Scotland's Music ©BBC 2007
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A Rose for Oswald's Grave
writer/presenter: John Purser
producer: David McGuinness

FX: St Clement's Bells

John Purser: It's early morning in London in the mid eighteenth century. James Oswald, some forty years old and ten years married, is sorting out music at his shop on the north side of St Martin's Church. Oswald had already been publishing in Edinburgh and, back in 1731, writing music in Dunfermline, where he laid the groundwork for his musical misson, to show that Scottish music could demand an honoured place alongside the Italian style which had swamped Europe.

A man could get fed up with the capers of visiting continentals. Oswald had been a dancing master and knew there was no need for artificial airs and graces. His song The Dancing Master said it all. Pseudo-Italian recitative followed by a lesson in seduction with high-stepping mannerisms verging on the silly.

Oswald: The Dancing Master
Iain Paton, tenor, Concerto Caledonia
CD Colin's Kisses
Linn CKD 101 Track 18

JP: The Dancing Master sung by Iain Paton.

James Oswald was born in Crail in 1710. His dad was the town drummer and was jailed more than once for swearing and drunkenness, so it hadn't been the best of starts in life; but Jamie's heart was always in Scotland and Scotland's heart was with him. He'd proof of that in a poem published in The Scots Magazine. It was by none other than the great Allan Ramsay protesting at Oswald's defection to London in 1741, and naming some of the tunes he used to play. Reading it over, Oswald must have felt that defection keenly:

Oswald (Tam Dean Burn):

"Dear Oswald, could my verse as sweetly flow,
As notes thou softly touchest with the bow,
While all the circling fair attentive hing,
On ilk vibration of thy trembling string,
I'd sing how thou woulds't melt our sauls away
By solemn notes, or chear us wi' the gay,
In verse as lasting as thy tunes shall be,
As soft as thy new polish'd Danton me.

But wha can sing that feels wi' sae great pain
The loss for which Edina sighs in vain?
Our concert now nae mair the Ladies mind;
They've a' forgot the gait to Niddery's wynd.
Nae mair the Braes of Ballandine can charm,
Nae mair can Fortha's Bank our bosoms warm,

Nae mair the Northern Lass attention draw,
Nor Pinky-house gi' place to Alloa.

Oswald: Alloway House
Alison McGillivray, cello
BBC recording

JP voice-over: Amongst the tunes that Ramsay had listed, Oswald knew that Alloway House was one of his own, composed for one of many aristocratic patrons in Perthshire and Fife: as he read on, the tune was running through his head.

Oswald (Tam Dean Burn):

"O JAMIE! when may we expect again
To hear from thee, the soft the melting strain,

Alas! no more shall thy gay tunes delight,
No more thy notes sadness or joy excite,
No more thy solemn bass's awful sound,
Shall from the chapel's vaulted roof rebound.

London, alas! which aye has been our bane,
To which our very loss is certain gain,
Where our daft Lords and Lairds spend all their rents,
In following ilka fashion she invents,

Still envious of the little we had left,
Of JAMIE OSWALD last our town bereft.

JP: But it was time to stop this self-indulgent nostalgia. There was more money in London, more musicians and there was Mary Ann Melville – a cut above him socially but paying a call before the shop was open. Did he imagine that two and a half centuries later one of his descendants would be charting their romance?

Heather Melville: **"**He married a Mary Anne Melville, who was said to be the grand-daughter of Robert Melville of Garscado, in Fife, near Ceres, and it was a runaway marriage – they married in London in1744 in St James's Piccadilly and I – my branch of the family - acquired the name of Melville again, presumably through the marriage of his eldest daughter. The Melville family obviously disapproved of this - definitely. Whether it was a social disapproval or whether it was a religious disapproval – the Melville family were known to be very zealous Presbyterians at the time, or whether political, I just have no idea: but it is very definite that the Melville family disapproved of this."

***JP*:** James and Mary's marriage was a success. It produced three daughters and no doubt inspired many songs. In particular, Colin's Kisses, a mini-song-cycle of twelve different kisses to words by Robert Dodsley. Dodsley and Oswald had much in common. Where Oswald had been a dancing master and become a composer and music publisher, Dodsley had been a butler and become a writer and major literary publisher. James Oswald nonetheless had had to elope with his Mary and The Secret Kiss will have reflected their own need for concealment. But the repeated words and

brief rests beautifully translate any initial hesitancy into repeated kisses – ending up with her open-ended invitation -"Kiss, kiss – or what you will."

Oswald: The Secret Kiss
Catherine Bott, soprano Iain Paton, tenor Concerto Caledonia
CD Colin's Kisses,
Linn CKD 101 Track 5

***JP*:** Oswald's the Secret Kiss, sung by Catherine Bott and Iain Paton.

Oswald had been publishing Scots tunes since his days in Edinburgh, and he continued on an even greater scale in London, collecting and publishing literally hundreds of them in a collection he called The Caledonian Pocket Companion: but he had his own ways with Scottish melody. This is how he treated Polwart on the Green, sturdy and assertive, but with sparkling variations.

Oswald: Sonata of Scots Tunes - Polwart on the Green
Concerto Caledonia
CD Colin's Kisses
Linn CKD 101 Track 17

JP: Oswald's shop sold much more than his own music. Geminiani, Burney, Reid, and Sammartini, were all published by him, and he also produced a Musical Magazine. On top of all this, he was teaching fiddle, flute and cello and composing regularly for concerts in the Public Gardens and the stage, for which it is clear that he got much of his inspiration from London life. We may imagine him going out to some tavern or coffee-house for his lunch, summoned perhaps by the sound of St Clement's bells playing Oranges and Lemons. The porters still went past its old graveyard carrying fruit up from the boats on the river Thames, and along the street were women with barrows selling fruit. It was probably one of these who inspired his Wheelbarrow Cantata. Perhaps he'd seen one of the porters chatting up a pretty girl selling cherries. He called him Porter Will and her – Cerissa – Cherry. But she was too proud for a mere Porter, and Oswald turned the whole scene into a satire on snobbery at any level of society, including taking a dig at Italian musical snobbery. He could see it engraved already: The Wheelbarrow – a Favourite Cantata Set by Mr Oswald.

Oswald: **The Wheelbarrow**
Susan Hamilton, soprano Jamie MacDougall, tenor
David Greenberg, violin Alison McGillivray, cello David McGuinness, harpsichord
BBC recording *(the cantata is available complete on the Scotland's Music website)*

JP: Oswald's Wheelbarrow Cantata. If the course of true love didn't always run smooth, neither did it for Oswald. By 1756, his wife, Mary Anne had died, leaving him in charge of their three daughters and his brother's illegitimate daughter. This may well have occasioned a supportive intimacy from Leonora Robinson-Lytton. Oswald and John Robinson-Lytton were friends and musical allies, and when John died, his widow Leonora secretly married Jamie Oswald. They lived quietly together at Knebworth, which her husband had owned. It's one of England's greatest stately homes, and Oswald became, in effect, master of it.

It can't be claimed that Oswald composed any really substantial pieces of music; he was more of a miniaturist. But at this he was unsurpassed and he did gather his miniatures together to make a greater whole. In the case of his Airs for the Seasons, there are no less than 96 – each one a kind of tiny sonata describing a different flower, arranged by the season. His patron, the Prince of Wales,

was expanding the gardens at Kew and Oswald clearly was aware of all the latest imported plants – including once called the Marvel of Peru. This is the third movement of the sonata. It's a French Musette, imitating their bagpipes. It's played by Evelyn Nallen and Timothy Roberts:-

Oswald: The Marvel of Peru – Musette
Evelyn Nallen, recorder Timothy Roberts, harpsichord
CD The Nightingale in Love
ASV DCA 606 Track 3

JP: But Oswald was equally at home with less exotic plants. This is the second movement of The Thistle, published in 1761. Think of it as part of a Scottish posy he might have presented to his secret wife to be, Leonora. An Amoroso movement sentimental with recollections and love, and a Brilliante joyous in anticipation.

Oswald: The Thistle - Amoroso; Brilliante
Concerto Caledonia
CD Colin's Kisses
Linn CKD 101 Track 3

*JP***:** It's time to close the door on Oswald's shop. He closed it himself. After all, the village drummer's son had risen to the heights of British society. I called this programme "A Rose for Oswald's Grave", because I wish I could place one there. Oswald died at Knebworth in 1769, but many of the gravestones there are indecipherable and we don't know which is his: unless he'd been quietly and anonymously placed by Leonora in the tomb she herself was to occupy. But that's the stuff of romance and not proper to this account.

Oswald: Serenata No. 4 – Languido: Largo
Concerto Caledonia
CD Colin's Kisses
Linn CKD 101 Track 25

JP voice-over: If social mores had dictated that his first marriage was an elopement and his second kept a secret, there had at least been one major public honour – his appointment in 1761 as Chamber Composer to George III. Miniaturist? Minor figure? Listen to this, the first movement of Oswald's Serenata number 4, composed to honour that appointment. This is beauty and mastery. It wasn't just the heights of society he had reached, but the heights of music itself.