

FROM HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS TO METADATA: A CASE STUDY IN SCOTTISH MUSICAL INHERITANCE

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The Tunes

The popular conception of a Scottish fiddle tune is something almost timeless, ‘traditional’, and changing very little over the years. Certainly, favourite tunes recur in many collections¹, with only small differences in melody or ornamentation. Thus, many twentieth-century Scottish country dancing books contain tunes that have been around for centuries. Not surprisingly, the focus has generally been on the tunes themselves, with the accompaniments often taken for granted, or sometimes ignored altogether in modern reprints.

The impetus for the Bass Culture research project, however, was the realisation that, in addition to any changes in the tunes over the years, the nature of the accompaniments – and indeed, the harmonic structures – also changed noticeably. Elegant baroque harmonies in some of the very early collections gave way to elementary, rhythmic marking of the beat and a sparser harmonic palette – a raw, functional line for cello or bass to accompany the fiddle for dancing. Later on, mass adoption of the piano was reflected in a more pianistic, decorative accompaniment. Figures 1 and 2 demonstrates the changes made to ‘The Marchioness of Huntly’s Strathspey’, in the 1822 and 1845 editions of William Marshall’s *Scottish Airs, Melodies, Strathspeys, Reels, &c.*



Figure 1: ‘The Marchioness of Huntly’s Strathspey’, in William Marshall’s 1822 *Scottish Airs, Melodies, Strathspeys, Reels, &c*

¹ In FRBR, collections are ‘manifestations’; in MEI, they are ‘sources’.



Figure 2: 'The Marchioness of Huntly's Strathspey', in William Marshall's 1845 *Scottish Airs, Melodies, Strathspeys, Reels, &c*

What's more, the frequent occurrence of the word 'new' in collection titles often belies the idea of 'age-old tradition' that we have taken for granted, and it becomes clear that the strathspey-dancing public certainly had a hunger for the very latest repertoire, alongside the regularly repeated old favourites.

The Project

The Bass Culture project, funded by the United Kingdom's Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), has as its primary aim an investigation into these changes in the bass-lines and accompaniments in general, and as a parallel strand, an investigation into harmonic structures in a number of early bagpipe sources. The name of the project, 'Bass Culture', is a tongue-in-cheek allusion to the greater importance of 'bass culture' in music of other traditions, such as in Caribbean music.

The funding is over three years, from October 2012 to September 2015. The Principal Investigator is Dr David McGuinness, a senior music lecturer at the University of Glasgow. A keyboard player, he plays early and other Scottish repertoire with his ensemble, Concerto Caledonia, which has released a number of recordings.² Doctoral student, piper and clarsach player Barnaby Brown is researching the bagpipe sources under the supervision of Susan Rankin at the University of Cambridge. Meanwhile, I am seconded for two days a week from my regular job as Music and Academic Services Librarian at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Along with my research background in historic Scottish song collections, I also bring bibliographical skills, so I stand with a foot in both camps – musicology and librarianship – and both facets are employed in equal measure. The project also required the services

² Concerto Caledonia: <http://concal.org/>. All weblinks cited here were accessed July 30, 2014.

of a systems developer; the initial stages of the project were served by Neil McDermott, Glasgow's Resource Development officer in the Music Department, and Zoltan Komives began working with us in the second year of the project. Zoltan comes with extensive background in computing, knowledge of MEI (Music Encoding Initiative), and also graduated in viola from the Conservatoire of Scotland. He is designing the functionality of our website, which will be the major output of the project. The present paper will focus on the fiddle tune collections, since my work is in this area.

The Problem

There is little point in an extensive research project into Scottish dance tunes – the most sociable and democratic of genres – unless the findings, and the collections themselves, are made widely available. If the collections themselves are not digitised, then they should at least be easily identified and located. This prerequisite alone determined the starting point of our research.

There are already some invaluable indices to help identify tunes and tune-book locations, and *The Scottish Music Index*³ - an online version of Charles Gore's earlier *Scottish Fiddle Music Index*⁴ - was our first port of call when identifying the collections that we needed to examine. Gore lists key library locations, but there are no RISM published item codes. The musical theme coding in these resources is based on the opening two (or four) bars of each tune. (The system was based on Breandan Breathnach's Irish collection, *Ceol Rince na hÉireann*.)⁵

Whilst *The Scottish Music Index* endeavours to cover the entire printed repertoire (excluding single-sheet music), Dundee Central Library's Wighton Collection has an invaluable database indexing one Victorian music-lover's herculean efforts to collect the entire printed Scottish music repertoire. Andrew Wighton bequeathed his collection to the City of Dundee in the mid-nineteenth century.⁶ In the twentieth century, it was bound, catalogued and microfilmed. In the early years of the present century, a new facility was built with the dual purpose of housing the collection and for use as a small venue for concerts and local history talks, and at this stage the collection was thoroughly indexed online. The index includes RISM codes, and although the online database is no longer available through the Library service, the Friends of Wighton have recently rectified this to some extent with an online search

³ Charles Gore, *The Scottish Music Index - Scottish fiddle tunes of the 18th and 19th centuries*: <http://www.scottishmusicindex.org/>

⁴ Charles Gore, *The Scottish fiddle music index : tune titles from the 18th & 19th century printed instrumental music collections, list of indexed and related collections and where to find them, index to numerical musical theme codes*. Musselburgh: Amasing Publishing House, 1994.

⁵ Breandan Breathnach, & J. Small, *Ceol rince na hÉireann*. Baile Átha Cliath: An Gúm, 1963.

⁶ Central Library, The Wellgate, Dundee, DD1 1DB

facility, and the ambition to do further work on it in future.⁷ An Excel spreadsheet of the Wighton catalogue also survives; and Google retrieves details of some tune-books.

Widening the scope somewhat, two further useful online resources are *EASMES – Early American Secular Music and its European Sources, 1589-1839*, made available by the Colonial Music Institute, which is by no means restricted to Scottish fiddle tune repertoire, but is a great index of tunes and tune-books; and Nigel Gatherer's traditional music website.⁸ Additionally, the Ceolas Celtic Music Archive's *Fiddler's Companion* is another tune archive worth visiting.⁹

There are also, of course, various sources of digitised scores, with the National Library of Scotland's digital Gallery a great place to start.¹⁰ A few more are available via the Petrucci Music Library, the Internet Archive, and the subscription service, Eighteenth Century Collections Online, and others occur in odd places.¹¹

These factors combine to produce a somewhat patchy digital representation of the repertoire, with no single resource meeting all the needs of either performers or researchers. It has never been our intention to create such an all-embracing resource, which would be beyond the resources of a 3-year research project to which three of us devote only two days a week. Nonetheless, it is hoped that our model might be capable of being extended to afford greater coverage in future.

Locations

The first imperative when we embarked upon the Bass Culture project was to revise the library locations listed in Gore's database. This enabled us to include locations that had come to light since Gore began his project in the pre-digital era. Notwithstanding the invaluable COPAC union catalogue for UK academic and national libraries, and a few other online resources including the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library at the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS), there will without doubt be many more copies extant in public library collections.¹² Meanwhile, although exploration of WorldCat

⁷ Friends of Wighton, Wighton Database Search: <http://www.johnbagnall.info/allwighton.html>

⁸ Colonial Music Institute & R. M. Keller, *Early American Secular Music and its European Sources, 1589-1839: an Index*. 2002. : <http://www.colonialdancing.org/Easmes/index.html>; and Nigel Gatherer's Traditional Music: <http://www.nigelgatherer.com/>

⁹ Ceolas Celtic Music Archive – *Fiddler's Companion*: <http://www.ceolas.org/tunes/fc/>

¹⁰ National Library of Scotland, Special collections of printed music - Digital Archive - National Library of Scotland: <http://digital.nls.uk/special-collections-of-printed-music/pageturner.cfm?id=97135480>

¹¹ *IMSLP & Petrucci Music Library*: Free Public Domain Sheet Music: http://imslp.org/wiki/Main_Page, and *Internet Archive: Digital Library of Free Books, Movies, Music & Wayback Machine*: <https://archive.org/>; *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* is a Gale Cengage Learning product available at <http://gale.cengage.co.uk/product-highlights/history/eighteenth-century-collections-online.aspx>

¹² Copac National, Academic and Specialist Library Catalogue: <http://copac.ac.uk/>; Vaughan Williams Memorial Library catalogue: <http://catalogue.efds.org/>

would undeniably be fruitful, the task of worldwide searching and logging of locations is too great for the present project. From our point of view, tracing copies was the means to an end, rather than an end in itself.

I identified RISM codes for Gore's initial 200+ tune collections, and we were able to add to our list not only more editions, but also a few more collections, and a few single folios that came to light along the way. Brief biographical information about the composer, compiler or publisher was collated wherever possible, but no attempt was made to undertake new research in this regard. A few particularly interesting collections did, however, prompt further investigation into their context and background.

Existing digitised copies were identified, and then we physically examined each collection for which no digital representation could be found, noting salient features. The end result was a staggeringly large spreadsheet literally stuffed with interesting data.

Outputs

Plainly, there are far too many tune-books, and insufficient AHRC funds, to digitise each one, but we do want to make all our data available on our website, which will be at hms.scot (Historical Music of Scotland). That means there will be full bibliographical information about each collection, and links to any existing digital material. Twenty-two tune-books are being digitised, mainly from the University of Glasgow and the A K Bell Library in Perth; it is intended that the database will be capable of retrieving items by dedicatee or other personal name, and by named places, wherever possible. We also aim to provide both incipits and cadential bars for the tunes in these digitised collections, although it remains to be seen how many tune-books can be captured in their entirety in such depth. Lastly, we are hoping to make visual comparisons between first and second editions of certain key collections – such as the William Marshall illustrations shown earlier - where the passage of time influenced the nature of the accompaniment, making them more pianistic, and sometimes also changing the harmonies. Further pages about other interesting aspects of historic Scottish music could possibly be added at a later date.

One of my contributions to the study of popular Scottish song- and tune-books of this period has been the close examination of the paratexts – all the introductory material and any indexes or extra material at the end of the collections. Some of the fiddle books that we have examined have offered interesting source-matter in this regard, telling us about the circumstances under which certain books were compiled; and also in a couple of instances enabling us to speculate about the use of Scottish dance-tunes in fashionable London and spa-town society. From this, it is clear that Scottish dances were by no means restricted to 'north of the Border', and were on occasions

custom-composed in a Scottish style. Since so many collections do include intriguing nuggets of information, it is hoped that the database will also include pertinent commentary where appropriate.

The final year of the project is clearly going to be busy! Zoltan has a herculean task ahead of him with the MEI encoding of the data already gathered, and I am transcribing excerpts into Sibelius software. Besides inputting the data, and transcribing incipits and end-of-section cadences from our digitised tune-books, we also need to determine how the project might be carried forward. Without doubt, much more could be done if more resources were available – and that means time, as much as funding.

Project social media

As with any research project, the team-members have given papers, tweeted (@BassyCulture) and blogged about our activities,¹³ and worked with undergraduates at the three institutions we represent. Please do follow our progress, and more importantly, do feel free to contact the Bass Culture team! At the present moment, while we are still designing the database, we are keen to know how our prospective audience of performers and scholars will make use of the resource; what they would hope to find; and we in turn hope that it will become a valued repository and first port of call for musicians involved in any way in this uniquely Scottish repertoire. Already, our networking has led us to establish new links with other researchers in the field, both in academia and beyond it – our most unexpected networking being the discovery of an 83-year old accordion-playing entomologist called Mick Bacchus who is something of an expert on the Gow family's fiddle music output, and has worked on updating the A K Bell Library's Ruggles-Brise Scottish music catalogue in Perth, Scotland.

Equally importantly, of course, has been the enthusiastic cooperation of Scottish libraries holding significant collections of early printed Scottish dance music, enabling us to forge links and help spread the word about the riches of their collections. For example, Glasgow's renowned Mitchell Library holds a wonderful resource in the Kidson Collection of Scottish music, whose contents are to date still listed in a dedicated card catalogue. There may well be other little-known public library collections elsewhere in the United Kingdom or beyond, with similar hidden treasures – we would love to know about them, even if we cannot do more than note their existence in the present project.

Since this article is about a work in progress, it has been more about aims, methodologies and projected outcomes, than a discussion of findings or results. We believe that it demonstrates an effective coming together of

¹³ University of Glasgow, Bass Culture in Scottish musical traditions. A blog for the AHRC funded project: <http://bassculture.info>

musicology and music librarianship, and look forward to the launching of the hms.scot website in due course.

Questions and comments would be welcomed, and contact details are given herewith:-

- Dr Karen McAuley - K.McAuley@rcs.ac.uk, tweeting @karenmca
- The project tweets @bassyculture
- The project blog: BassCulture.info/

All weblinks were accurate at the time of submission, 30 July 2014.

Abstract

The contemporary librarian is more than ever before a conduit for making historical material available to scholars and performers alike. The challenge in today's world is not only to augment early manuscripts and publications with appropriate electronic versions, but to provide added value by enriching them with contextual and interpretative information.

The 3-year project 'Bass Culture in Scottish Musical Traditions' seeks to address these issues in Scottish bagpipe and fiddle music. It will provide a substantial web resource of sources and their interpretation, engaging with musicians working in a number of traditions to develop historically-informed practices. The aim is to enable musicians to have an understanding of the structures underpinning Scottish fiddle and pipe music, enriching the traditions with a deeper, more widespread appreciation of the diversity of their roots. The metadata requirements of the two repertoires have similarities and divergences; flexibility is needed to apply suitable metadata across both, and compatibility with existing approaches is also a prerequisite.

The web resource will be under construction by October 2014, and this paper was read at the IAML 2014 conference in Antwerp, providing an opportunity to share an innovative collaboration between musicology, librarianship and web development.

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