

*The Caledonian Muse* (1790) London: Samuel, Ann & Peter Thompson.

*The Caledonian Muse* and *Hibernian Muse* were advertised as recently having been published in 1790, in *World* (London), Saturday 23 October, issue 1188:



THE CALEDONIAN MUSE  
A Collection of scarce and favourite  
SCOTS TUNES  
both Highland and Lowland, viz.  
Songs, Luinigs, Laments, REELS, Strathspeys, Measures, Jiggs &c.  
properly adapted for the  
VIOLIN, GERMAN-FLUTE, HARPSICORD & PIANO-FORTE:  
to which is prefixed  
An ESSAY on SCOTS MUSIC.  
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## An Essay on the SCOTS MUSIC.

As most national Music, and in particular that of the Scots, originated with the Bards, the present Essay may not improperly commence with some enquiry into the origin and employment of an order of men, once so famous both in Europe and other countries.

The Bards may be traced to Greece,<sup>1</sup> and as high as the time of Homer,<sup>2</sup> to whom (in a lax sense, at least) the character may be applied. They probably received their origin among some of the eastern nations, and might derive their office from that of the Hebrew prophets, whom they strongly resembled.<sup>3</sup>

During many ages, these were the chief cultivators of Poetry, Heraldry, and Music; particularly among the Celtae, a great and powerful nation, which once flourished in the west of Europe. From these (whether immediately, or by the medium of Ireland, is of no consequence to our present enquiries) the Scots themselves originated; as did likewise their Music, their Poetry, and their *Bards*; these being spared, by general consent, on the introduction of Christianity, while the Druids, on whom they had been dependent, sunk with the superstitions and idolatries with which they were connected.<sup>4</sup>

In the *Highlands*, where the most ancient Scottish Music has been preserved, every Chief formerly maintained a Bard in his family, whose principal business was to celebrate, in Lyric strains, his patron's heroism, and the exploits of his ancestors. They generally expressed themselves with the ardour of enthusiasm, and often rose to the sublime.

These Bards were not regarded with the contempt that modern times have bestowed upon their successors, but raised to the highest honours, and particularly employed in embassies of peace, their persons being esteemed sacred. "Caibar feared," says Ossian, "to stretch forth his sword to the Bards, though his soul was dark." - "Loose the Bards", said his brother Cathmor, "they are the sons of other times. Their voice shall be heard in other ages, when the kings of Temora have failed."<sup>5</sup>

Another considerable part of their office was to celebrate their deceased patrons; and of such consequence were their elegiac compositions imagined to be to the departed

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<sup>1</sup> It is remarkable enough to merit an observation, that the Inhabitants of Peru and Mexico, in South America, and even those of the Marian Islands, had among them an order of men similar to the Bards. Encyclop. Brit. (new edition) article *Bard*.

<sup>2</sup> Odyss. Book viii.

<sup>3</sup> See the Historical Essay prefixed to Psalmodia Evangelica, Vol.II, Page 9.

<sup>4</sup> Blair's Crit, Dissert. on Ossian's Poems, Page 11.

<sup>5</sup> Ossian's Poems, Vol.I Page 263.

ghosts, that those who were so unhappy as to die without this honourable attention were supposed to “wander in the thick mists before the reedy lake.”<sup>6</sup>

In succeeding ages, these domestic Poets and Musicians very much declined both in character and respect. Among the various reasons which have been assigned for this event, one of the most considerable seems to have been the revival of literature; for “book-learning”, as an ingenious writer observes, “has ever proved fatal to unlettered poets.”<sup>7</sup>

Although the Bag-pipe is now the favourite instrument of the Highlanders, it does not appear to have been always so. Giraldus Cambrensis<sup>8</sup> speaks of the Harp as used in this country, as well as in Ireland and Wales; and writers of superior credit and antiquity describe the Harp as the instrument of the most ancient Bards.<sup>9</sup> Ossian also, if his testimony may be admitted, says, “Beneath his own tree, at intervals each Bard sat down with his Harp. They raised the song, and touched the string, each to the Chief he loved.”<sup>10</sup> The last performer on this instrument in the Hebrides was one Morison, or Dall, who, in the close of the last century, acted as Bard to the Laird of McLeod of Dunvegan Castle; and, like Demodocus of old, was blind.

To the Harp succeeded the Bagpipe; which, though not of equal, is certainly of very high antiquity among the northern nations. It is not mentioned in Ossian, but is supposed to be intended in some ancient northern songs by the appellation of the *Soeck Pipe*<sup>11</sup> [.] This instrument, as the Harp had been before, was used to accompany the *Corronach*, [sic] or *Dirge*, in which, formerly, the deceased was wont to be addressed in broken extemporary verses, a practice not yet entirely disused among the Irish.

Many learned men have supposed a great part of the old Scottish Music, and even their Bards, derived *immediately* from Ireland; and that king James I of Scotland, who reigned in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, both introduced and naturalized them. It is certain that he was a Poet and Musician,<sup>12</sup> particularly a Harper, and there is still extant an ancient Musical Treatise ascribed to him. An old writer calls him another *Orpheus*, who exceeded both the Highlanders and the Irish, the best Harpers of their time.<sup>13</sup> Buchanan thought him more of a Musician than a king ought to be;<sup>14</sup> and indeed it

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<sup>6</sup> Blair's Dissert. Page 21.

<sup>7</sup> Dissertation on the Influence of Poetry and Music upon the Highlanders prefix'd to McDonald's Highland Airs.

<sup>8</sup> Topograph. Hibern. Lib. II. Cap.x.

<sup>9</sup> Diod. Siculus, Amm, Marcellinus, &c.

<sup>10</sup> *Ossian's Poems*, Vol.II, Page 112, 113.

<sup>11</sup> Pennant's [sic] Tour to the Hebrides, Page 302.

<sup>12</sup> *Hawkin's History of Music*, Vol.IV. Page 4.

<sup>13</sup> Major de Gest Scot Lib VI.

<sup>14</sup> - “Quam regem vel deceat, vel expediat, &c”. Rer. Scot. Hist. Lib. X \$57.

must be confessed that few princes who have endeavoured to distinguish themselves as practical Musicians have been equally eminent as good kings. But his musical fame even reached to Italy, for *Tassoni*, a celebrated writer of that country, mentions him as the inventor of a new species of plaintive melody.<sup>15</sup>

*James V* was another musical prince, and the reputed author of some songs still in being. One of them was composed, it is said, on occasion of his having an amour with the daughter of a Highland Cottager,<sup>16</sup> as he was strolling in disguise about the country. This prince's fame likewise extended to Italy, and he is celebrated by the elegant *Ariosto*, under the name of *Zerlino*.<sup>17</sup>

*David Rizzio*, the unhappy Italian Secretary of Mary queen of Scots, has been formerly asserted to have much refined, and somewhat Italianized many of the Scottish tunes; but the fact has been of late disputed, and with apparent reason.<sup>18</sup> There are a few favourite Scots tunes which tradition ascribes to him, perhaps with more truth.<sup>19</sup> *Barsanti*, however, another Italian, who visited North Britain in the present century, collected and made basses to a number of favourite Scottish airs, which at the same time he might probably modernize and refine, if not improve.

It is certainly a very curious fact, that the sister arts of Poetry and Music should be so much admired and cultivated as they have been in many nations considered as barbarous and uncivilized; but it is equally true, that these arts have, in a greater or less degree, contributed to civilize and humanize those very nations. This is particularly remarkable as to the Arcadians, who were naturally very fierce and barbarous, till softened by the power of Music, which they made an essential part of education; but the Cynaethians, a branch of the same stock, neglecting this cultivation, were the most ungovernable and ferocious subjects Greece had.<sup>20</sup>

The wonderful stories related of *Amphion* and *Orpheus* are, by the soberer critics, supposed to mean no more than that, by the union of Music and Poetry, they civilized the first barbarous inhabitants of Greece, reconciled them to live in society, and cultivate the useful and domestic arts.

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<sup>15</sup> "Ma trouò de sa stesso una nuova, musica lamenteuole, e mesta differente da tutti l'altro." *Pensieri Diversi*, Lib. X, Cap.23.

<sup>16</sup> No.XVIII, 'The Gaberlunzie Man'; [xxx] according to some, the man with a wallet at his back; and, according to others, a beggar clothed in rags and tatters, alluding to the character in which he was disguised. See *Callander's Antient Scottish Poems*, Page 17 and 79.

<sup>17</sup> *Orland. Fur. Cant.* XIII.

<sup>18</sup> *Hawkins's Hist.* IV, I, &c.

<sup>19</sup> See No.CXXXI, CXXXVI, in the following Collection.

<sup>20</sup> *Polybius*, vid. *Dissertation ou l'on fait voir, que les merveilleux effets, attribuez a la Musique des Anciens*, &c, par M. *Burette*. *Memoires de Liter.* Tom. VII.

Policy was not, however, the *only* motive to the cultivation of Music among rude nations. In the early ages, many of them tended flocks or herds; and their method of life admitting much leisure, they naturally sought to fill it up by amusements agreeable thereto, of which, Music and Poetry were the chief. This was remarkably the case of the Arcadians above-mentioned; and so partial were they to soft and pastoral strains, that even in war, like the Lacedemonians, and some others, they used no musical instruments but flutes.

Others, whose manners were less softened, were more addicted to hunting and petty wars, and this disposition would necessarily affect both their Poetry and Music; employing a different set of images in the former, and in the latter accents more wild and masculine. – These remarks are particularly applicable to the ancient **Highlanders, who borrow most of their poetic images from the battle or the chase;**<sup>21</sup> and their Poems are full of ideas of self-importance and ambition, the great incentives to war and rapine.

Self-complacent and ferocious as the ideas of a barbarian Chief may be, an uncivilized state is always attended with a certain degree of gloom and melancholy. Man was born for society, and cannot be happy in solitude; add to this, that the hunter is not always successful; and few warriors are constantly victorious. These reflections, with the constant use of Music in funeral obsequies, will sufficiently account for the plaintive and melancholic tincture of a great proportion of ancient Music, which has an effect analogous to Music in the minor mode; though, strictly speaking, the present doctrine of modes and keys is entirely modern, and few very ancient airs can be thoroughly accommodated to it. In tones apparently minor, the 7<sup>th</sup> was not sharpened, even when sometimes the 6<sup>th</sup> was;<sup>22</sup> and the air was permitted to modulate from key to key (to speak in modern terms) with scarce any other law than that of the composer's ear. Sometimes a very short air appears to conclude in a different mode from what it begins in;<sup>23</sup> and at others, concludes in the harmony of the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> of the key, instead of that of the key itself. <sup>24</sup>

One of the most obvious peculiarities of Scottish Music is the affected omission of certain notes in the scale, particularly the 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>,<sup>25</sup> and almost any other interval. This has been accounted for from the supposed contractedness of antient instruments;<sup>26</sup> it seems, however, too great a beauty to ascribe to such a cause; and it is singular enough that the same peculiarity is not only to be observed in some Irish

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<sup>21</sup> Influence of Poetry, &c, Page 8.

<sup>22</sup> See No. XXVI, XXXV, LXII, &c in this Collection.

<sup>23</sup> See No. XX, XXI, XXX, &c

<sup>24</sup> See No. XXXI, LXI, XCIV, &c.

<sup>25</sup> See No. XIX, XX, XXI, XXV, XVI, XXX, XLIII, &c.

<sup>26</sup> Certainly Macdonald's Preface adheres to this view. However, the author of the present 'Essay on the Scots Music' disputes this.

airs, but even in the Chinese Music;<sup>27</sup> and Dr Burney has conjectured, from a curious passage in Plutarch's Dialogues, that this was the *original* enharmonic scale of the Greeks.<sup>28</sup>

No nation has ever applied Music to a greater variety of useful purposes than the Scots, particularly in the Highlands. The animation they receive from the bagpipe is notorious, and confirmed by a modern instance, little short of, and better authenticated, than the wonderful stories of the antient Music. At the battle of Quebec (1760) whilst the British troops were retreating in confusion, the General complained to a field officer of Fraser's Regiment of the bad behaviour of his corps:

"Sir", answered he, with some warmth, "you did very wrong in forbidding the pipers to play this morning; nothing encourages Highlanders so much in a day of action; nay, even now, they would be of use."

The experiment was tried, and immediately on hearing their national Music, they returned and formed with great alacrity in the rear.<sup>29</sup>

The modern Highlanders (as the Greeks of old) accompany almost every kind of work with Music. The songs used in the Hebrides, and on the western coasts, are called *Luinigs*; they are generally very short and plaintive.

"They are sung by the women, not only at their diversions, but during almost every kind of work, where more than one person is employed, as milking cows, watching the solds, fulling of cloth, grinding of grain with the *quern*, or hand-mill, hay-making, [p.4] and cutting down corn."<sup>30</sup>

At Raasay, Dr Johnson found the women reaping (as is their custom while the men bind up their sheaves), and "the strokes of the sickle were timed by the motion of the harvest song, in which all their voices were united."<sup>31</sup> The men too have their *iorrums*, or songs for rowing,<sup>32</sup> to which they keep time with their oars, as the women likewise do when their operations admit of it. When the same songs are sung in the hours of relaxation, the time is marked by the motion of a napkin, which all the performers lay hold of. In singing, one person leads the band; but in a certain part of the tune he stops to take breath, while the rest strike in and complete the air, pronouncing to it a chorus of words and syllables, generally of no signification.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Burney's Hist. Vol.1, R.34, and 497.

<sup>28</sup> See the specimens in *Du Halde's* Hist. of China, Vol.III.

<sup>29</sup> Influence of Poetry, &c. Page 13.

<sup>30</sup> Influence of Poetry, &c. Page 10.

<sup>31</sup> Journey to the Western Islands, Page 139.

<sup>32</sup> See No. XXXIX in the subsequent Collection.

<sup>33</sup> Influence of Poetry, &c. Page 10



They are likewise very fond of the Bagpipe to accompany their meals, and the visitant of an Highland chief is commonly entertained with some national airs while he sits at meat.<sup>34</sup>

There is something peculiar in the Music of the St. Kildians, though their only musical instrument is one of the most contemptible in being, *viz.* the Jew's Harp.

"The Muses of St Kilda are as simple as its inhabitants: At the conclusion of the fishing season, when the winter's store of this little commonwealth is safely deposited in a house, called *Tigh-a-bharra*, its whole members resort thither, as being the most spacious room in their dominions, and hold a solemn assembly. There they sing, with gratitude and joy, one of their best reel-airs, to words importing: What more would we have? There is store of cuddies and sayth, of perich and allachan,<sup>35</sup> laid up for us in *Tigh-a-bharra*."<sup>36</sup>

There is also a beautiful simplicity in the poetry of this Island, of which the following specimen may not be unacceptable, it being the elegy of a young woman of St. Kilda, who had lost her husband by a fall from the rocks, an accident not unfrequent in catching the wild fowl of those parts:

"In yonder Soa<sup>37</sup> left I the youth whom I loved. But lately he skipped and bounded from rock to rock. Dexterous was he in making every instrument the farm required; diligent in bringing home my tender flocks. You went, O my love! upon yon hanging cliff, but fear measured not thy steps. Thy foot only slipt – you fell, never more to rise! Thy blood stained yon sloping rocks; thy brains lay scattered all around; all thy wounds gushed at once. Floating on the surface of the deep, the cruel waves tore thee asunder. Thy mother came, her grey hairs uncovered with the curch:<sup>38</sup> Thy sister came; we mourned together: Thy brother came, he lessened not the cry of Sorrow. Gloomy and sad we all beheld thee from afar. O thou that was the seven-fold blessing of thy friends, the shiny l'on<sup>39</sup> of their support! Now, alas! My share of the birds is heard screaming in the clouds; my share of the eggs is already seized on by the stronger party. In yonder Soa left I the youth whom I loved."<sup>40</sup>

Among the Lowland Scots Tunes some of the most antient are No.II. VIII. XVIII. XLI. LVIII. LXXXV. in the following Collection. Of the former of these Sir J. Hawkins

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<sup>34</sup> *Johnson's Journey*, Page 297, &c.

<sup>35</sup> Kinds of fishes.

<sup>36</sup> *Influence of Poetry*, &c. Page 9.

<sup>37</sup> A small, reeky Island near St. Kilda.

<sup>38</sup> A kerchief.

<sup>39</sup> A rope of raw hides – a very valuable article with these people.

<sup>40</sup> *Influence of Poetry*, &c. Page 9.

relates the following anecdote: Queen Mary, consort of William III, having a mind one afternoon to be entertained with music, sent for Mr. Goslin, a gentleman of her chapel; Mrs. Arabella Hunt, who had a fine voice; and Mr. H. Purcell: and after they had performed several compositions of the latter, her Majesty growing weary, asked Mrs Hunt to sing the old Scots Ballad of "Cold and Raw", which she did, and accompanied herself upon the Lute, much to the mortification of Purcell, who sat at the harpsichord unemployed; and to let her Majesty know that he remembered it, he made the air of this tune the bass to a movement in his next Birth-day Ode.<sup>41</sup>

There is considerable difficulty in adjusting the more antient tunes. Frequently among several copies, all written by the natives, no two were found perfectly alike; and it was not always easy to ascertain the most genuine. Some tunes, originally composed to the Harp, may have been considerably altered to suit the Bagpipe. Others have been dabbled with by modern Musicians, who have perhaps not always improved so much as they have altered them.

With regard to the performance of the following airs, it may not be impertinent to observe, that they will produce the best effect on those instruments most capable of expression, such are the Violin, German Flute, and Piano Forte. In the performance of most national Music, and in particular the Scottish, there are some peculiarities which can hardly be expressed in notes; nor must the time be too strictly adhered to,<sup>42</sup> since, in all probability, the original authors of the more antient airs, knew no more of our laws of time than of harmony. To relish the beauties of this kind of Music, it is necessary to enter into the spirit of it, and nothing can more contribute to this than the hearing of it performed by the natives, who are generally enthusiastically attached to it. The little grace notes, however, which are mostly to be performed with rapidity, may be of service to assist a stranger. The Strathspeys, it should be remembered, must be played considerably slower than the other Reels.

It need hardly be added, that the basses are modern; many of them the composition of the first masters of the present age; and some of the airs, which never appeared with any kind of accompaniment before, were with difficulty made to submit to any; and often bid a total defiance to modern rules.

Should the present work meet with public encouragement, it is proposed to be succeeded by a similar collection of *Irish*, and other national, airs; a work which, when complete, may not only entertain the lovers of Music, and gratify enquirers into the early state and history of that elegant art; but, from the analogy constantly to be observed between the original manners of a people and their native Music, afford useful hints to persons engaged in more serious and philosophic studies.

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<sup>41</sup> Gen. Hist. of Music, Vol.IV, p.6.

<sup>42</sup> Burney's Present State of Music in Germany, Vol.I. p.254, and McDonald's Preface, p.4



NOTES by Karen McAulay

- Psalmody Evangelica - Thomas Williams, *Psalmody Evangelica: a Complete Set of Psalm and Hymn Tunes for Public Worship [...]* S, A and P Thompson, 1789, 2 vols. – the same publisher as for *The Caledonian Muse*
- Blair's Crit. Dissert. On Ossian's Poems –  
Hugh Blair, *Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian, Son of Fingal* (London : printed for T. Becket and P.A. De Hondt, 1763)
- Dissertation on the Influence of Poetry and Music upon the Highlanders prefix'd to McDonald's Highland Airs –  
Patrick McDonald, *A collection of Highland vocal airs, never hitherto published, to which are added a few of the most lively country dances or reels, of the North Highlands, & Western Isles, and some specimens of bagpipe music* (Edinburgh: Printed for the Publisher, [1784])
- Topograph. Hbern - William Wenman Seward, *Topographia Hibernica*. (COPAC dates this as 1795, later than the present collection!)
- Pennant's Tour to the Hebrides –  
Thomas Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides [1772]* (London: printed for Benj. White, 1776) 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.
- Hawkin's History of Music - John Hawkins, *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music* (London: printed for T. Payne, 1776), 5 vols.
- Callander's Antient Scottish Poems –  
John Callander, *Two Ancient Scottish Poems* (Edinburgh: printed by J. Robertson, 1782)
- Barsanti - Frances (Francesco) Barsanti, *Collection of Old Scots Tunes* (1742)
- Polybius - Polybius was an ancient Greek philosopher.