

Scotland's Music © BBC 2007
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Sound Hoarse Sad Lute
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Anon (Straloch MS) - Port Jean Linsay
Rob MacKillop
CD Flowers of the Forest
Greentrax CDTRAX155 Track 14

JP Voice-over: In the 17th century, the lute was a popular instrument, but it was often associated with sorrow:

"Sound hoarse sad Lute, true Witsse of my Woe,
And strive no more to ease selfe-chosen Paine
With Soule-enchancing Sounds, your Accents straine
Unto these Teares uncessantly which flow.
Shrill Treeble weepe, and you dull Basses show
Your Masters Sorrow in a deadly Vaine,
Let never joyfull Hand upon you goe,
Nor Consort keepe but when you doe complaine.
Flie Phoebus Rayes, nay, hate the irkesome Light,
Woods solitarie Shades for thee are best,
Or the blacke Horroours of the blackest Night,
When all the World (save Thou and I) doth rest:
Then sound sad Lute, and beare a mourning Part,
Thou Hell may'st moove, though not a Womans Heart."

JP: That poem by William Drummond comes from the same period when the lute was one of the most important instruments in Scottish music making - as the lutenist, Rob MacKillop explains:

Rob MacKillop Voice-over: "The two main things to keep in mind about the lute repertoire – one is that there are over 500 hundred tunes, mainly Scottish and that form really the bedrock to a lot of traditional music we hear later. The other thing is that they appeared at a time that could hardly be more revolutionary. We'd lost the court – it'd gone south and a hundred years later we lose the parliament; and in between those two tremendous significant dates, we have this outpouring, this flowering of amazing music which we find in these manuscripts. . .

JP: That was Rob MacKillop playing Port Jean Linsay on a large lute and talking about its repertoire, of which he will tell us more later. The tune dates from around the same time as that poem by William Drummond of Hawthornden, addressed to his lute and published in 1614. Drummond's house was – and is – perched on the edge of the gorge at Roslin within sight of Rosslyn Chapel and Castle. It's a romantic spot and Drummond was a romantic melancholic retiring poet. That didn't prevent him from having a mistress by whom he had three children and, later, a wife, by whom he had a further nine, so his views of the immovability of a woman's heart don't bear too much scrutiny! As for the music, it was gathered in by Sir Robert Gordon of Straloch in Aberdeenshire in the 1620s. His lute manuscript was only one of many as Rob MacKillop will be explaining.

RMack: If we take them in chronological order, you've got the Rowallan manuscript. ... now the great thing about that is it gives us an insight to what was happening at the court of James the 6th, because Rowallan's uncle, Montgomerie was the Maister Makar – the Poet Laureate if you like – of the court of James the 6th.

JP voice-over One of the poems Montgomerie wrote for music is “Come my children dear draw near me”. Montgomery remained a loyal Roman Catholic in what was a Protestant Court. He was eventually banished from it and this is a lovely Roman Catholic song, addressed by a virgin, perhaps a nun, to her bridegroom, who is Christ. And in that spirit of innocence the exquisite and simple words and music gather the children round.

Anon (Margaret Ker MS) - Come my children dere
Baltimore Consort
CD On The Banks of Helicon (Early Music of Scotland)
Dorian DOR-90139 Track 12

JP: Custer la Rue and the Baltimore Consort performing Come My Children Dear by Alexander Montgomerie. But that celebration of celibacy – of marriage to Christ – was becoming a thing of the religious past and, for Scotland, the music of the Court was also a thing of the past. The Rowallan manuscript from about 1620 reflects some of the changes that were taking place.

RMack: “It's a great manuscript – you begin to see, the change, the complete change, and politically led change in many ways between the court music and the traditional music that was to come.”

Anon (Rowallan Lute Book) - A Scotts Tune; Come [= Corne] Yairds
Jakob Lindberg
CD Lute Music from Scotland and France
BIS CD 201 Track 1

JP: Jakob Lindberg playing a Scotts Tune and Corne Yairds, both from the Rowallan Lute Book. Scotland's astonishingly rich in lute music from this period, and it's highly distinctive: clean, characterful, and shaped by an elegant tradition.

RMack: If we move onto the Straloch manuscript for instance, which has these ports – porshts – many harp players are claiming that repertoire as their own yet the porshts seem to come from two angles: one is the old tuning prelude where a musician would play the open strings and octaves on his instrument to tune it, mixing in er local songs, traditional songs – in this case they seem to have a Gaelic influence in the songs. So they're mixing in the tuning prelude with er Gaelic songs, or something like it.

JP: Here's two versions of “I Long For Thy Virginitie”, first Rob on lute, then Bill Taylor on clarsach. Our love-lorn poet, William Drummond, was bound to have played “I Long For Thy Virginitie” – he knew exactly what it felt like:-

Anon (Straloch & Skene MSS, arr. Robert Phillips, William Taylor) - I long for thy virginitie
(pub. Kinmor Music)
The Rowallan Consort

CD Notes of Noy, Notes of Joy
Temple COMD 2058 tracks 6 & 7

JP Voice-over:

“O sacred blush, impurpling cheeks’ pure skies
 With crimson wings which spread thee like the morn!
 O bashful look, sent from those shining eyes,
 Which, thou cast down on earth, couldst heaven adorn!
 O tongue, in which most luscious nectar lies,
 That can at once both bless and make forlorn!
 Dear coral lip. Which beauty beautifies,
 That trembling stood ere that her words were born;
 And you her words! Words! No, but golden chains!”

JP: I Long for Thy Virginite. Well, Drummond’s longing for Euphemia Cunningham of Barns was never met, for she died shortly before they were to be married. But in those days life was often cut short, and with it not just love, but much else that might have been written down had the Lady Margaret Wemysses of this world lived beyond their ‘teens.

RMack: In the Wemyss manuscript which was written down by a young lass who died when she was seventeen I think, or eighteen, we don’t know what she dies of, she started the manuscript when she was eleven, and you can see the development. The first pieces are really terrible, awful, she can hardly write on the page: but by the end of the manuscript you’re getting a lot of beautiful beautiful tunes, some of my favourite tunes from that period.

The Wemyss manuscript was compiled round about 1640 - 50, er very little English influence if any at all. The main body of work is Scots followed by French and they’re also using different tunings and different instruments from the earlier manuscripts. They’re using what really were the latest fashion in France. Much bigger lutes – 10 and 12-course lutes.

JP: Here then is Rob MacKillop playing Milne’s Lilt from the Wemyss manuscript along with another Drummond poem to his lute, recalling its origins as part of a tree, but lamenting the imagined loss of his beloved. His poet’s heart perhaps foretells that he was indeed to lose his fiancée.

Anon - Lilt-Milne
Rob McKillop
CD Flowers of the Forest
Greentrax CDTRAX 155 track 25

JP Voice-over:

“My lute, be as thou wast when thou didst grow
 With thy green mother in some shady grove,
 When immelodious winds but made thee move,
 And birds on thee their ramage did bestow.
 Sith that dear voice which did thy sounds approve,
 Which us’d in such harmonious strains to flow,
 Is reft from earth to tune those spheres above,
 What art thou but a harbinger of woe?”

Thy pleasing notes be pleasing notes no more,
 But orphan wailings to the fainting ear,
 Each stop a sigh, each sound draws forth a tear:
 Be therefore silent as in woods before,
 Or if that any hand to touch thee deign,
 Like widow'd turtle, still her loss complain."

RMack: Well it's sad. It's an odd thing in Scottish music that most of the music is in the major key, which is usually is what your school music teacher would describe as a happy interval, but the Scots have this incredible talent for turning it into a sad miserable interval and there is a melancholy which I suppose is in a lot of lute music – the Elizabethans certainly had made a lot of hoocha about the melancholy in their music and it's true. But the Scots had a particular quality of melancholy which certainly Drummond picked up on and you hear it a lot in this Wemyss manuscript wonderful wonderful music.

JP: William Drummond would have known and played music such as this in his perch at Hawthornden above the River Esk. Safe in his retreat with his mistress and then his wife and children, the world might have passed him by. But he was not unaware of what went on elsewhere. His father had moved south with James the 6th and when, in 1612, King James's eldest son, Prince Henry, died in his late 'teens, Drummond composed an elegy, better than most of the effusions that the Prince's death evoked. Down south, Robert Ramsey was also mourning the death of the Prince. We don't know Ramsey's nationality for sure, but it's likely that he was related to the family of Ramsey trumpeters who went south with the Scottish Court, and this is his "What tears, dear Prince". The words are by Sir Walter Raleigh.

Robert Ramsey (ed. Timothy Symonds) - What tears Dear Prince
Magnificat Choir and Players/Philip Cave
ASV Gaudeamus CDGAU 138 Track 11

JP: Robert Ramsey's lament for the death of young Prince Henry. But let's have a brief respite from melancholy. If there *was* just cause for it, it has to be admitted that it was also a fashion, and fashions wear thin after a time. So do monarchs. James the 6th and first died without any great sorrowing on the part of the public either north or south of the border. He'd only returned to Scotland once anyway. But had the people known what sort of a successor Charles the 1st was to make, they might have mourned James's death more thoroughly!

It took Charles eight years before he deigned to come north to receive the Scottish crown in 1633. He'd even proposed that the ceremony be conducted in London. This open insult to the Scottish throne has been repeated all too recently, when the Queen arrived in a lounge suit to receive the Scottish Honours after her London coronation, but Charles was received with a fantastic display of cultured tableaux as he entered by the West Port of Edinburgh and proceeded down the High Street. Drummond wrote screeds of tedious laudatory poetry for the occasion. We don't have any of the music, but this is the sort of stuff you might have heard from the local musicians – a medley of tunes which were not after all the sole possession of the melancholy lute, but part of joyous sport and entertainment for other musicians:

Anon (ed. James Ross) – Medley
Coronach

**CD A Scots Tune
CMF 007**

JP: Coronach with a splendid medley of the sort that might have greeted Charles the First for his belated Scottish coronation. But I can't resist ending today with this wonderful tune, wonderfully entitled "Wo Betyd Thy Wearie Body". Round and round it goes, spinning like the earth, described in this beautiful poem by Drummond in which the lute is an image for the whole world, the whole world resonating in the lute:-

**Anon (Straloch MS) – Wo betyd thy wearie bodie
Ronn McFarlane
CD The Scottish Lute
Dorian DOR 90129 Track 25**

JP Voice-over:

"God, binding with hid tendons this great All,
Did make a lute which had all parts it given;
This lute's round belly was the azur'd heaven,
The rose those lights which he did there instal;
The basses were the earth and ocean;
The treble shrill the air; the other strings
The unlike bodies were of mixed things:
And then his hand to break sweet notes began.
Those lofty concords did so far rebound,
That floods, rocks, meadows, forests, did them hear,
Birds, fishes, beasts, danc'd to their silver sound;
Only to them man had a deafen'd ear:
Now him to rouse from sleep so deep and long,
God waken'd hath the echo of this song."