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The Dancing is Done

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producer: David McGuinness

John Purser: It's early morning on the River Forth in the mid 16th century. Down the estuary at Seacliff, the hermit has been long awake as it's his duty to tend one of the lights that guide sailors along the treacherous coasts. The monks on the Island of Inchcolm are also awake. The little quadrangular hand-bell they're ringing is on a visit from their parent church at Dunkeld. It dates from the 9th century and it plays three notes – three-in-one – the Holy Trinity.

Anon - Inverness Fragments Recessional

Musick Fyne/James Ross

CASSETTE A Scottish Mass of 1546

CMF 004 Side 2 Track 8

JP Voice-over: The monks – men and boys - are about to celebrate early morning mass, but first they process through the Abbey kirk in the cold light of a cold morning, singing Psalm one hundred and thirteen.

“From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same, the Lord's name is to be praised ... He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; That he may set him with Princes, even with the princes of his people.”

The mid 16th century was not an easy time for monks. Some stuck naturally to the old ways which they loved: others felt the need not just for renewal but for radical change. The Reformation was beginning to take shape in Scotland. Patrick Hamilton had been burnt at the stake, and so had George Wishart. Both were accused of heresy, when all they were trying to do was to bring the church to the people – trying to raise the poor out of the dust, lift the needy from the dunghill, and set them, if not among princes, at least in a position to participate in the celebration of their own faith.

Musicke Fyne, led by James Ross in solemn procession. Reformation came at a price which went well beyond our modest count of two or three martyrdoms; and the Golden Age of vocal sound, accompanied by the fresh green age of The Last Dance, was the last age in which such music was to be heard, until the late 20th century. Four hundred years of silence for some of our greatest masterpieces.

Nor was such music all sober plainchant and solemn processional singing. This is how those same monks on Inchcolm might have celebrated the descent of the Holy Spirit at Whitsun or Pentecost. It's one of the four quarter days in Scotland. They divide the year into four and some legal payments are still made on these days. But this pre-Reformation music's no longer in use, despite its powerful parallel intervals, assurance and virility.

Anon - Salva Festa Dies

Cappella Nova/Alan Tavener

BBC recording

JP: Cappella Nova, standing in for the monks of Inchcolm, radiating rhythmic energy. Further up the Forth estuary and a touch inland at Torphichen, Robert Wedderburn has also been up early. He doesn't sleep well in his new surroundings, and he's missing the sea. It's 1547 and his vicar's residence in Dundee has just been burnt down by the English, and he's easing the pain of the memory, by writing "The Complaynt of Scotland". Picture him at his desk, stabbing his quill bitterly into the inkpot of his thoughts. But it's not all complaint. Right now he's recording a wonderful list of the names of all the songs and dances that cheer his soul, hearing them in a dream world of shepherds and shepherdesses, and no rough English wooings to disturb their joy:-

Robert Wedderburn (Alan Riach): "Quhen thir scheiphyrdis hed tald al thyr pleysand storeis than thay and ther vyuis began to sing sueit melodiou sangis of natural music of the antiquite. Nou i vil reherse sum of the sueit sangis that i herd amang them as eftir followis, in the fyrst, pastance witht gude compayne, the breir byndis me soir, Stil vndir the leyuis grene, Cou thou me the raschis grene, allace i vyit your tua fayr ene, gode you gude day vil boy, lady help your presoneir, kyng villyamis note, the lang nounenou, the cheapel valk, faytht is there none, skald abellis nou. The abirdenis nou brume brume on hil, allone i veip in grit distress, trolee lolee lemmen dou,"

Anon c.1520 (Henry VIII's book) - Hey Trolly Lolly Lo!

The Hilliard Ensemble

CD Popular Music from the time of Henry VIII

Saga Classics EC3357-2 Track 10

RW: "bille vil thou cum by a lute and belt the in Sanct Francis cord, the frog cam to the myl dur, the sang of gilquhiskar, rycht soirly musing in my mynde, god sen the duc hed byddin in France and delaubaute hed neuyr cum hame, al musing of meruellis amys hef i gone, Mastres fayr ye vil forfayr, o lusty maye witht flora quene.

Anon - O Lustie May

The Kincorth Waits

CD My Delyt

Watercolour Music WAITCD015 Track 1

RW: "O myne hart hay this is my sang, the battel of the hayrlau, the huntis of cheuet, Sal i go witht you to rumbelo fayr, Greuit is my sorrou, turne the sueit ville to me, My lufe is lyand seik send hym joy, send hym ioy, fayr luf lent thou me thy mantil ioy, The perssee & the mongumrye met that day that day that gentil day, my luf is laid apon ake knyght, allace that samyn sueit face, in ake myrthful morou, my hart is leiuit on the land."

Anon - Alas That Same Sweet Face

Saltire Vocal Quartet

LP In A Garden So Green

Da Camera Magna SM 94035 Side 1 Track 1

RW: "Thir scheiphirdis ande there vyuis sang mony vthir molodius sangis the quhilkis i hef nocht in memorie, than eftir this sueit celest armonye tha began to dance in ake ring, euyrie ald scheiphird led his vyfe be the hand and euyrie yong scheiphird led hyr quhome he luffit best. Ther vas viij scheiphirdis and ilk ake of them hed ake syndry instrument to play to the laif. the fyrst hed ake drone bag pipe,"

Anon (Estienne du Tertre 1557) - Branles d'Ecosse
The Baltimore Consort (Edwin George, bagpipe)
CD On The Banks of Helicon – Early Music of Scotland
Dorian DOR-90139 Track 21

RW Voice-over: “the nyxt hed ane pipe maid of ane bleddir and of ane reid, the thrid playit on ane trump, the feyrd on ane corne pipe, the fyft playit on ane pipe maid of ane gait horne, the sext playit on ane recordar the seuint plait on ane fiddil, and the last plait on ane quhissil. kyng amphion that playit sa sueit on his harpe quhen he kepit his scheip nor yit appollo the god of sapiens that kepit kyng admetus scheip vitht his sueit menstralye none of thir tua playit mayr cureouslye nor did thir viij scheiphyrdis befor rehersit...”

JP Voice-over: You might think that by now Wedderburn had run out of dances to remember, but not a bit of it. These Scottish branles, which were actually published by Etienne du Tertre in France in 1557, would have already been well known in Scotland, and Wedderburn was so delighted with his own countrymen’s skills that he would allow no other culture to compare with them . . .

RW voice-over: “ i beheld neuyr ane mair dilectabil recreatione. for fyrst that began vitht tua bekkis and vitht a kysse, euripides, iuuenal perseus horasse nor nane of the satiric poietis quhilkls mouit ther bodeis as thai hed bene dansand quhen thai pronuncit ther tragiedeis none of them kepit moir geomatrial mesure nor thir scheiphyrdis did in that dansing. Nor ludius that vas the fyrst dansar of rome culd noct hef bene comparit to thir scheiphirdis, it vas ane celest recreation to behald ther lycht lopene, galmouding, stendling, bakuart & forduart, dansand base dansis, pauuans, galyardis turdions, braulis, and branglis, buffons vitht mony vthir lycht dancis the quhilk ar ouer prolix to be rehersit yit nochtheles i sal rehers sa mony as my ingyne can put in memorie in the fyrst thai dancit al cristyn mennis dance, the northt of scotland, huntis vp, the comount entray, lang plat fut of gariau, Robene hude, thom of lyn, freris al, ennyrnes, the loch of slene, the gosseps dance, leuis grene, makky, the speyde, the flail, the lammes vynde, soutra culm kyttil me naykyt vantoounly, schayke leg, fut befor gossep Rank at the rute, baglap and al, ihonne ermistrangis dance, the alman haye, the bace of voragon, dangeir, the beye, the dede dance, the dance of kylryrne, the vod and the val, schaik a trot, than quhen this dansing vas dune, tha departit and past to cal there scheip to ther scheip cottis thai bleu vp there bagpipsis than the bel veddir for blythtnes bleyttit rycht fast and the rammis raschit there heydis to gyddir than the laif of ther fat flokkis followit on the fellis baytht youis and lammis kebbis and dailis, gylmyrs and dilmondis, and mony herueist hog, than I deprtit fra that compayne and I entrit in ane onmauen medou . . .

JP: Edwin George on bagpipes. Such joyous stuff was not likely to survive the strictures of a John Knox who was writing “The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women” at much the same time as Wedderburn was listing all those wonderful dances. But Knox had his reasons. He was not long back home in Scotland, having been imprisoned in the galleys, rowing, rowing - a year and a half of rowing like a slave - and it was the French Queen Regent of Scotland, Marie de Guise, whose troops had put him there. Song and dance to him were dangerous pleasures. Wedderburn, however, was also a reformer, and although we’ve finally exhausted his list, which has probably taken him from breakfast to midday to write, we’ve not exhausted all the lists, because here’s one that’s entirely sung. It’s a fricasee – French for a stew. And that’s just what it is. A tasty Scottish musical stew of snatches – just snatches - of songs and dances – nearly every one of them lost to us. Trip and Go Hey is what it’s called and, performed by the King’s Singers, it would be nothing but joyous in my ears were it not that it fills me with a sadness for what is gone.

Anon - Trip and Go hey

The King’s Singers

LP A History of Scottish Music, The King’s Music

Scottish Records SRSS 1 Side 2 Track 5

JP: “The dancing is done, sisters adieu, So hie we now home, sisters adieu, The heav’n is full of mirth and jo; Adew, farewell, now will we go.” I can’t leave the last dance like that. I don’t care if Knox suffered in the galleys, I’ve no intention of suffering with him. It’s not just Heaven that should be full of mirth and jo, but Earth as well. This is a victory dance by William Kinloch and it’s followed by the the splendid tub-thumping of Coronach playing General Lesly’s Goodnight. And with that, good-morning, good-day or good-night to you.

William Kinloch - The Batell of Pavie set be William Kinloche: Celebrations of Victory:

Dance ‘la Guerra’

Coronach

CD A Scots Tune

CD CMF 007 Track 11

Anon (Margaret Wemyss MS) – General Lesly’s Goodnight

Coronach

CD A Scots Tune

CD CMF 007 Track 19