Introduction:

This collection represents a Scotland-wide tradition, albeit viewed from the North-East, where the writer grew up. For centuries the lands between the Spey and the Tay, from the Gaelic-speaking uplands to the Scots-speaking lowlands, have been a golden ground of creativity, producing major, transforming talents in all the languages of Scotland and throughout the traditional instrumental music, song and dance repertoires. It is Scotland in miniature, and its verbal and musical cultures are "a' throu' ither" i.e. richly intertwined.

The writer was brought up in Buchan, in the north east corner of Aberdeenshire, some forty miles from the city of Aberdeen. The coast of Buchan is low and flat to the east, with mile upon mile of grassy links and sandy beaches. Where it turns west into the Moray firth at Fraserburgh it becomes abruptly rocky, with long rubble shores occupied once by rows of steam drifters driven ashore and left to break up when the collapse of foreign markets and diesel power finally overtook them in the aftermath of the Second World War. When I was a child, you could see the first Industrial Revolution, the one based on iron and steam, dying all along the shore between The Broch and Sandhaven. Further west the coast rises into a dramatic series of rocky headlands which stretch away into Banffshire, and it is here that several of the classic fishing villages of the North East are found, Crovie, Gamrie, and Pennan. It was from Pennan my grandmother came, born in May 1893, daughter of Margaret Gatt and her husband Alexander Gatt, who was called "Sanny Kay" (pron. Caie--in fisher communities there is much intermarriage so everybody is related and there are very few surnames. Everybody therefore has a by-name). Pennan perches on a narrow shelf of land at the foot of a cliff reached by a winding and precipitous road, single track for most of its length. It lies in the lee of the Red Head with the Den behind—Pennan Den, celebrated by the tune of the same name, composed by James Watt, 1832-1909, teacher in Pennan, which is one of the loveliest of its kind --a rocky shore, a small harbour, an inn, a village hall, and a strip of cottages along the shore, often gable on to the sea. The Kirk and school were on the cliffhead above (Salvation and Education at the top of the brae; Damnation at the foot). The people were called "Pennan Pewls"—i.e. Pennan Seagulls--although not to their faces.

Fiddler's Mary (1823-1911) and William Gatt (1823-1913) of Pennan

The religious revivals and temperance movements which swept the North East in the 19th century did not stop the dancing in Pennan. My grandmother spoke of "balls" that lasted all night, dancing things like the Pirn Reel and the Star Reel, "till the very busks of your stays rusted." She was full of stories and sayings and songs. Family illness meant I was often in her company. We went "spying fairlies" (looking for marvels, wonders) and were frequently in Pennan. Music poured out of her, and all her sisters and daughters, nieces and cousins. She had a sixpenny mouth organ, and its compass was small so when she ran out of notes at the top she would sing them, la, la, la, returning to the moothie as she came back within its range. Auntie Ruthie taught herself to play the accordion by laying out knives on the table to practice the fingering, because she didn't have an accordion. She was a songwriter as well, and a number of her pieces were published (my own favourite being *Breid and Treacle,* Austro-Scotia Music Co., 1966). My grandmother could play the melodeon and dance an Irish jig, simultaneously if need be. Her father was a fiddler and precentor of the Kirk, and he would line out the psalms on a Sunday and play for the dancing in Pennan (and be paid in copious quantities of drink) when not on ecclesiastical duty. She was nine years old and the eldest when he drowned coming back from the West Coast fishing, and she was brought up by her uncle John, Tylor John, who shot the last sea otter ever seen on the coast. She came of a long line of musicians. They trace their genealogy in the female line, which makes the writer Fiddler's Mary's Margaret's Mary's Margaret's Willie, and life was full of harmoniums, pianos, mouth organs, tin whistles, and Scottish country dance music coaxed from wet battery radios on Saturday nights which had to be wheeled to the shop on bicycle crossbars when they needed to be re-charged. It was the age of Jim Cameron and Jimmy Shand and other great acoustic country dance bands. The whole genre was new, and exciting things were happening in it. Many people had been with the Scottish regiments in the War, and they had a lot of pipe music in their repertoires, so that when he was twelve, and the piper came, the writer already knew most of the tunes and all he had to do was learn to steer them through his fingers on his bright new Robertson chanter.

The tunes are about the only things that remain of those years. Old Pennan has been swept away; not by a tidal wave sent on account of its iniquities (as its neighbours predicted) but by the same economic forces which tore the heart out of The Broch—Fraserburgh—the great sea town where the Pennan folk kept their boats when they grew too big for their own harbour, and it is now a dormitory for Fraserburgh professionals. Of course it has smartened the place up no end. Locals of a more sardonic turn of mind call it *Pennan-sur-Mer.* Since the ways of Providence are mysterious, maybe that was the judgement which awaited it.

Outwardly, the fishing villages were conservative in terms of culture. Old songs, old stories, old ways and old doings were to be had on every hand. The Pennan folk were amongst the most archaic and colourful Scots-speakers in the North East (itself a bastion of the language), and the whole area had been deeply Jacobite. It was a Pennan woman who carried supplies to Lord Pitsligo, commander of Pitsligo's Horse and a leading Jacobite thinker as he lay concealed in a nearby cave for months after the Rising of 1745; later he hid in a labyrinthine old 17th century house in Fraserburgh called "The World's End", which exists to this day.

But local culture was not hermetically sealed. The North Sea was a great highway. One could sail to practically anywhere from any one of countless harbours and creeks around the coast. The old singing and melodic traditions had been shared by neighbouring communities all around the northern North Sea basin and into the Baltic for hundreds of years. Even in the mid-twentieth century Norwegian fishers could understand their Buchan colleagues if they spoke Scots and stuck to conventional topics.

Pennan Den, with my grandmother's house by the harbour

By the same token, cultural imperialism had washed over everything in great successive waves. The North East had been deeply influenced by the first phase of American cultural expansion in the religious revival of 1874 when Dwight L. Moody had preached in the open air on the Braid Hill of Aberdeen (none of the local clergy would lend him their kirks because they thought his doctrine unsound), and thousands of people had flocked to the city in special excursion trains from all over the North East singing the wonderful new hymns of Ira D. Sankey from cheap printed sol-fa sheets.

Within a couple of generations, electric recording and broadcasting had further transformed the way people consumed music, although even here there were limiting factors: radio reception was often poor and unpredictable; you couldn't buy the records of anything but the most obvious tops of the pops; and then you needed something to play them on.

After World War II, the airways rang with big band swing. In a more mainstream setting, Guy Mitchell, Frank Sinatra, Doris Day and many others showed singers interesting new possibilities in voice production. There were new dances, too: the Jitterbug, the Cha Cha, and the joint-devouring Twist. Then the fusion of rhythm & blues with supercharged honky-tonk gave birth to rock 'n' roll, Elvis Presley and Buddy Holly, Jerry Lee Lewis, Fats Domino and Little Richard. I spent much of my teens playing boogie woogie. Several people I knew played in rock bands here and there, sometimes mellowing into Country and Western as the years went on.

So the sound world contained everything from religious music to pop, but not everything that was theoretically available could actually be heard, and I lived through the great age of Be-Bop barely knowing that it existed. Church music was a big influence, however, although not in its mainstream *Scottish Hymnal* form, as the notes to the sound files may show. Every addition to an existing tradition alters

slightly our perception of the whole, and few hear any sort of music entirely unmoved, and take nothing whatever away from the experience. I was not of the first generation of pipers to be influenced by a wider musical world: I believe it is possible to trace the influence of Ragtime in G. S. McLennan. The radio and recording generation started in the 1920s, while all kinds of musical influence was possible from other sources at earlier periods ranging from sheet music of the hits of the day to attendance at public concerts and soirees where the mainstream of Victorian and Edwardian popular and light classical music could be heard and its influence absorbed. Scottish soldiers and administrators have found themselves in a wide variety of musical contexts in Africa and Asia, and while it is not obvious what they acquired in the process there will have been subtle influence. Perhaps this is less obvious in the melodic tradition, because of the considerable differences in idiom and genre, not to mention timbre--listening to an Arab pipe band with their characteristically reedy tone still sets Scottish ears on edge—(and no doubt contrariwise); but what thoughtful percussionist can have failed to hear virtuosic local drummers in Africa and India and not have thought, at least occasionally, "Wow!"?

In the Sixties, the explosive success of folk-revival Irishry reached into every corner of the popular musical world. There was some exciting and fresh material amongst it, especially from people like "The Dubliners", but it was a period when musical Hibernianisms were difficult to avoid, and as a beginning composer I did not avoid them. And yet…people often casually group the Scottish and Irish traditions together under the general heading of "Celtic music", but they are very different in their expressive approach. To a Scottish ear the Irish instrumental tradition can often sound florid, over-expansive, over-decorated, even garrulous. The Scottish tradition is markedly more austere and laconic, as well as being very much the larger of the two in terms of size. The standard popular account of "Celtic music", June Skinner Sawyer's *The Complete Guide to Celtic Music* (Aurum Press, London, 2000, first published, Secaucus, N.J., 1999) states that "Ireland has over six thousand individual dance pieces in its repertoire, including jigs, reels, and hornpipes." (p.9) If this is accurate, then it means that the Irish repertoire is very much smaller than the Scottish one for which Charles Gore's comprehensive *Scottish Fiddle Music Index* (Musselburgh 1994) suggests at least double that figure up to his cut off date of 1922; and to that would have to be added the large amount of material which has been composed since that date, and the repertoire of the other strands of the Scottish instrumental tradition including the accordion and the great Highland and other bagpipes.

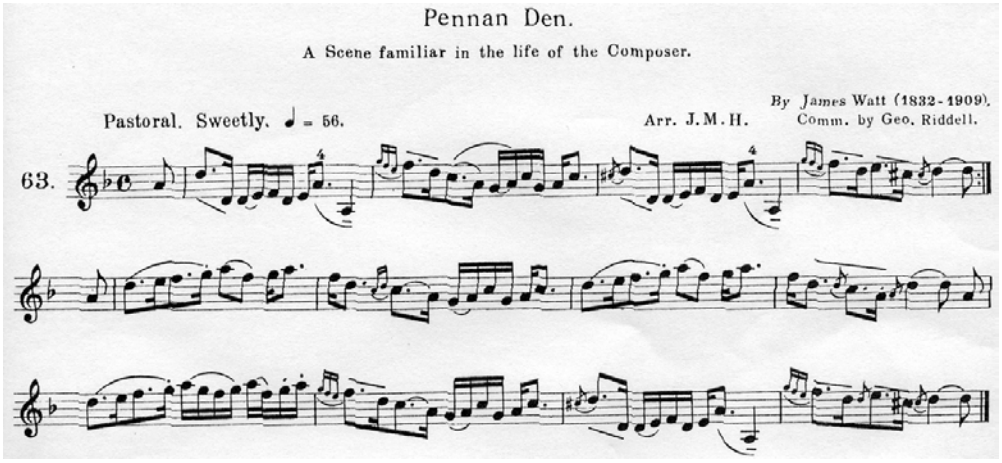
It is clear that the idiom of the pipe has had an important influence on composers for other branches of the instrumental tradition in Scotland during the 20th century. There are various reasons why this might be so. The great age of original composition of light music for the Highland bagpipe began in the 1840s and '50s and included a golden late Victorian generation numbering G. S. McLennan, Willie Ross, John MacColl, William Lawrie and John MacLellan of Dunoon amongst its members. The sheer quality of their compositions made them irresistibly attractive to instrumentalists throughout the Scottish scene. In addition the many wars of the 20th century and the advent of mass conscription gave all kinds of talented musicians a first hand experience of the pipe and its music, including instruction—many people with skills on other instruments were converted into pipers by the crash courses of Willie Ross and others working at regimental level during the Second World War, so

that they emerged with repertoires enriched and enlarged. Listening to pipers during the desert campaign in North Africa made the great North-East fiddler Hector MacAndrew determine that, if he survived, he would devote all his energies to the advancement of Scottish music.

G. S. McLennan playing at the grave of his old friend fiddle virtuoso and composer J. Scott Skinner in Allanvale Cemetary in Aberdeen in March 1927

In time, of course, such influences began to fade. The dominance of television from the later '50s onwards meant that the general run of youngsters heard much less Scottish music than they would have done on the radio, and Bob Nicol of Balmoral reported in about 1970 that he was seeing a new phenomenon: something was happening to the kids who were coming to him for the light music. Previously, he said, all you had to teach them was the technique, but now you had to teach idiom as well, because they didn't already have it when they came, and it was very difficult. As people from this generation began to launch into their own careers as performers and composers, especially in new wave folk-rock bands, their ignorance of the historic repertoire and the limitations this imposed upon their music became increasingly apparent. Canadian dance band leader George Emmerson wrote as early as 1971 that:

> Some recent compositions…are disturbing, exhibiting a loss of the old tonality and characteristics of melody essential to the Scottish tune. The giving of a Scottish name to a tune and calling it a "reel" or "strathspey" is no justification for classing it with the traditional airs…Is it too much to ask that aspiring composers of music in the traditional style should make certain that they know what the style is, absorb its essence, and try to understand it before setting the creative wheels in operation? (George S. Emmerson, *Rantin' Pipe and Tremblin' String: a History of Scottish Dance Music,* London, 1971, p.107)



From J. Murdoch Henderson's *"Flowers of Scottish Melody"*

Composition:

As a child I eagerly studied ways of saying things in music. Repeated listening, and a little thought, revealed that traditional Scottish music was highly regular, so to master the idiom all one had to do was to work out the melodic and structural "rules" then build a personal repertoire large enough to see what had been done in each of the various genres, and therefore what had not been done, a thing vital for composers to pin down, because that is the space they operate in.

Anyway, I wrote my first tune, a strathspey, about fifty years ago. I was twelve years old. It was a jagged, heavily syncopated piece, probably attempting to extract more boldness and energy from the motifs than they would sustain. I remember I had a lot of trouble notating it as I had limited contact up to that stage with written and printed music. I had a quick ear and could easily acquire whatever I needed if I could get to hear it in the first place, so there was little incentive to fiddle around with the dots and squiggles. It was devouring pipe music collections from that point onwards that gave me whatever musical literacy I possess. Of course, I fell immediately into the usual trap, namely over-ambition, thrashing about futilely in big "important" forms like the competition march, strathspey and reel of which I had a purely impressionistic grasp, and had not given enough detailed study to know how to handle properly.

I also discovered that I was far too quick to commit to paper the merest passing impressions. Remembering other people's tunes was no problem; but I found that, perversely, when I was working out new phrases inside my head, they tended to flee the coop almost at the point of conception, so that while I did not have to write other people's tunes down in order to remember them, as a general rule, anything I thought new and fresh from me had to be got down at once before it disappeared. Tunes under construction are very much more unstable than completed pieces subject to recollection. Consideration during the following day/month/year/s tended to reveal one of two things: either that the material was banal and should be discarded; or that something might perhaps be done with it…but what? I produced pages and pages of scribbled manuscript which manoeuvred in the same narrow areas, increasingly blurring where I thought I had been going, or what I had set out to achieve in the first place, and making control difficult. Composing on computers encourages greater ruthlessness, since what doesn't work can instantly be changed or deleted; on the other hand things of possible value (realised belatedly) may easily be lost in this way.

I also quickly discovered that one tune tends to spawn another, that antiphonal call and response mechanisms operate between tunes as well as within them. Sometimes both may survive—a number of my own tunes were written in pairs. Some are Doppelgangers: reality cannot, except perhaps briefly, contain both simultaneously, one will kill the other, since they are not similar enough to be one tune but not dissimilar enough to be two.

Sometimes the process of composition is deliberate and controlled, working patiently from the implications of one "given" portion to the next. But sometimes in moments of desperation you are reduced to replicating the wretched thing endlessly inside your head just waiting for it to mutate. It has to come out squint, even once, to tell you where you might go next. At other times unfinished tunes can beset their creator like

restless ghosts filling the mind with periodic unquiet, maybe for years, until eventually they are exorcised—or abandoned. Closure can be achieved more or less instantaneously, of course, but any old closure will not do--what is required is something "enough", whatever that may be, although sometimes one may have to settle for less than the perfectly executed back somersault originally intended. Sometimes, but rarely, tunes come quickly, but most cost a dismaying amount of mental effort. Of course, they must bear no trace of it: they must seem as light as air and as spontaneous as breathing. At least that is the theory. I have been guided throughout by affection for the melodically strong, economical tradition in which I grew up, based on the notion that if a tune was effective and shapely in two parts but baggy and superfluous in four, six or eight, then the two-parted form should always be preferred.

My first tune to have a public airing was "Union Glen" which was played by Seumas MacNeill on the BBC radio programme "Chanter" in the winter of 1968/9, the result of a competition for new tunes for which the prize was being played by Seumas on the radio. By this time I was putting together settings for the Aberdeen University OTC Pipe Band of which I became pipe sergeant about 1966. The Pipe Major was an outstanding player technically, but was interested mainly in solo competitive work which gave me scope for trying out new things with the band. Being immersed in Scottish traditional music from infancy I was aware of the huge common pool upon which fiddlers, accordionists and pipers drew, and how strongly influenced by pipe-idiom a lot of the box and fiddle repertoire had been. Yet I was struck by how narrow a range of tunes was commonly to be heard in the piping world, representing a tiny slice of even the existing pipe repertoire, not counting the things that could easily be done by borrowing from neighbouring strands of the instrumental tradition. This became still more apparent as I did the research for my Ph.D. on Jacobite Song in 18th and early 19th century Scotland, combing through hundreds of old fiddle and song books. By the time I became Pipe Major in 1970 the band had a lot of good players including two or three of the top young soloists in Scotland, then doing degrees at Aberdeen. I learned a lot from them--in many ways the OTC was like a college of piping within the larger university. In 1971 I arranged a tour for the pipes & drums of the OTC in the south of England, playing in historic towns like Winchester and Salisbury. It was quite a show: our band president was a former world champion drum major and he could do just about anything with a mace. We even played inside the circle at Stonehenge. It was an interesting experience. I was alert for subtle shifts in ambience but nothing stirred, it was almost disturbingly empty, perhaps the most sterile space I have ever played in.

By this time I was going to see Bob Nicol and pìobaireachd absorbed most of my attention for the next thirty years. But the habit of gathering and making tunes never stopped and some of the results are assembled now in the present collection.

Nowadays it seems easier, at least in Scotland, to find out about the traditions of fiddle or song than the pipes. Many North East folk know the poet and folklorist Hamish Henderson's song "The 51st Highland Division's Farewell to Sicily" (beginning "The pipie is dozy, the pipie is fey / He winna come roon' for his vino the day") but have only the haziest idea that the tune, "Farewell to the Creeks", was composed by the pipe-major of the 1st Gordons, James Robertson of Banff, just up the coast from Pennan, or that the creeks referred to in the title are the creeks of

Portknockie, a little further still up the Moray Firth coast. Still fewer are likely to know that the quiet little burgh of Ellon on the river Ythan which marks the southern boundary of the province of Buchan (as narrowly defined), is the birthplace of one of the founders of the modern pipe band movement, Alec Hutcheon of the Govan Police; or that "Campbeltown Loch" (aka "The Glendaruel Highlanders") is an Aberdonian tune, composed by Alex Fettes Pipe-Major of the Aberdeen Volunteers in honour of another great Aberdonian piper and pioneer of the modern pipe band movement, John MacDougall Gillies. Gillies was born in the same street where, a century later, Hamish Henderson came to collect ballads from Jeannie Robertson for the School of Scottish Studies. But Jeannie's husband and his brother were pipers, and pipers as well as singers used to gather at her house. In the 1980's, Jeannie's daughter Lizzie, took me to meet her surviving uncle, Isaac Higgins, who was anxious to pass on tunes and stories, and some of these are reproduced in the present collection.

When I came to the University of Aberdeen, and discovered the student pipers at the Officer Training Corps (which was the heart of piping in the University, although none of them went on to military careers), the very first night I was there, they said, "ach, come on, we'll away up to Jeannie's", got some beer, piled into their cars, and minutes later I found myself sitting in the great ballad-singer Jeannie Robertson's living room, where singing and playing went on for hours. My first pipe-major was Andy Hunter (or Dr. Andrew Hunter as I should say now) the noted folk singer and small-pipe player. He was just back from a year in Brittany and full of enthusiasm for Breton music and I found myself accompanying him on the pipes when he played his Bombard. One day I met him at Mounthooly and he sang me his newly made "Up and awa' wi' the Laverock", (which he later recorded *Andy Hunter: King Fareweel,* Lismor Folk, LIFL 7002) which he had just sung to Jeannie, who had corrected him saying "na, na, laddie, you're nae timin' that richt", and had proceeded to teach him how to phrase his own song.

A point on tempo:

Many of the tunes collected here are envisaged at tempi suitable for informal social dancing. The stress is on "informal" because there is much evidence indicating that formal dance tempi slowed markedly during the twentieth century under the impact of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society, and the Highland dancing adjudication boards who deemed, quite arbitrarily, that "high" foot positions were the only correct way to do it, which meant, of course, that the music had to slow because the high positions cannot be executed as quickly as the low. The latter style is sometimes labelled "step dancing" nowadays and wrongly assumed to be a "Gaelic" phenomenon, but it has a long and respectable lineage amongst dancing masters throughout Scotland.

Historically the dances of Scotland and the music which accompanied them were very much more rapid than they have since become. It has been debated whether the lively tempi of early recordings could be related in some way to primitive technology, the need to cram tunes onto cylinders with very limited playing time (from two to four minutes as a rule). But in the written literature of the subject, these things are laid down very clearly. Scott Skinner explicitly recommended twenty seconds for a two-parted strathspey and fifteen seconds for a reel, as we see in the introduction to his collection *Harp and Claymore*, 1903-4, i.e. the speeds on his recordings were those he

normally played at. These timings coincided with those specified by the leading Victorian commentator, George Farquhar Graham, editor of *The Songs of Scotland adapted to their appropriate Melodies*, 1861, and those of John Glen of J. and R. Glen, bagpipe makers, and author of the seminal *Early Scottish Melodies,* 1900. Glen took his reels at the same speed as Skinner and although his strathspeys were slower, it was not by very much. (see *The Glen Collection of Scottish Dance Music,* 1891, p.14 for his recommended timings).

Most of the small 6/8 marches can be played in jig time (and contrariwise), since, as a general rule it is simply a question of tempo. Some of the jigs and hornpipes are "pointed" and some are not; this is based on a sense of how "square" a tune is, some suit one kind of treatment some another; but none of this is intended to be prescriptive. It is entirely up to the taste of the performer.

William Donaldson, 30th November 2006

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