

Hector MacAndrew
1903 - 1980

With This Website

www.scottishfiddlemusicinstyle.co.uk

I remember with deep affection my teacher in this field:

Scots Fiddle Player Hector MacAndrew

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HEREWITH SOME OF MY MEMORY TREASURES:

N.B. Where Gaelic is quoted in a track title or text – this is taken directly from the source utilised

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01) 2/4 March: The Stratherrick Highlanders

Whilst it is fair to say that Hector MacAndrew and I never really discussed Gaelic airs in any depth, what he did imbue was the style: subtle bowing, double-stops, slides and ornaments, which he would have learned mainly by ear, and which always struck me as vocal derivation. These marches are more ‘left hand fingering’ than right hand, but of course you don’t have ornaments without phrasing (breathing).

"On the east or southeast syde of Loghness next to Abertarff there is a countrey called Straharriggaick. And it is alleadged this countrey is the highest countrey in Scotland, and it is likelie to be true in respect that everie countrey which is next to Straharrigaig is below, and it is as it were upon a mountaine above all other Countreys. Ane verie cold Countrey, and eivill, fresh waters thereintill being reid colloured running through Mosses: this countrey is oftymes verie profitable and fertill of corne and abundance of milk . . . and there is sundry glenns in this countrey which is very profitable for feeding of guidis (lives-tock). And there is a forest on the southeast syde of this countrie and there is a great store of deire in that glen and very manie Roes in all the glens and woods . . ."

So quotes an early 17th century writer.

Captain Simon Fraser would have been very familiar with this country (although this march, or an antecedent thereto, is not found in any of his collections).

My setting derives from the Uilleum (William) Ross Collection and found in the [Ceol Sean Database](#) as a three-part set. To make four parts I repeat the first part.

I quote Ceol Sean on Uilleum:

Wm Ross was a Pipe Major in the Black Watch from 1849 to 1854, and then served as a piper to Queen Victoria from 1854 until he passed away in 1891.

His pipe music collection first appeared in 1869, and the number of tunes presented increased in subsequent editions.

*[Link to Stratherrick War Memorial and Roll of Honour on
Roll of Honour Stratherrick](#)*

02) Air: Callum-a-Glen

The source for this tune is James Hogg's *Jacobite Relics...* Volume 2, 1821, Song 78; 'from the Gaelic' he says 'It is a pity that I have too much in hand in these songs from the Gaelic to speak them as I feel...'. Although James undertook lengthy journeys (a) in 1802 north from Ettrick as far as Dalnacardoch and Tomintoul and then (b) in 1803, more remarkably circuitous, from Edinburgh to the Butt of Lewis and return via Skye - Canna - Mull, in all lasting some four months (see *Walking With James Hogg*, Bruce Gilkison, 2014).

His meagre knowledge of Gaelic frustrated him - the songs in his two printed volumes are all in English which has to accord with the tunes. This particular Jacobite song, full of grief, laments a man's state '*Was e-ver old warrior of suffering so weary?... His chief is slain, family all gone - 'The homes of my kinsmen are blazing to heaven/The bright sun of morning has blush'd at the view...'*

Finally, he draws comfort: dreaming of retribution, one day...

03) Waulking Song: A Thousand Curses May There Be

In essence the waulking process involves a group of (usually) women sitting round a wooden trestle, cloth, traditionally soaked in human urine, rolled in front of them beating in forward and back and then handing it sideways. This serves to shrink the material (the precursor of our 'pre-shrunk' label). Recommended for biceps development: try it with a wet blanket and see how hard it is. The activity would best take place in the open air! An alternative method, sitting using feet, is illustrated (XXXIV) in Thomas Pennant's *A Tour...* 1772.

A mesmerising group rhythm with chorus and solo singer will elevate an irksome domestic chore to a level where the lifted spirits will spur the activity. There is also the psychology - a collective dialogue of current events or personal concerns brought to the surface and worked out - a bonding group therapy. Gossip in song.

This arrangement is sourced from *Hebridean Folk Songs, Volume III*, John Lorne Campbell/Francis Collinson. A working rhythm, but within its frame there are often subtle rhythmic changes between 'verses' which may be recalled or simply improvised. The 'pulse' has to remain constant, however.

John Lorne Campbell, collector, and Francis Collinson who transcribed the music, have left us gold dust in these three volumes.

04) Air: That Heavy Is the Burden of Love

...That Heavy is the Burden of Love (...Gur Trom an Eallach an Gaol)

- from the last line of the chorus.

Listen to her CD [*Sgaith Airgid*](#), (although this arrangement is inspired by, and taken from, the singing of Mary Smith.

The song is not included on this CD.)

I was fortunate, quite by chance, to hear Mary's traditional singing of this, to me, poignant song. Mary sang it with both anguish and the lift of the sea. On a personal level it evokes boyhood hours in the company of longshoremen and sharing their yarns and lives.

The tunes, songs and stories from the Western Isles are legion, from the days of what must then have been a seaway equivalent of the present A9 (though the traffic was not as fast) where everyone knew the 'filling stations', where the songs were, and where almost every rock and gully had a name.

In this context I am minded of the opening of George Mackay Brown's poem: *The Sea...*

The word "sea" is small and easily uttered.

They utter it lightly who know least about it.

A vast ancient terror is locked in the name

Like energy in an atom.

Sailors, explorers, fishermen know this,

Women who stand on headlands, they know it...

05) Reels: Loch Carron; Miss Erskine of Alva; Thro' the World Wou'd I Gang Wi' the Lad that Loves Me; I'll Kiss the Wife She Bad Me

These four reels are drawn together from different sources:

Loch Carron is a composition of piper D. C. Mather (1870-1943). Follow link to [D. C. Mather](#) for a brief profile and a picture of him proudly displaying his many medals! He was piper at one time to the Murrays of Lochcarron, a landscape which, no doubt, served to fire his creative imagination.

Miss Erskine of Alva is by Perthshire fiddler Daniel Dow (1732-1783). It can be found in *Thirty-seven new reells [sic] and strathspeys for the violin...* published c.1775/6. Close scrutiny of his *A collection of ancient Scots music for the violin, harpsichord, or German flute, never before printed, consisting of ports, salutations, marches, or pibrochs [sic]*, published c.1778 (?) reveals this man's wider sphere of interest and the traditional influences which he inherited.

Thro' the World Wou'd I Gang Wi the Lad that Loves Me comes from the *William Christie Collection* (1820). William (1778-1849) was a native of Cuminestown, a village built in the 1740's, east of Turriff. On the title page of the publication, he is styled as 'A Teacher of Dancing'. This tune he characterises as 'Old'. The pentatonic (ABDEG) basis might bear this out. What strikes me from the collection is the diversity of included tunes indicating a more cosmopolitan outlook, commercially driven maybe by his dancing master activities in different venues - from village to ballroom.

I'll Kiss the Wife She Bad Me appears with a number of variants. This is the title which appears in the Angus MacKay (1813-1859) *Pipers Assistant* (1843). The tune, aka *The Bob of Fettercairn; Will you Have a Fiddler (A Bhean an gabh thu Fidhler)* (Gunn, 1848, p.23) circulated widely.

English composer Gustav Holst metamorphosed a Northumbrian pipe version, *Newburn Lads*, into his *Toccata for Piano* (1924). Holst was an underrated, imaginative composer, in many ways ahead of his time. The chord sequences in his *Egdon Heath* (1927), dedicated to Thomas Hardy, will serve as an example.

06) Slow Strathspey & Reel: Miss Campbell of Saddell; Miss Margaret Graham of Gartmore's Favourite

Both of these tunes are the compositions of Robert ('Red Rob') Mackintosh (c1745-1807). They appear in volume three (1796) of the four that he published between 1783 and 1803. Here we move into the houses, castles and ballrooms

– the ‘polite’ circle of ladies and gentlemen whom William Marshall (Fochabers) was to entertain. Numbers of these people were keen to have themselves framed in a tune, probably the only way many are now remembered. Fortunately, the four volumes of Mackintosh’s music have recently been resurrected, complete, in one volume (2002, to which Charles Gore has contributed an informative introduction) by the Highland Music Trust. It will soon become apparent to anyone pouring over this score that Mackintosh was a versatile and gifted musician (within both the category and this period of social history). There are over 250 of his original compositions. He apparently also had time to father thirteen children, so he was indeed a busy man... I hope he had a good memory for names! John Murdoch Henderson (*Flowers of Scottish Melody*) refers to *Miss Campbell...* as a ‘Pastoral’. I prefer the slow Strathspey approach. This class of tune was a ‘listening’ interlude, not meant to dance to, but nevertheless performed in the elegant and uplifting pointed style of the strathspey. RM chooses his keys carefully. Here Bb brings mellowness to the resonance and adding double stops or broken chords enhances this even more. The reel I think of with dance movement.

Thank you, Hector for playing it to me.

07) Air: Charlie Is My Darling

Here we have yet another variant of the song (tune) - this time as it appears in James Hogg's *Jacobite Relics...* Volume 2, 1821, no. 49, styled 'MODERN'. This song was very widely known, in fact so much so in the country, that singers were not keen to have their music transcribed '*...as they imagine that they shall become the sport of the person to whom they condescended to sing.*' (Wilkie).

So, there is nothing new then...

08) Air: Culloden Day

This is an arrangement from the song by John Roy Stewart (1700-1752) given in *Highland Songs of the Forty-Five*, ed. John Lorne Campbell, published by the Scottish Gaelic Text Society. The song (in this edition) runs to 12 verses of eight lines. If sung (in Gaelic) it

is unlikely that the tune would be exactly the same for each of them. The English translation begins:

*‘Great is the cause of my sorrow,
As I mourn for the wounds of my land...’*

The 60ft high Prince Charlie Monument at Glenfinnan (Homepage picture) is very fine, but don’t overlook the consequences resulting from his arrival there in 1745...

9) Air: I Will Return to Kintail

Gaelic singer Joan MacKenzie (1929-2007) gives us a very moving and expressive rendering of this song *Thèid mi Dhachaigh, hòro Dhachaigh* (*The Seaforth Lullaby*) on [CD Scottish Tradition Series, Vol 19.](#)



The Five Sisters of Kintail

Walkhighlands

10) The Sailor’s Song

This lively tune, - with the rhythm of the sea about it, the movement of a boat, the camaraderie of the fo’c’sle, the lifting of spirits (pun intentional) to confront the challenges of the ocean, away from home, - is the one to which Niall MacLeod’s (c1843-1913) Gaelic poem of this title is set. Perhaps somewhere on the ship there is a fiddler, but not on this deck (illustrated by John Michael Groves):



The poem is included (page 36) in the illuminating book *Bàird Ghleann Dail - The Glendale [Skye] Bards* edited by Meg Bateman (John Donald, 2014) which contains 60 poems in all: by Dòmhnall nan Òran - Donald of the Songs (1787-1872) (12); Niall MacLeòid (c.1843-1913), 'The Bard of Skye', first son of Donald (32); Iain Dubh (1847-1901), second son of Donald (12).

The book, which is very comprehensive and accessible, includes English translations, editorial notes, sources (both written and archival) and airs to the songs where this is possible.

11) Hornpipes (Sailors' Style): The West End; The Rights of Man; Fisher's; Staten Island

There are countless tunes of this genre in the public domain, either composed as such or adapted from popular song/ballad airs or fragments thereof moulded into the 16-bar framework.

Given the long voyages/ports visited, fiddlers, singers etc. on a sailing vessel circa c.18 would soon absorb and modify local tunes – and vice-versa.

The fragility of the violin was not a good omen for its survival at sea - intact (I have seen an enterprising metal-bodied one) but certainly it was used in the fo'c'stle or on deck (where an enlightened ship's master realised the team-bonding and exercising advantages of dancing - especially whilst in the doldrums, where tempers could readily fray.

12) A'Bhliadhna gus an Aimsir Seo

This is a rendering of the beautiful air, no. 21 in the *North Highland Airs* section of the *Patrick MacDonald Collection* (1764), left by his gifted brother Joseph (d.1761). William Matheson sings a song the air of which is very similar to this one and which begins '*A year ago, how stately we were in Ormacleit*' on *Scottish Tradition 16* (Greentrax: CDTRAX 9016D). Donnie MacLeod sings the same song on *Orain Nan Gaidheal* (CDTRAX 5008), but the air is different. He notes this as *A Song to Clanranald*, composed in the 17th century: *This time last year, what pomp we had in Ormacleit, the court of the fiery lion who is manly and modest...*

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13) Irish 6/8 Jigs: The Frost is All Over; The One Horned Cow; The Geese in the Bog; The Price of my Pig

As with the hornpipes (11) above) these tunes are in public domain - nevertheless I give some printed sources and a few notes about each one:

Firstly: 'traditional' - aka *The frost is All Gone; The Mist of Clonmel; On a Monday Morning; Praties are Dug; What Would I Do if the Kettle Boiled Over?* - according to who you listen to, and where.

Secondly: from the *O'Neil's Music of Ireland* collection, - a metaphor for beverage manufacturing equipment.

Thirdly: - aka *Humours of Ballinafad; Ken Fahey's Jig; The Old Geese in the Bog; Na Geanna Sa Portach...* etc (Mat Cranitch: *The Irish Fiddle Book*.)

Fourthly: from Mat Cranitch - a very sad story about the poor farmer who has an extremely lucrative day at market selling his pig. Flushed with this success, he decides to head for the nearest bar for a dram or three in celebration. In convivial company this escalates, and inebriated, he finally falls in with a lady of the night...

Sunrise... and as he drifts to, the realisation dawns: no lady... no money... no pig... a thumping headache... and... worse... the day ahead to face the ire of the wife at the door of their cottage, leaning on her broom...

For further tunes in print see *Ceol Rince na hEireann* (Breandan Breathnach.)

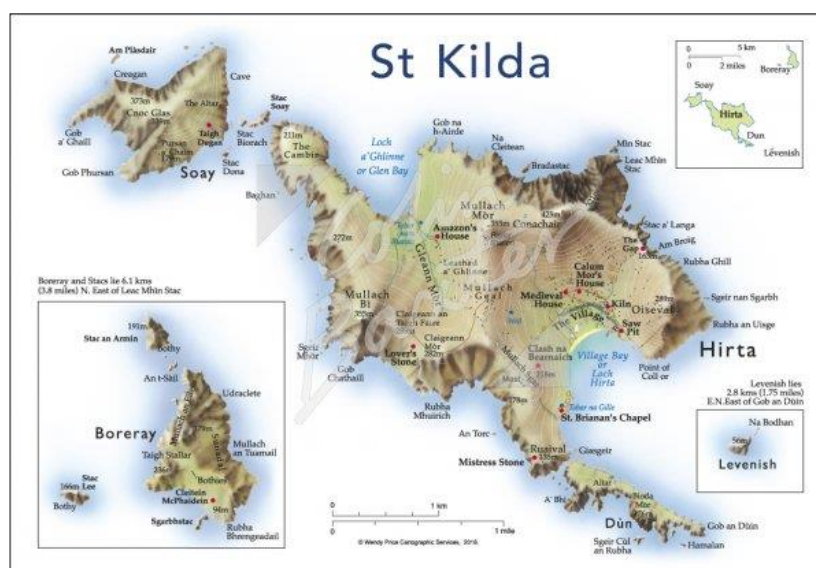
14) St Kilda Lament - It Was Over on Soay (Gur ann Thall ann an Sodhaigh)

I was very fortunate to hear Mary Smith (mentioned above) sing her version of this haunting lament. I play it remembering that.

It is raw grief expressed by a St Kilda woman for the loss of her man who fell from a Soay cliff to the rocks below, whence the sea took him.

Fulmars and Gannets provided essential oil and food for the island population, and it was the men's responsibility to ensure the continuity of supply, implying descent of sheer cliffs often obliged (although not always) to rely on a single rope with only touch and bare toe holds to accomplish this. They became physically adapted masters of the art, but sadly, as in this case, there were fatal accidents.

It is almost beyond comprehension now, how generations of families survived in this way on an isolated, wild, austere, ruthlessly unforgiving (by our standards) group of islands, 40 miles WNW of North Uist - out in the open Atlantic. The dwindling population was evacuated in 1930, the islanders no longer able to sustain their way of life.



These islands have their own 'silence' - pervaded by sea and wind, all the sounds of nature in a primeval theatre. The cliff echoes are polychoral - seeming to come from everywhere.

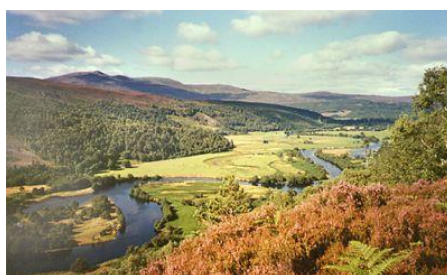
Listen for gannets, fulmars and sea-swell in the backing.

Man,s habitation has come and gone; the birds remain.

15) 6/8 March: John Mackenzie's Farewell to Strathglass

This buoyant march composed by Pipe Major William Ross (1878-1966) in 1898 appears in Book 5 of his Collection, p. 26. Here it gives an insight into his original fingerings, which on his various archive recordings available to us, are articulated with precision - even given the often fast tempi adopted. It is a pleasure (and an inspiration) to be able to hear a master in action! He was about age 20 when this march was composed, already making his way.

The rest, as they say, is history.



Strathglass Landscape (Pinterest)

Of course, it is not possible (nor even desirable) to try to replicate pipe ornamentation on the fiddle, although there are some interpretative characteristics which can be woven into the basic line of melody - using both left hand and bowing techniques. Importantly, keep in mind the nature of the instrument for which this genre of music was originally intended and how the music is written out. There is also scope for improvisation - why repeat phrases or cadences *exactly* the same way twice...? (Yawn).

Think of bagpipe music in the key of A major but with G natural - Mixolydian. It is written without key signature. On the chanter the notes are fixed, so no need for it.

However, in staff notation written 'a' will sound one semitone higher (i.e. b flat) when played on the pipes.

Think A major (with g natural) for the fiddle. I play 'open' a's and e's for brightness and an allusion to glinting reflection.

16) Air: I Am Bereft of Sleep

I am seldom able to play this air without recalling the 19-year-old John Keats' *Sonnet to Sleep*. Of course there is no direct connection, but the theme is universal. This curious state of being, common to all, and now widely researched, can be upset for many reasons. Each generation brings its own images. There would have been plenty of scope during Simon Fraser's lifetime (1773-1852) - the tune (no. 75) is in his *1816 Collection*, and he says was one of his father's songs - to be rendered in a 'slow and plaintive' manner.

17) 6/8 Jig: Donald MacLean

A printed version of this lively jig, which I believe to be by Pipe Major Donald MacLeod (1878-1965) is in the Edcath Collection, Vol II. It is a lively 4-part foot-tapping dance tune not particularly easy for the pipes, - nor for the fiddle for that matter, where you have a bow arm to coordinate with fingering and ornaments.

18) Air: A Song On the Highland Dress

The Songs of John MacCodrum edited by William Matheson, (Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, 1938) is the source for this song.

John MacCodrum (1693-1779) vocalises the thoughts, dreams, nightmares, strife, suffering, satires, laughter, bitterness, tears, expressly and expressively within the metrical rhythms and metaphors of the Gaelic language.

A Song on the Highland Dress (1749) is a vehement condemnation of the proscribing of wearing highland attire after the battle of Culloden in 1746.

'Tis like being in prison - without the tartan...'

19) Strathspey & Reel: The Braes of Mar; Rachel Rae

The strathspey is a traditional fiddle set - which Hector MacAndrew, bless him, gave me in 1971 during one of our 'sessions'. It incorporates the 'driven' up-bow and various other features in bowing style, double stops, syncopated triplets and dynamic variation: thus, the spirit of dance movement is inherent, and the crucial subtlety of tempo change between strathspey and reel adds a lift and a vigour as the step quickens. Hector said this setting of the strathspey was passed on to him from Forbes Morrison (1833-1906), dancing master in Tarves, who was renowned for his short 'snap' bowing (attributed to Niel Gow) and use of the syncopated triplets I mentioned. As well as its several appearances in the c19 fiddle books and manuscripts and with different titles, this tune is

widely known outside Scotland - in Ireland and in Nova Scotia whence it must have been transported by Scots or Irish emigrants. A master's thesis, *The Sound of Gaelic is in the Music*, by Cape Breton fiddler Jackie Dunn (1991) notes *the strathspey is known to have Gaelic words and has the punch line '... 'S Math a Dhannsadh... (it is good to dance)'*. The allusion to the fiddle speaking Gaelic is mentioned elsewhere - referring to Captain Simon Fraser's playing '*...making the fiddle speak Gaelic*'.

The reel *Rachel Rae* (several variations of spelling e.g. *Raecheal Rea's Rant*, - first appearance in print in the Archibald Duff Collection - 1794) is believed to be a composition of John Lowe, Dancing Master, Marykirk, Kincardine. Joseph Lowe, his son, published a famous collection in the 1840's. This simple, unpretentious tune, beginning with a simple D-major arpeggio, has an elegant swing about it and it's not difficult to see why it became so popular.

20) Urlar and Thumb Variation from Piobaireachd *The Boisdale's Salute*

Principal source: General Thomason (Ceol Mor Bk.5 p.7)

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A.k.a. Alastair Mor MacDonald of Boisdale's Salute (Glen Bk.3 p.7)

These are not the only versions available.

After some deliberation I based my arrangement on General Thomason's version. [Link](#) As one might expect from an engineer-soldier-piper, his methodology and presentation are laid out with a formal military precision. Although 3/4 time is indicated in the original manuscript, with a pause on the third pulse, I play out the pause as an extra beat (approximately) - thus 4/4. I play only the Urlar and first (or the so-called Thumb) variation. In the latter the ethereal effect of the pipe chanter high A is represented by a ringing harmonic a" on the violin second string, when A is played in that compass.

Alexander Mackenzie in his History of the Macdonalds and Lords of the Isles, 1881, tells us about the Macdonalds of Boisdale and mentions Alexander Macdonald 'Alastair Mor', first of Boisdale, South Uist, 'which lands he inherited as his portion in 1730'.

I view the title Salute as celebratory, or the long memory of a celebrated event, i.e. rather than a gathering tune or a march or a lament - if, that is, this tune (or a version of it) actually relates to this event.

These two portions are of course only part of the whole piobaireachd. Nevertheless, against the backdrop of the Outer Hebrides and the culture and the history of the Lords of the Isles, one can only be in awe of the power, beauty, and pathos of their music. Piobaireachd, the 'ceòl mor' or big music, is a more ancient very powerful means of expression for the highland pipe, originally taught vocally - 'canntaireachd' (chanting). Here we have the big laments, salutes, marches (the latter stirring clan members to action whilst, for example, swarming down a hillside) - the highland charge - much older than the regimented 'ceòl beag' or little music - dance tunes and the formalised music of the military pipers. A third category, the 'ceòl meadhonach' (middle music) embraces slow airs/song airs etc. Having said that, piobaireachd has its own strict set of rules and variation sequences peculiar to the chanter (fingered blow pipe), each note or group resonating with the drones and producing its own distinctive timbre. The variations become faster with more complex rippling fingering until finally the piece finishes full circle with the slow ground, or urlar, whence it began, - and then a stunning silence descends.
Music best heard in the open air...

Notes © Michael Welch, 12th October, 2024

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