

Scotland's Music © 2007
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Lady and Gentlemen
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Helen Hopekirk: Dance To Your Shadow
private recording
Gary Steigerwalt, piano

John Purser voiceover: This is the Scottish tune, Dance to Your Shadow, arranged by Helen Hopekirk. Who she? Just another of those forgotten Scottish musicians whose fame in their own time has disappeared almost out of hearing. I'd never heard of her until two Americans got in touch with me and, last year, their efforts culminated in a Helen Hopekirk centenary concert in her home town of Portobello. But if it weren't for them, she'd have remained as neglected as before.

JP: Helen Hopekirk's arrangement of Dance to Your Shadow played by Gary Steigerwalt, who sent us this message:

Gary Steigerwalt: In early 1987, my wife, pianist Dana Muller noticed several piano pieces by Helen Hopekirk on the shelves of a library in Northampton, Massachusetts near where we live. The scores had not been checked out since 1922, but Dana thought the pieces were worth a closer look. After a little digging, we learned that Hopekirk also had enjoyed illustrious careers as a pianist and a teacher and that four of her former pupils were still living in Massachusetts.

JP: It was never a good idea to be a woman if you wanted to be a composer or even a concert artist. Back in the 19th Century the young pianist, Robina Laidlaw, made a name for herself in Europe. But then she got married, had children and that was the end of that. Of course once they stopped castrating male singers the female sopranos and contraltos did well enough. Nellie Melba was one. She gave her name to peach melba but actually 'Melba' wasn't her name, it was Helen Porter Mitchell and her father was a Forfarshire farmer. But neither of these virtuoso performers was a composer. Helen Hopekirk was both.

Hopekirk was born in Portobello in 1856 and died in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1945. Her works include a lost piano concerto, an impressive Konzertstück for piano and orchestra, many songs and piano pieces and the beautiful song cycle Der Nordsee, setting poems by Heinrich Heine. It's not surprising that she should set poems in German because, like so many Scottish musicians of the 19th century, that's where she studied, as did her teacher Alexander Campbell Mackenzie. We're going to hear the last song of the cycle. It's a beauty. The poet dreams he's dead, buried under the snow but with the light from the eyes of the stars falling on his grave, serenely happy and full of love.

Helen Hopekirk: Es Träumte mir von einer weiten Heide (Nordsee Lieder)
Melinda Spratlan, soprano Gary Steigerwalt, piano
private recording

JP: The concluding song of Helen Hopekirk's song-cycle, Nordsee Lieder. Another of our neglected composers who studied in Germany was the virtuoso pianist, Frederick Lamond. He was born in Glasgow in 1868, the son of an impoverished weaver, and became one of Europe's finest

pianists. Here, Lamond himself describes his first meeting with his great teacher, none other than Franz Liszt:

Frederic Lamond interview rec 25.3.45
BBC sound archive

JP: And this is the Etude from Lamond's own first published composition - the Clavierstück Opus 1, played by William Wright.

Lamond: Clavierstück op.1
William Wright, piano
BBC recording

JP: The Etude from Lamond's Clavierstück, opus 1. Lamond also composed a beautiful cello sonata, a piano trio, an overture from the Scottish Highlands, an opera - and a symphony, of which this is a brief taste from the Scherzo and Trio, looking back fondly to Beethoven and forward to Mahler, but not without a hint of Scotland lurking in its melodies and textures.

Lamond: Symphony in A major - Scherzo
BBC SSO/Martyn Brabbins
Hyperion CDA67387 Track 3

JP: Part of the scherzo of Frederick Lamond's Symphony in A with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra conducted by Martyn Brabbins. Born in the same year as Lamond (1868), was Sir John Blackwood McEwen. He was less conspicuous as a performer and more retiring as a man, but he took his composing much more seriously and we're going to hear a little of his Viola Concerto, specially recorded for us. The soloist is Scott Dickinson.

McEwen: Viola concerto - excerpt from 1st movement
Scott Dickinson, viola, BBC SSO/Stefan Solyom
BBC recording

JP: Part of the impressive first movement of McEwen's Viola Concerto with Scott Dickenson and the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra conducted by Stefan Solyon. The second movement's an Allegretto grazioso – and gracious indeed it is.

McEwen: Viola concerto - excerpt from 2nd movement
Scott Dickinson, viola, BBC SSO/Stefan Solyom
BBC recording

JP: The final movement from this special recording of McEwen's viola concerto is as cheerful as a summer day with the solo viola at last being allowed to step out of the shadows into its sunny landscape.

McEwen: Viola concerto - excerpt from 3rd movement
Scott Dickinson, viola, BBC SSO/Stefan Solyom
BBC recording

JP: The music we've been listening to is scarcely known, and was all composed before the First World War. But Lamond, McEwen and Hopekirk all lived through that war, as did McEwen's

employer and Hopekirk's teacher, Sir Alexander Campbell Mackenzie. Mackenzie had been Principal of the Royal Academy of Music in London for some thirty years. Here he sadly recalls the devastating effect of the First World War on the institution he had rescued and made his own:

Sir Alexander Campbell Mackenzie (Tam Dean Burn): "Of these four years memory retains but a confused jumble of nightmarish happenings. The male students . . . disappeared, leaving only a few youngsters in what had become a girls' school ... a determination to uphold the normal standard of excellence and the honour of the institution was exceptionally keen. One would rather forget than remember the trials of those days. ... When on leave from France, our lads seemed at once to be irresistibly attracted to their Alma Mater, where an affectionate welcome from young and old awaited them. How often have I noted the sudden transition from boy to man. Some, alas! paid us their last visit."

JP: Just four years later, came the Royal Academy of Music's Centenary. How could its Principal celebrate? And yet he must. Subtle, sensitive old man that he was, he composed an overture called Youth, Sport and Loyalty. Nothing maudlin, nothing bombastic - until the very end with a brief, splendidly harmonised excerpt from the National Anthem.

**Trad arr. Wright: Regimental Quick March: The King's Own Border Regiment
The Regimental band of the King's Own Scottish Border Regiment, Bandleader
CD Battle Honours
Bandleader BNA5075 Track 17**

JP voiceover: But the tune representing Sport is D'ye Ken John Peel?, and that song's about a hunt to the death and the echo of John Peel's horn in the morning – for John Peel himself is dead. Mackenzie knew this was the March of the Border Regiment, and he knew the price that Youth had paid for its Loyalty. Quietly, so that almost no one would know, Mackenzie paid his tribute while still waving the flag of youth. This is John Peel played by the Border Regimental Band.

JP: And here comes John Peel trotting into Mackenzie's overture.

**Mackenzie: Youth Sport and Loyalty
BBC SSO/Clark Rundell
BBC recording**

JP: And finally, you'll hear the two tunes together – John Peel in the bass and God Save the King - in the last bars of Youth, Sport and Loyalty – ah! if only I'd held onto youth, sport and loyalty myself!

**Mackenzie: Youth Sport and Loyalty
BBC SSO/Clark Rundell
BBC recording**