘serious and tragic’, and quotes Randolph Stow at the after-show party as saying ‘let’s write a funny one, as a sequel’. This implies that neither librettist nor composer thought of *Eight Songs* as evoking humour which would normally be the desired by-product of parody.

*Miss Donnithorne’s Maggot* parallels *Eight Songs* in its use of an historically-based musical substructure, which is effectively a collection of dances, a suite of sorts, starting with a Prelude and ending with a Reel, the cousin of the traditional Gigue, but going by way of a Victorianised Elizabethan ‘dompe’ and a Rant.
Richard McGregor: The Persistence of Parody

Once again the intention is pathos not parody, and the musical content with its cross-temporal illusions is not a parody either but clearly freely composed on borrowed substructure, none of which is actually original: Davies has simply created an pastiche, of which more later.

Perhaps *St Thomas Wake* (1969) comes nearest to parody but even here the intention is not so much humour as the creation of an essential conflict between the honky-tonk versions of the John Bull Pavan and the orchestra’s serious musical argument. See Example 4: *St Thomas Wake*, bar 492 et seq.

What does it mean? Is Davies making a joke at his own expense, or is it a comment perhaps on the widening gap between popular and serious music: the fact is that the original Pavan material has been paraphrased not parodied. It would only work as a parody if we understood the point of the parody. As we do not, then we should not view the work as parody. However the honky-tonk piano is a recurring stylistic element in Davies’s work of this period and we need to understand better its symbolic significance for the composer before we can attempt a further re-interpretation of *St Thomas Wake*.

The preceding examples have all come from that period in Davies’s life when he was the *enfant terrible* of British music and all the works mentioned have been given a good outing in terms of commentary, not always, I am suggesting, accurate to the musical context intended by the composer.

After the first two symphonies it seems like the establishment lost interest in that terrible child: he had become, or so it seemed, *passé*. If it appeared that Davies, for the most part, was no longer doing those humorous parodies, such obvious time and place distortions, such obvious exaggerations, such, as it might seem on the surface, deliberately provocative manoeuvres, then perhaps we should consider that for the composer, the late seventies, eighties and nineties were a period of integration and stabilisation. In what will undoubtedly come to be seen as his middle period, Davies was about consolidation.

Remember the Dali: those elongated timepieces became a trademark. He translated them into real tangible artefacts (jewellery)
Example 4: *St Thomas Wake*, bar 492 et seq
Example 5: *Strathclyde Concerto No. 5*, First Movement, Letter G
Example 6: Strathclyde Concerto No 3, First Movement, Figure [1]
Richard McGregor: The Persistence of Parody

and they became part of the essence of the artist. So it is with middle period Davies. All the elements are still present and come to the surface or stay rather in the shadows depending on the work. A good example of a work whose background comes into the foreground is the Strathclyde Concerto no. 5 (1991) which is based on a realisation of Jan Albert Ban’s two-part song Vanitas vanitum and Haydn’s Lisola disabitata. I suspect, but cannot at present prove, that there is some personal biographical element here rather like the seashell eyebrows of Dali. Not all of Davies’s works contain biographical elements but there are some notable examples, such as: what Davies calls ‘the Metin square’ in Symphony No. 4 (1989) (after a partner of the time); the use of the early piano piece Parade (1949) in Symphony No. 3 (1984) and Symphony No. 6 (1996); the whole of the Salford cycle and especially Chat Moss (1993) which produced one of the sources for the Symphony No. 5 (1994); and, it appears, also the set of string quartets, currently in progress.

Pre-compositional processes – thoughts on a deeper time frame
Davies’s compositional methodology for the creation of source sets employed in his larger scale works is now quite well documented so I do not propose to present any such material here, but I do want to offer some thoughts on the antecedents of that methodology, not in relation to recent serial practice but in relation to those aspects which might have been influenced by his studies and understanding of early music.

In his first published works, such as Alma Redemptoris Mater (1958), Davies showed quite clearly his debt to older sources. In that work a tenor is subject to melismatic elaboration in the manner, if not substance, of the early polyphonic style. Similar thematic constructions are found in some of the works of the following five years, but the same basic idea underlines an example like this from the Strathclyde Concerto No. 5 where the magic square is read across its diagonals (see Example 5). The demisemiquavers and triplet semiquavers are melismatic decorations or elaborations and not pitches of the square, though the starting point for each melisma is a pitch from the magic square, as circled in the example. That this proved to be a useful way of generating soloistic material for the concertos is shown by the technique’s continual recurrence in works of this type. Another example is found in this extract from Strathclyde Concerto No. 3, for trumpet and horn soli, written in 1989 (see Example 6).

When he was using transformation sets, from about 1963 onwards, and had to generate a very large number of pre-compositional charts, one can see melismatic material being “created” on the sketches, often using collections of pitches derived from the intervallic distances between opposite ends of the transformation set processes. However, my impression is that this has become an intuitive aspect for what I would term Davies’s second level works of the 1980s and 1990s, that is, those pieces where the organisation is not so all encompassing as in the symphonies, namely, the concerti and the ballets in particular. However it is an intuitive aspect founded on an intimate, memorised knowledge of the pre-compositional charts and workings created for a particular work.

In the 1958 work Prolation, Davies experimented with the technique of that name, and in the String Quartet of 1961 with Mensuration and Coloration, but these have not had a direct influence on later work. On the other hand, once he had arrived at the technique of Transformation Sets, which would later transmute into Magic Squares, a certain consistency of approach became evident in his preparatory sketch processes.

Davies’s pre-compositional method normally involves taking the pre-existing source, whatever it might be, often a plainsong but equally it might be any predominantly melodic/thematic source, such as the tune Cuamh Brabha nan Teud in Strathclyde Concerto No. 4 (1990), or the Ban and Haydn already mentioned for Strathclyde Concerto no 5. The pitch sieving process he uses, which usually removes repeated pitches and often adds accidentals, essentially creates a paraphrase of the original idea, which is then rolled out across the various Transposition and Transformation processes created for works up to Ave Maris Stella of 1975, and after that work into magic squares. The magic square creates both pitch and rhythmic matrices which have elements of both the cantus firmus and isorhythmic techniques of early music without belonging strictly to either process. The permutating numeric series based on 9, an example of which may be seen in Example 7 (below and opposite) from Ave Maris Stella, is effectively a variant of a regularly repeating talea.
Pitch Square (Magic Square)

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Example 7 (part 1): Magic Square for *Ave Maris Stella*, Section II, Figure H

The permutating pitch patterns from the same 9 base are therefore a variant of a regularly repeating color. As can be seen in the extract from *Ave Maris Stella* on Page 81, the deployment of this material is often in the tenor of the instrumental texture, functioning as a cantus firmus. Almost every fifteenth and sixteenth century antecedent is here except parody in fact.

This then is the one constant in the composer’s pre-compositional processes which links his serious music, and some of his less serious works, to the stylistic models which he took from his studies of early music. We might, in addition, be able to suggest that Davies, probably unconsciously, borrowed the idea of the cyclic nature of some musical techniques of early music where parody, paraphrase or cantus firmus were used to unify a whole Mass, setting up relationships with the underpinning recurring thematic idea.

It could also be argued that Davies’s transmutation of an existing work, such as the orchestral piece *Time and the Raven* (1995) into the Symphony No. 6 is as close to the original idea of parody as to make no difference to one’s perception. However, as is the case with the Sixth Symphony, this is only true of the very opening and within a short time the music is pulled into the typical paraphrasing which I am suggesting is the predominant impetus behind Davies’s musical borrowing.

*Parody v. Pastiche*

If Davies’s work hardly ever demonstrates parody in any of its senses then perhaps we need to be more exact as to what is usually being implied by the assigning of the catch-all term “parody” to his music. It is generally more accurate to speak of “pastiche” in relation to the composer’s music, although, of course, use of this term no longer carries an early music connotation with which some commentators would wish to characterise, indeed pigeon-hole, his stylistic antecedents.

Referring back to examples cited earlier, it is clear, I think, that whatever else they may be, the dance forms which underpin *Eight Songs* and *Miss Donnithorne*, and the honky-tonk version of the John Bull Pavan in *St Thomas Wake* are all essentially pastiche and not parody.

This applies also, for example, to parts of *The Lighthouse* (1979) such as, for example, the mock Victorian gospel song ‘This be thy God, oh Israel’. We are not meant to laugh at this, but to sense the uncompromising religious zeal behind it, which gives the song a dangerous, oppressive quality: our understanding of the character of Arthur is enhanced and the context is not trivialised by its inclusion.

Viewed in this way, pastiche, and not parody, is a technique much used by Davies but normally only within a dramatic, or abstract-dramatic, context, and his purpose varies with the context. So in the ballet *Caroline Matihilde* (1990), the opening is a derived version of a John Dunstable original while the music that begins the Queen’s Chamber Scene is a pastiche of a
Example 7 (part 2): Ave Maria Stella, Section II, Figure H
Scottish-type folk tune but has no original source as its basis. Even the bagpipe solo at the end of *An Orkney Wedding with Sunrise* (1985) is a pastiche – we smile not because we recognise the tune as having been distorted in some way, nor because it is a send-up of suchlike tunes, but because it is a successful pastiche drawing on folk memories and archetypes and placed in a context where its semiotic meaning is clear. It is quite incorrect to apply the term parody in its meaning as a humorous distortion or in its relational sense to early music in such cases. When Davies does use parody, and it is comparatively rare, then he does so with the express purpose of sending up his subject. *Mavis in Las Vegas* (1997) includes several examples of pastiche which are to be perceived as parody; such is the case with the ‘Liberace moment’. Davies therefore uses pastiche to evoke a memory, to create conflict, or elicit an emotional response. I have used this opportunity to try to explode the notion that one can categorise an aspect of Davies’s style under a single discrete classification. It is almost as meaningless as trying to assert that Davies previously wrote in a style which reflected the Franco-Flemish masters of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, whereas recently, with greater use of 3rds and 6ths – a more obvious modality – he has succumbed to the *Contenance Angloise* (and presumably would not if he had been born in Scotland!).

I began with Dali’s *The Persistence of Memory* and I shall finish there too. Dali’s pieces of jewellery made in the shape of these stretched timepieces may be attractive in their own right, but, viewed as single items, they lack context and derived meaning. In *The Persistence of Memory* they have meaning and the meaning is interpretable, but the range of interpretations is large. Do they suggest: the heat of the sun; time being distorted (as when it passes quickly, or, when it drags); are they exaggerations of reality, set in a context of other exaggerated realities; are they intended to link time past (the suggestion of earlier types of painting from the background) with the present, and so on?

Peter Maxwell Davies’s musical idiom is both eclectic and inclusive. It is rather easy to dismiss some of his work as having no real substance, as being all surface and no depth, as playing for cheap thrills at the expense of the paying public. This gloss on criticism of his work, albeit somewhat exaggerated, is not too far from the truth of the matter, in that Davies’s music has been dismissed by some of his contemporaries as trivial and designed to court cheap popularity, unlike, for example, Birtwistle for whom there is no compromise.

Davies’s music engages with multiple layers of meaning, all interpretable, but none absolute. It remains one of the fascinating aspects of his musical idiom that it does function at different levels simultaneously. As I hope I have demonstrated, it is inaccurate to just use the term “parody” as a catch-all characterising his stylistic processes since the term fails to do justice to the diversity of levels through which his music operates in relation to style, content and idea within his compositional technique.

*Endnotes*

2. Reproductions of this famous picture, which is on display at The Museum of Modern Art in New York, can be readily found on the internet and therefore no reproduction is included. See for example: www.moma.org/collection/provenance/items/162.34.html or www.3d-dali.com/Tour/persistencia.htm [as at 17 June 2005].
4. Peter Maxwell Davies, programme note for the First Symphony (www.maxopus.com/works/symph_1.htm) [At the time of going to press, as a result of ongoing legal proceedings, the maxopus website was not live: however it is anticipated that the service will be restored in due course (eds)]
5. This label is only seen on the sketch and even then in Davies’s personal script, so not intended to be “read” as such.
Dillon’s L’évolution du vol: an Evolution of Stylistics or a Flight from National Identity?

Michael Spenser

In his preview of the world premiere of James Dillon’s Oceanos, the concluding part of his Nine Rivers cycle at the 1996 Proms, Antony Bye attempted to contextualise Dillon’s work:

There’s nothing nationalistic or tweely picturesque about this music. Nine Rivers encapsulates our special relationship with land and seascape, along with Dillon’s desire to recapture some of music’s mediaeval magic […] and his need to distance himself from his Anglo-Scottish heritage.

These observations, while rather general, focus on two elements that have arguably been important for Dillon’s output since 1976: his relationship with Scotland and a concern with the creative artist’s relationship to a wide range of disciplines – from historical performance practice to twentieth century philosophy, from contemporary art to scientific concepts such as genetics or astronomy. Dillon says, ‘I am interested in what the Sufis call that fine net of connections between things’.

This paper seeks to outline some of these connections with specific reference to his work L’évolution du vol (1991-93) written for the ensemble Accroche-Note. This work, scored for mezzo soprano, clarinet (doubling Eb clarinet, bass clarinet and contrabass clarinet), two percussionists, piano (doubling hurdy-gurdy and harmonium) and double bass, consists of a series of vignettes which may be performed individually, in combination, or as a whole.

With its strange evocation of a range of musical styles, not least the typographical references to Debussy’s Preludes, and an idiosyncratic formal structure, L’évolution du vol deals with the issue of whether style works in-authentically with pre-ordained notions of patterning. Further, the work can perhaps be seen as engaging with what Kenneth White calls ‘the nomadic intellect’ – and as such, may be viewed as Dillon’s re-assertion of the need to transcend national (or any other) stereotypes.

The music of James Dillon has, mainly due to an article published in the 1980s by Richard Toop, been situated in the area of composition called ‘New Complexity’¹. Despite the superficially hegemonic and totalising appearance of the term ‘New Complexity’, different commentators mean different things by it. The German composer-philosopher Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf would argue that, along with ‘large amounts of quantitative and qualitative information’, complexity involves an interaction between different levels of semantics and Brian Ferneyhough states that:

The principal defining features [of complexity] might be seen as: discrepancy, incommensurability and the consequent reliance upon ambiguity as mobile mediator between perceptual categories².

Toop also suggests, however, that the composers who fall into this category are interested in creating ‘different simultaneous pulses which are usually periodic and, far from seeking to redefine motion at the bar-lines, these periodic groups habitually go across them’². This is certainly a characteristic of Dillon’s early works such as Ignis Noster for orchestra and La Femme Invisible for chamber ensemble.

On the continent and specially in Germany, however, a change in the music of Dillon post-1990 has been observed by Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf who suggests that there is a significant (and in his opinion, negative) shift away from complexity in recent times³. Dillon claims that his early work is an ‘attempt to get rid of the residue of pop music/repetition’ – ‘the beat’ – which had been a primary factor in Dillon’s early music career⁴. This approach is re-assessed in L’évolution du vol which, while not as dense as some of his work, is expected to be played from memory and without a conductor. Indeed, Dillon has said that he imagined something like a gypsy band arriving on a village green, unpacking their instruments and starting to play. In a limited sense, this could be viewed as a dispersal of Scottish identity, just as Ives might use a similar trope to construct
Title Ambiguity

Dillon often uses titles that are ambiguous or open to several readings. The title L’évolution du vol evokes a double meaning: “vol” can mean either “flight” or “theft”. If we unpack this example, there are several possible interpretations. First, as regards “flight”, there is a reference to the subject matter of the various spliced and re-organised texts which primarily deal with the notion of “getting high” – many phrases are taken from recipes for “flying ointments” concocted by herbalists and witches as can be seen in the following example from the text from Movement VI.

six five turns the hazel
four the rowan wind arbour sun bright chill
three shadows anoint the moment in time is measured by a child
through the symmetry ice gently heat
curves measure space where silence gaze has the bellfire curvature rung as seven
seven echoes
cross ascent of moon and crow hover
flights infinite outline a trace eye blind with time stride the winding fold of elemental shift glide
a lace of sweet herbs morpholique
wild celery wolfsbane cinquefoil
separated by vision proto in shadow
circle liquid astral light
in the weave of sweet herbs
for the winds hollow breath
haze of southern sky and sweet lustre
sway with the juice I steal a path of fire
between the dynamics of air and an infusion of light resonance
desire manifest amongst stone
time recedes amongst fire it disappears rising before impact
between the dynamics of air and an infusion of light desire manifest
among of stone time recedes
amongst fire it disappears
rising before impact
etched by doubt

Figure 1

Here, there is also a direct link to Movement III, a duo for tuned percussion, entitled (…l’ascension) which could be viewed literally as a series of short “flights”, culminating in a very high passage for eight un-pitched triangles. But if we consider vol to mean “theft”, to what aspects of the work might this refer? Perhaps the theft of other types of music; that is, references to the French Troubadour style, Eastern European folk music tradition, North African drumming, Ravel, jazz (particularly Charlie Mingus in part VII for solo double bass, and [albeit tenuously] to Frank Zappa’s music in the final part).

There are no references to the Scottish music traditions which have surfaced in Dillon’s early work such as Siorram for viola, Birl for harpsichord or piano and A Roaring Flame for voice and double bass. Rather, as Figure 2 demonstrates, Dillon chooses to refer typographically to Debussy’s Préludes by printing the title of each vignette at the end of each part and in brackets with ellipses as Debussy does.
Michael Spenser: Dillon’s L’évolution du vol

I - (…la pensée rêverie) - (…the dream thought)
for harmonium and mezzo-soprano

II – (…l’homme et la vérité) – (…man and truth)
for piano and mezzo-soprano

III – (…l’ascension) – (…the ascension)
for percussion duo

IV – (…l’être-ange) – (…the living angel) (a play on l’étrange/“strange”)
for Eb clarinet, hurdy-gurdy, mezzo-soprano

V – (…nuée) – (…blurred)
for bass clarinet and percussion duo

VI – (…descente/désir) – (…descent/desire)
for bass clarinet, mezzo-soprano, double bass

VII – (…le vent, l’arbre et les temps) – (…the wind, the tree and the times [or possibly seasons])
for solo double bass

VIII – (…historiées faces de la danse) – (…historical facets of dance)
[c.f. Hans Holbein, the Younger of Augsburg’s 41 woodcuts entitled Les simulachres et historiees faces de la mort (facsimiles published in 1538 by M. and G. Trechsel of Lyon)]
for contrabass clarinet, mezzo-soprano, percussion duo, piano, double bass

Figure 2

Dillon has always been more enthusiastically received in France than in his homeland (as evidenced by what Conrad Wilson calls the ‘Dillon Debacle’ which took place early in 2005); this may be a practical reason behind the connections with French culture that are emphasised here; for example, Debussy, the French text, the Troubadour evocation – and, indeed, his interest since the early 1980s in the French spectral composition movement. It may also be significant that the work was commissioned by a French ensemble (Accroche-Note, though the first performance was actually by Champ d’Action). However, there is perhaps another reason.

In his essay The Franco-Scottish Connection Kenneth White writes in reference to himself:

It was in France, in fact, that our Scottish-born intellectual nomad was to publish books over the next few decades. From the French, or from the original English manuscripts, they were translated into other languages, but did not appear in the English-language countries, with which he felt, intellectually, poetically and culturally, less and less contact.

It is my contention that by the 1990s, Dillon was also feeling distanced from the intellectual, poetic and cultural climate of Scotland (despite the arguable references to Scottish fiddle tradition at the start of the Violin Concerto [2000], references that the composer denies).

The Music (and Stylistic References)

The idea of eschewing repetition that is so prevalent in Dillon’s early work (see especially helle Nacht for orchestra) is reassessed in L’évolution du vol. Dillon says that here, ‘repetition shifts to the area of change – texture’ and this relates to his belief that memory primarily functions in how we understand form. One possible interpretation of this is that memory, rather than simply perceiving an already extant form, provides a filtering device that allows us to create form. Throughout L’évolution du vol, micro-level paradigmatic cells of texture, often involving rapid changes of performance technique, are distributed in such a way that they allow for several different interpretations of form.
There are some obvious examples of this such as the formative repetition in bars 33-37 of ‘(…le vent, l’arbre et les temps)’. Here, the double bass reiterates the fast open string/glissando texture that is also notable for the gradual transition to and from sul pont/sul tasto articulations which evoke Jimi Hendrix’s Machine Gun (Figure 3 opposite).

The shift of bowing positions refers back to the opening bars of the movement where the pitch and rhythmic material are less complex, and also refers forward to bars 88-93 where such material is much more detailed. The sections of pizzicato gestures which evoke the music of Charlie Mingus (bb. 15-17; 20-23; 58-60; 83-84) operate in a similar way to the open string/glissando texture.

Another more complex example of this type of formative repetition of texture occurs in Movement III, in which there is an overlapping of various types of tuned percussion instruments (metal and wood). The Table below outlines the temporal morphology of this process.

**Table**

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<td>3 e</td>
<td>9 e</td>
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Figure 3
It is clear that the double vibraphone material, which appears for 118 quaver beats, is the dominant texture compared to the double xylophone and glockenspiel textures (a total of 39 quaver beats). However, the distribution of this texture across the movement, interspersed by the other similar, yet differentiated texture-types, suggests that Dillon is interested in the subtle sonic differences between the chosen instruments. The result is that the listener is aware of the coherency afforded by the general similarity in tone-quality of the tuned percussion and the distribution of the “double-instrument” textures, but creative interest and variation exist due to the gradual shifting between the double set of four tuned percussion instruments.

The final movement, ‘(…historiées faces de la danse)’ includes examples of canonic repetition between the voice and contrabass clarinet (bb. 31-33; 36-38; 38-41; 44-46) and ‘shadowed’ doubling between the voice and vibraphone with instrumental pitch modification (Figure 4) reminiscent of Frank Zappa’s music of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Aside from these micro-level and formative repetitions of texture within movements, there are also paradigmatic relationships across movements. For example, the piano part from bar 44 in ‘(…historiées faces de la danse)’ (Figure 5) refers back to the varied repetition of the harmonium material that opens the work and the Alberti bass figuration of that part from bar 14, but due to the arpeggio outline, it is also a memory of the second movement (which also uses the piano) – see Figures 5(a) and 5(b) (bb. 44-47 of VIII; bb. 1-2 of I; bb. 16-18 of II). There are other more general connections across the movements – for example, the percussionists, which appear in Movements III, V and VIII play the same instruments as each other in III and V, but not in VIII. The harmonium and hurdy-gurdy both play suspended pedal notes or triads (Movement I – bb. 1-14; bb. 30 – 36; and Movement IV throughout).

Figure 6 shows a different stylistic reference, this time to North African drumming with two sets of four small drums and a bass drum which are played with the fingers. Whether Dillon is deliberately making a connection between North Africa and its relationship with France through colonialism is unclear. However, the indications to play the drums at the centre and the edge (and with gradual transitions between these two states) can be linked to the double bass writing in Movement VII.

The clarinettist who features in movements IV, V, VI and VIII descends (in opposition to the “flight” of the title? Or perhaps a reference to coming down from the high?) through Eb clarinet, bass clarinet to contrabass clarinet. Through the gradual introduction and omission of members of the ensemble, Dillon sets in motion a particular range of expectations which are then usurped (or occasionally

Notes
1. Toop claims in his recent article “‘New Complexity’ and after: a Personal Note’, that Dillon believed the term had been coined by Nigel Osborne.
5. Dillon goes on to say that for him, this notion related to Boulez and Stockhausen’s position that pop music and repetition were ideologically linked in some way to fascism.
6. I am indebted to Roddy Hawkins for this observation.
7. For example, ‘The Gumbo Variations’ from Hot Rats or moments on the album The Grand Wazoo
8. See particularly Movement 9.
9. ‘une action simple chargée de peu de matière’
11. Pace, Ian, Tradition and invention: A personal response to The Book of Elements and Contemporary Culture (unpublished)
Figure 4 (beginning)
Figure 4 (conclusion)
Figure 5 (beginning)
Figure 5 (conclusion)
L'ÉVOLUTION DU VOL
To the artist of Acrécho-Note

James Dillon

Figure 5a
Figure 5b
Figure 6
Bibliography
PACE, Ian, Tradition and invention: A personal response to The Book of Elements and Contemporary Culture (unpublished)