



Hector MacAndrew 1903 – 1980

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I remember with deep affection my  
beloved teacher in this field

Scots Fiddle Player Hector  
MacAndrew

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## *A selection from tracks in my collection*

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

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### **TRACKS BY NUMBER:**

#### **01) 6/8 Marches: Old Adam; The 10th HLI Crossing the Rhine**

These have counted among my favourite 6/8's for many years. I always like to return to that dignified, elevating swing of the kilt when the spirits need a lift, which of course I suppose was the whole point of the tunes in the first place.

The composer of both was P/M Donald Shaw Ramsay (1919-1998). Donald was born near Torphichen to a farming family. His father, a fiddle player himself, was keen on all this music and his infectious unbridled enthusiasm certainly rubbed off on his son - who began lessons on the chanter at the tender age of eight, and never looked back. Whilst he is not remembered as a 'competition' man he was tutored by the inimitable Willie Ross at Edinburgh Castle. At age 20 Donald became the youngest Pipe Major ever appointed in the British Army. His best compositions are original and expressive. This to my mind may be in part due to his exposure to the fiddle (as well as the highland pipes) at a young age, where the particular capacity for expression of the former would influence his imagination on the latter.

I currently have no idea who *Old Adam* was, but *The 10th HLI Crossing the Rhine* on the other hand brings alive the memory of the offensive of 23rd March, 1945, in which the battalion, together with the 51st Highland Division and Commandos, were involved.

## 02) Strathspey & Reel: Malcolm's Wedding; The Heiress

Here I'm looking at tunes 93 and 94 in the Second (manuscript) Collection of Captain Simon Fraser (Edinburgh University library). You will hear that I play both at a more modest speed (befitting my years?). Seriously, I prefer this tempo here as I think it suits highland dignity. I am minded of the strathspey *The Source of Spey*, by Lachlan Macpherson of Strathmashie, which Hector MacAndrew played so hauntingly (E minor) and of which he said his father was so fond. There is no reason why a fiddler shouldn't choose any tempo appropriate to the mood of the moment or for that matter 'play' with the rhythm, ornamentation or bowing. Once you have decided, put away the staff notation and let them go themselves - see where they lead, through the heather...

## 03) 9/8 Jigs: Fa's Sae Merry's the Miller When a' His Pocks Are Fu; I Ha'e a wife of my Own; The World's Gane O'er Me Now

Three lively jigs for the ceilidh, first and third (the latter a pipe jig setting) taken from the *William Christie (1778-1849) Collection (1820)*. Christie was a native of Cuminstown, by Turriff, Aberdeenshire. He's styled in the preface to the collection as *A teacher of Dancing*.

Here we have character, - a mix of older tunes - a definite traditional flavour - with some of his own compositions more in keeping with the 'ballroom' clientele for which he played...

Hector told me that William's day job was 'village postie'. Exit post bag - enter music! Of the second tune I can only say 'origin obscure', *gun urra*. There is a version in *Kerr's Collection*.

**04) Air: Eilidh Chuain:** This wonderful song air is arranged from Morag MacLeod's transcription in *Tocher 35*. The title refers to a sailing vessel (possibly a yacht) and in the accompanying text it is suggested she was the 'Eilidh or 'Helen' from Cuan in the island of Luing'. The arrangement begins and ends with the chorus, which is quite metrical. The rhythm in the verses, however, is freer and there are seven of them, depicting, with vigour, a voyage - in praise of the vessel and its behaviour, describing its crew etc. The feeling of movement and of the lift of the sea is tangible and exhilarating.

## 05) 6/8 Jigs: The Boatman; Bobbing Joe

Two quite simple, short modal (mixolydian/aeolian) tunes from Volume 1 of the *English Dancing Master* published in 1651 by John Playford (b. Norwich 1623; d. London c.1686) This was the first

of several such volumes of his but the only one with *English* in the title. A note on the title page reads:

*Plaine and Easie Rules for the Dancing of Dances, with the Tune to Each Dance.*



John Playford

I am not sure I would feel happy wearing this head gear on the dance floor...

Playford served as an apprentice publisher for some seven years from about 1640 later opening his own 'shop' at London's Temple Church. His music publishing business flourished and eventually become widely popular.

His first *English Dancing Master* was published in 1651, during the Puritan dominated Commonwealth (two years after the demise of King Charles 1). He was captured by Cromwell's men at some point, whilst assuming the mantle of 'war correspondent', but subsequently released on the understanding that he focus on his musical activities in future... Was dropping 'English' a political expediency?

However it is likely that the tunes he used for the dances published in his books were already extant and also that some titles might rather refer to the dances to which tunes were set.

He is a fascinating character and much is known about him, his family and his wide ranging and successful career.

## 06) Air: The Mariners

The sea has infinity of moods, or at least those mankind chooses to impose upon it. The sound it makes can be a low frequency rumble, raw power that no rock can withstand permanently; at the other end of the scale is the high frequency hiss of undertow over shingle or wavelets over sand, or the random eddy of the rock pool. Next visit to the shore - pay attention to this timeless rhythm. Every wave is different.

This air (Aeolian) is arranged from Captain Simon Fraser's unpublished manuscript in the Edinburgh University Library (Catalogue No. GEN614). There are no notes from which 'the substance may be gathered' - but there may be published or traditional Gaelic words in existence. A thought for those who go down to the sea in ships, and for those left ashore.

## 07) Air: Joy Gae Wi' My Love

This is sourced in the David Glen Collection bk. 9, no. 17, and referenced as *An Old Highland Air*. David Glen, the Son of Alexander Glen (see note 1) above), published pipe music from 1876 to 1911. The tune is hexatonic, playable on the chanter, (ceòl meadhonach) but here arranged for the fiddle based on that setting, which is clearly an adaptation of an earlier song. Niel Gow (1727-1807) refers to the air in one of his collections with the same appellation as Glen.

## 08) 2/4 March: Bonny Anne

It was Hector MacAndrew who first introduced me to this lyrical march in September, 1971, playing it on the fiddle in his inimitable 'pipe' style, his wife Elsie accompanying with a 'double tonic' [Collinson, 1966] piano part. 'Daniel Ross' is credited with its composition, although thus far I am unable to find any biographical details about him.

However, this isn't the end of the story. The four-part tune we have here is derivative - i.e. it seems to have begun its life's journey as a ballad (probably c18): *Where Would bonnie Annie Lie?* [G minor/Aeolian] or *Where does my Bonny Annie Lye?* or *Where'll our Gudeman Lie?*

James Beaton (National Piping Centre, Glasgow) pointed out to me: 'In the pipe tradition, as with so many of these little tunes, it develops over the course of the 19th century, under the influence of competition, to become a much larger and more melodically and technically complex tune'. Its progression can be traced through a number of pipe music collections, the development of ornamentation likewise.

Just what inspired Daniel Ross to arrange and embellish this song air remains speculative. Who was his 'Anne'. Wife, girlfriend, daughter, granddaughter, none of the above...? However, we do now have a fine four-part march.

I am grateful to James for his comments and advice.

### 09) Air: The Island of the Mist

This song, by Mary Macpherson, Mairi ni'n Iain Bhain, aka Mairi Mhor nan Oran (Big Mary of the Songs), of Skye, is one I find very moving, reflected in the 'darkness' of the violin open G string. There is a text version in *Caran an t-Saoghail - The Whiles of the World, An Anthology of 19th Century Scottish Gaelic Verse* ed. Donald Meek, which runs to seventeen verses. Oral versions exist on the *Bliadhna nan Oran* and *Tobar an Dualchais* websites.

Mary projects the pain and suffering she experienced first-hand in her own lifetime on to the inhumane, and all too often, unjust treatment and harassment of her contemporaries, those who were obliged to work out their lives on the island of her birth or to leave it or to take 'the King's Shilling'...

Mary, born Mary MacDonald into a crofting community in Skeabost in 1821, was the second youngest of a large family. She married Isaac MacPherson in Inverness c.1848. He died in 1871 and Mary was left a single parent. Subsequent to 1872, after a short spell in prison for theft (apparently a quite unjust conviction for stealing clothes from her employer) she embarked on her cathartic path into poetry. If the quality might give cause for debate (Alexander Nicolson, *History of Skye*, for example, says of this song '...the whole production too often resolves itself into a glorified tourists' guide...') the allusions and emotions emanate powerfully enough - from one who simply could not contain them any longer. The poems and music allow us a glimpse of what it felt like to be in her world - and that is what interests me. After Inverness, Mary moved to Glasgow and undertook nursing training. She returned to her beloved Skye in the early 1880's becoming 'Bard of the Land League'. The book *Gaelic Songs and Poems*, transcriptions taken from her own voice, was published in 1891. She died in Portree in 1898 and is buried in the Chapel Yard Cemetery, Inverness. In 2002, Highland Council established a Gaelic Song Fellowship in her memory.

### 10) Str & Reel: When I Was in the Land of the Mountains;

#### Blend Your Bonnets With the Yew

Both these tunes, numbered 7 & 8, also appear in Fraser's unpublished *Second Collection*. The 'snappy' strathspey has a wild air of defiance about it, whilst the reel title most likely refers to the plant badge of Clan Fraser (Dwelly gives *iubhar*, Yew-tree, 'Badge of the Frasers') and the ancient tradition of using Yew as a talisman. A Yew tree known locally in Stratherrick as the 'Great Fraser Yew' may date back to c.14 and, it is said, once served as a gathering or rallying point for Stratherrick Fraser clansmen in times of strife.



To learn more follow the link [The Fraser Yew](#).

Bearing in mind the tradition which must have permeated Simon's thinking given the turbulent c.18 history and then the pedigree of his grandfathers Alexander (Culduthel) and Thomas (Errogie), in turn handed down through his father, a thread which ran throughout the period, the [Clan Fraser History](#) may give more pointers to understanding Captain Simon's somewhat enigmatic mindset.



The Fraser Yew (Photographed by Iain Cameron)

### 11) Air: The Cheerful Old Man (An Saoidh)

Arrangement based on the air (no.32) in Simon Fraser's second unpublished collection, the manuscript for which is in the Edinburgh University music library. Unlike his 1816 collection, Fraser's notes for all the tunes are lost, the music manuscript itself having been carefully prepared by his son Angus (1802-1870).

Both Dwelly and Armstrong agree in their respective Gaelic/English dictionaries *Saoidh* translates to 'good, worthy, brave, tutor, preceptor...

Simon Fraser must have had someone (or a song) in mind when he included this air. It is certainly noble and reflective, worthy of someone who has witnessed much in the way of the folly of man throughout a long life, who leans on his staff - and watches. Certainly, a man I would want include on my Christmas card list.

### 12) Reel: The Sound of Sleat

Seafarers have sailed here for centuries, the Sound opening westward to the islands - Eigg, Rum, Canna, and beyond - to the open Atlantic. They have seen the sea in its stillness and its wrath, and faced it accordingly, with oar and sail and engine, with honed navigational skills - scent of land, sun, stars and now satnav...

This is a fiddle arrangement of an elemental (pentatonic/hexatonic) pipe reel in three parts, composed by D Mackinnon, a printed pipe setting of which will be found in *Pipe Major Donald Macleod's Collection*, book 2, page 26.

The sea begins and a distant horn emerges - metamorphosing second time to a ship's whistle and the drone of engines. A run on the 'birlinn' of MacBrayne (*MV Loch Nevis*) on a rough day coupled with a visit to UHI, Sabhal Mor Ostaig, Skye, brought this tune to mind.

Working in the (extensive!) archive library, with its outlook over the Sound and towards North Morar and Knoydart, required disciplined focus on the task in hand.... This is a special environment in which to absorb Gaelic culture: language, songs, piping, poetry, legends, history... not in a city or a town but over a floor of silence in an enduring landscape, witness of ages. I use a horn (French horn) sound for various effects: sea, battle, cattle, deer...

Below is an extract from Robert Glen's *Notes on the Ancient Music of Scotland* (1880):

**The horn was used by the Scots to transmit signals of war, and sometimes to delude the foe. Barbour mentions that—" When the Scottis folk were about to decamp, they blew their horns and made fires bright and braid, to make their 'auld enemies' believe they**

were to maintain their position." Froissart complains of the uproar that occurred in the Scottish camp from the blowing of horns on the night before the battle of Otterburn in 1388. Probably many of the horns used then and long afterwards were those of cattle. Angels blowing cows' horns are to be seen on tombstones erected during the 17th century in Pencaitland churchyard, East Lothian, which seems to show that instruments of that primitive sort were more familiar to the people then than metallic trumpets. Only one ancient bronze trumpet has been found in Scotland, namely, the Caprington Horn, which was discovered in 1640, although large numbers have been found in the peat bogs of Ireland. The only musical instrument referred to by Barbour is the horn, and from his description we see that distinguishing calls could be blown upon it. James of Douglas and Sir Robert Boyd recognised the Bruce from his blast on the horn. Cochrane, the favourite of James III., had a hunting horn mounted with gold, and having a precious stone set in the middle, hanging round his neck by a chain of gold, when he was seized at Lauder. In 1503 James IV. had six trumpeters in his service, all clothed in red and yellow. In the 17th century the city of Edinburgh had one or more trumpeters.

### 13) Air: Gleniffer Braes (Song by Robert Tannahill)

An appreciation of the man:

It was on reading the two articles by Konrad Hopkins published in the Paisley Daily Express (12<sup>th</sup>/ 13th November, 1981) and then the PhD thesis *A Weaver in Wartime* by Dr Jim Ferguson that re-awakened an interest in Robert Tannahill – regrettably after many years in limbo.

Robert was born to a weaving family in a cottage at 32, Castle Street (demolished circa 1910), Paisley on June 3rd, 1774. He was not a healthy child, suffering a deformed right leg, a condition which plagued him all his life but which, nevertheless, did not discourage him from walking over his beloved Gleniffer Braes. Neither did it stop him, apprenticed to his father, learning the complexities of the loom. When Robert was about two years old the family moved to a larger one storey cottage in Queen Street (part living space/ part weaving area) built by his father. Apart from a two-year sojourn to find work in the Bolton area, it was here he lived all his days, seeing after his mother after his father passed away (c.1802) until he himself died on 16th May, 1810, apparently taking his own life. As the years drew by, he endured increasingly tormenting bouts of depression. His physical condition precluded his joining the army as many of his compatriots did during the Napoleonic wars, when austerity and the threat of invasion hung over the nation. His romances/social life certainly never climbed to heady heights achieved by Robert Burns, - in fact he was uncomfortable in the company of others he perceived to be above his (so called) 'social circle'. In despair he would sometimes crave release from the bawdy, aggressive tavern circle, (where it has to be said he did hear some of the music that inspired him) and from the confines of what felt like the 'prison' of his town environment. A psychological profile is not the whole story however. Whether consciously or not, he used his perceived inadequacy in a positive, creative way. It drew him to an extraordinarily powerful insight into the human qualities of those round him, their joy, hardship, suffering, weddings, funerals, celebrations... To be able to write the poetry and songs he left to us means he empathised from within. This will have brought him tears at times. His was not to disparage the establishment, he was apolitical, engaging with his subject with a penetrating eye (and ear).

Whilst not perhaps as musically adroit as Burns, he was certainly influenced by the local music scene whether amongst his circle of friends or in the local taverns, where the repertoire

would have embraced ballads and Irish and Scots songs and dance tunes. Although biographer David Semple is cautious about this, Tannahill would have been spellbound by the lively and modal Irish air and dance genre - such as Track 4, above. See *Robert Tannahill and Irish Song* - Dr Jim Ferguson. All these folk songs and dances further sparked the tinder of creativity, and, along with the rhythm of his loom, provided an emotional platform for his words and songs. He kept a flute, paper, pen and ink next to him - tunes and ideas could be jotted down quickly whilst still fresh in his mind and either worked on, embellished (or discarded) later.

David Semple's (Victorian era) biography *The Songs and Poems of Robert Tannahill...* (1874 version) is available on-line (big file - suggest 'save as') and has also been republished (2004) by the Grimsay Press, Glasgow (1876 version). All this printed material lays out an extensive biography of the man, including his education, reading and letters.

Sourcing the airs (indicated by Semple) for the songs is more challenging - sifting out variants of ballads/songs extant in Tannahill's lifetime, critical examination of the appropriateness of those composed or arranged by his friends, professional or otherwise.

**Robert died in 1810, five years before Waterloo. During his later years he would have witnessed first-hand the turmoil, anguish and distress caused by the Napoleonic Wars. But he was not a war poet in front line terms (like, for example Joseph Lee (Dundee) or the WW1 poets such as Wilfred Owen). Those relevant poems/songs he did compose in times of hostilities dealt '...with the effects of the war on the wives, widows and sweethearts of the soldiers who were fighting and dying abroad'.**

**This song (far from being a sentimental pastoral) I think is his best of that genre. It is about a young woman in deep distress pining for her soldier who has gone, - obliged to go to war. In Tannahill's poem she uses the metaphor of a bitter winter scene on the Braes to reflect her own inner emotions - the mood swings and tonal shifts.** Undeterred by his lameness Tannahill nevertheless walked often over the Braes. He loved nature and had deep compassion for animals as well as people '...and in his sympathy, he was able to feel what they felt, and from their points of view, and translate their feelings into singing lines and stanzas' (quotes from Konrad Hopkins).

#### **14) Hornpipes: Jacks Delight; The Quarter Deck; Lime Street; Staten Island**

These tunes (here played 'sailors' style), probably nineteenth century, were popular and common enough in the music halls and theatre back then. Many are derived from song airs and were to be found originally, widely scattered along the highway of the sea, with different titles, particularly among the ale houses of ports and harbours. Thomas Potter Cooke (1786-1864) was a stage actor and dancer who collected and performed to these tunes.

There are pictures of him in the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, and the National Portrait Gallery.

For me, 'Jack' comes to life in the novels of (among others) Patrick O'Brian, which depict the exploits of Captain Jack Aubrey, R.N. Fiction of course, - but no holds barred yarns depicting life in the British Navy during Napoleonic times.





*Thomas Potter Cook*

By Nathaniel Whittock - National Portrait Gallery: NPG D34097

### 15) Air: Love of Land and Home Ground (Gaol Fearainn, Gràdh Fuinn)

Taken from the book *Brìgh an Òrain - A Story in Every Song*, the songs and tales of Lauchie MacLellan, translated and edited by John Shaw. This is one of the lively Sailing Songs - *Òrain Sèolaidh* (p.169). The singer relates the engaging story of his sailing a 'tricky course' when the revenue cutter is sighted. They have an illicit cargo of tobacco, wine and tea aboard. The cutter fires on them but misses and then only catches up with them when their jib falls down. Owing to certain suitably pre-prepared subterfuges by the crew, - the revenue men depart empty handed... It's a great yarn. The tune is pentatonic (DFGAC) and rhythmically a mixture of 2/4 and triplets, suggesting the somewhat random movement of wind and swell and the helmsman playing it.

### 16) 2/4 March: Glen Caladh Castle

A tuneful, buoyant composition from Pipe Major John McLellan, DCM, Dunoon. Glen Caladh Castle (aka Glen Caladh House, or during WW II - 'HMS James Cook') stood on the west side of the approach to Loch Riddon, just NW of the Isle of Bute. Use was made of the adjacent harbour area to train landing craft crews during WW II. The house, once a very imposing building (one former owner being George Stevenson, nephew of the railway engineer) was demolished in 1960 having become unsafe.



Source: Bing Images

### 17) Reel (Slow/Fast): Na Tulaichean\* - The Reel of Tulloch

A wild earthy tune - its popularity reflected by the number of variants, added variations and so on.

Also the stories. I homed in on one in *The Killin Collection* (1884) page 47. The version I play here is a traditional one, given to me by Hector MacAndrew in 1971. It is basically 32 bars of strathspey reel followed by faster tempo reel time, i.e. four pulse to two pulse. The arrangement is a sequence of consecutive fifths or fourths over an A/E drone bass - the same sequence in each line (four bars).

Scottish composer/conductor Ian Whyte (1901-1961) incorporated this tune in his ballet music for *Donald of the Burthens*, first performed in 1951 (Sadler's Wells Ballet). There is an electrifying moment when the piper enters playing it. Ian made some imaginative and lively song arrangements, among other things... must be languishing in an archive somewhere?

Below is the story from *The Killin Collection*:

## NA TULAICHEAN.

(REEL OF TULLOCH.)

The following incident occurred in the latter part of the sixteenth, or the early part of the seventeenth century. A John MacGrigor—usually known as “Iain Dubh Gearr”—of the Ruaru branch of that clan, was at Killin attending St. Fillan's market, (“Féill Fhaolain,”) which is held there in January. He was set upon at Streethouse by eight men; but being very powerful, and a splendid swordsman, he either killed or seriously wounded the whole of them. Upon this he fled to Strathspey, where he married a young lady named Isabel Anderson. Twelve men and a superior in command were sent after, to take him either dead or alive. He was slumbering in a barn when intelligence was privately brought him that they had arrived, and were near at hand. His first impulse was to fly; but being strongly persuaded by Isabel, he resolved on fighting it out. They had a gun and a pistol, with plenty of ammunition; and as John fired at his pursuers through crevices in the wall, Isabel, who stood behind him, loaded. The result was that in a very short time the whole thirteen were severely wounded, whereupon John sallied forth and cut off their heads. Isabel then gave him a draught of beer, which he quaffed; and seizing her round the waist, they improvised and danced those reel-steps which have ever since been so popular. The words were also improvised, and sung as a “mouth-tune;” but the music must have been old.

John, it is said, afterwards became a peaceable and prosperous man; and it has been satisfactorily shewn that the celebrated Doctors Gregory, who did so much to establish the fame of the Edinburgh Medical School, were descendants of his. Before settling down, however, there is reason to believe that he “raised” some successful “creachs” in Breadalbane. There can be no doubt about his period, as his name appears in the record of Privy Seal, of date 15th May, 1688.

## 18) Air: The Deserted Hall

Taken from Captain Fraser's second (unpublished) collection manuscript (Edinburgh University Library, as above). Regrettably, unlike the 1816 printed collection, no text notes exist with this mss. The C minor key lends a rather dark foreboding sense - entering a once prosperous now silent building, devoid of people.

## 19) 6/8 Jigs: The Black Haired Girl of Knockie; The Goat Pen

The first of these lively jigs (flighty, tinkling laughter?) appears in the *Uilleam* (William) Ross *Collection*, and the second in Angus MacKay's *Piper's Assistant*, 1843.

Ross (1823-1891), the grandnephew of the famous Piper John Ban MacKenzie, was one-time piper to Queen Victoria. The *Ross Collection*, first published in 1869, proved very successful and subsequently ran into several editions, - outliving its author!

Refer to William Donaldson *The Highland Pipe and Scottish Society 1750-1950*, p. 169.

Angus MacKay (1813-1859) produced the *Piper's Assistant* collection of ‘light’ music in 1843. This undoubtedly became a useful addition to the pipe box at that time and served to expand the repertoire in this field – for those who could read it. Much is written about MacKay – his life, tragic death, and his important 1838 collection of piobaireachd...

Ross, an astute businessman, carried forward the ‘ceol beag’ momentum 26 years after MacKay with his *Collection* editions above.

## 20) 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*, and Benjamin Britten's setting in his *Serenade for Tenor Horn and Strings*.

The theme is timeless and 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.

My arrangement fades to silence... the 'hushed Casket' is sealed...

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Notes © Michael Welch, 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2026

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