

Scotland's Music © BBC 2007

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Fair Play

writer/presenter: John Purser

producer: David McGuinness

Roy Williamson - Flower of Scotland

sung by the Murrayfield crowd March 17, 1990

BBC recording

John Purser voiceover: This is the rugby fans singing Flower of Scotland at the opening of Scotland's immortal Calcutta Cup, Triple Crown and Grand Slam win at Murrayfield in 1990. Many attribute that victory to the atmosphere built up by the singing of the song – our unofficial sporting national anthem. The victory was a determined and frequently defensive one. Against England we're playing an opposition which should, on the basis of population, be ten times stronger than ourselves, and when it comes to the backward look of The Corries' Flower of Scotland, most Scots thinks of the defeat of England's King Edward and his vastly superior forces, by Scotland's King Robert the Bruce, backed by the camp-followers who turned the tide, charging down the hill when the outcome looked doubtful.

It's wildly romantic, utterly unreasonable, wholly unsporting, and wonderfully effective. Who can seriously object to Flower of Scotland, for all that it's full of echoes of warfare and sung by people who, for the most part, would not give their country so much as a nose-bleed in its defence? But that day, with that song, we know that the team gave everything they had and they won. Great! Such is the power of music – for it would never have worked if it had simply been shouted: it had to be sung.

JP: Well, warfare or sport, I've called this programme Fair Play. The idea of fair play has been attributed to the Celts – not by the Celts, but by a Polish scholar of Celtic languages. Who am I to question his wisdom? Of course we Celts are amongst the finest exponents of fair play.

You don't believe me? Here's what Wojciech Liponski has to say: "the Celtic contribution to the historical development of the fair play concept is beyond any doubt while English 'exclusive rights' to that concept are no longer exclusive."

Fair play, of course, has nothing to do with refereeing, which belongs to a completely different kind of concept. If the ref happens to be a Masonic bastard, or indeed a Fenian bastard, these are sad facts we fair-play supporters have to thole. On the other hand, if the ball boys at Hampden are a tad slow at returning the ball when Scotland are leading France and there's only a minute left to play, we rejoice in their knowledge of the deep inner workings of fair play. And if the opposition happens to be English, then everything's fair play - and what gives me a sense of vast Celtic fair play pride is that we've ever so much music to cheer us on in support of it.

In fact we've been Fitba' Mad since at least the 1880s when "The Dooley Fitba' Club" was published in Dundee as a Broadside Ballad. Here's Robin Hall and Jimmy MacGregor's take on it:-

Trad. arr Hall and MacGregor – Football Crazy

Robin Hall and Jimmy MacGregor

SINGLE Decca 45F-11266

JP: Well, that song was a hundred and twenty years ago and here's Adam McNaughtan also living in the past:

Trad. arr F. Allison and J. Eaglesham – The Twin-Towered Stand

Adam McNaughtan

CD Last Stand at Mount Florida

Greentrax CDTRAX 120 Track 13

JP: Last Stand at Mount Florida, with Adam MacNaughtan. But we're still fitba' mad and, of course utterly devoted to the concept of fair play – and it isn't confined to football. My father recalled an Irish supporter at a rugby match against England. An English player was heading with the ball for the try-line when the Irish supporter was heard to cry out "Holy Mary, Mother o' God, will you not take the legs from under the heretic!", which proves the point that fair play really is a Celtic concept. In fact the Irish have been really helpful in this fair play business.

Trad - The Sash

Milltown Loyalist Flute Band

CD Ulster's Greatest Bands Meet

Ulster Records Track 1

Anon - Big Paddy Bonnar

Legend Lives On

CD Hail! Hail! Celtic

Cherry Red CDGAFFER 12 Track 15

JP: Well, The Sash My father Wore was played by Milltown Loyalist Flute Band, harking back to protestant victories in the late 17th century, and they were followed by Big Paddy Bonner – a song in praise of that great Celtic goalkeeper from the west of Donegal – which makes him an Ulsterman too, though whether he sings the Sash with gusto or no is quite another matter. Being a mere armchair fan myself, and therefore totally inexperienced in these matters, I asked the former Chelsea and Everton player, Pat Nevin, how important he thought singing was in sport.

Pat Nevin interview:

Well, on quite a few occasions I've been involved in records that have been made by Scotland squads, and almost every one of them has been absolutely dreadful from my point of view. There was one that we sang with Rod Stewart which was almost passable, but even that, you know, I never think it worked particularly well, they usually seem to be a money-making venture. Also I was very disappointed one year when England managed to steal New Order to do a song and that charted very well, and sold very well, and it's the only New Order song in my life that I never bought, because it was the England world cup song.

But I think the real songs are the songs of the fans, and that's the ones that have the most power, and if we're talking about Scotland, my memories of Flower of Scotland. We were told we had to learn the words when we were in the under-18s with a certain Andy Roxburgh who was the under-18s manager at the time. And it actually cemented me as a Scotsman, and I can remember the date, I remember the moment, it was back in 1981, it was in the summer, I was playing in Mexico City for Scotland under-20s against Mexico in the Aztec Stadium with 110 000 people. And above that maniacal riot I could hear 200 Scots fans in the corner singing their hearts out Flower of Scotland. At that moment, I knew how Scottish I was, because I knew how important Scotland was to these people, and how the football was to these people, and how they were so linked with each other, and

even though recently there have been calls and suggestions to change that as the anthem that's sung before the national games, I'm certainly one person because of the memories I have of that, that hopes that never changes.

JP: Well, here's one of the contenders.

Reid/Reid - I'm Gonna Be (500 miles)

The Proclaimers

CD Sunshine on Leith

Chrysalis CCD 1668 Track 1

JP: The Proclaimers with I'm Gonna Be (500 miles), now sung as an alternative national anthem at Hampden Park. But I doubt if it'll ever replace *Flower of Scotland*.

Pat Nevin interview:

You often hear at Scottish rugby matches they'll sing Flower of Scotland, and they'll sing it in time. The Scottish Tartan Army with the football are not necessarily quite as good at that, but when it does go right it is fantastically good, it gives you a phenomenal lift.

I've got great memories of various places that I've been throughout the world with Scottish sides. I was a big Celtic supporter as a youngster, but recently saw Celtic in Milan, and they sang. They sang Celtic songs, and there were no party songs, there was none of that nonsense involved in it there, and they sang the whole 90 minutes, in fact it was 120 minutes because it went to extra time. And we had great worries about the problems with the fans in Italy, because there had been a death of a policeman quite recently, and at the end of the game 20 000 Milan fans walked the quarter of a mile to half a mile round the stadium, half an hour after the game, to form a guard of honour for the Celtic fans to walk through them, because they had sung so incredibly well, they had got behind their team. They had quite obviously lifted their team as well, and it was an incredibly moving moment.

And it's those sort of moments – I've done the unthinkable in football and I'm now a Hibernian supporter, I changed about five or six years ago, and they're my favourite team - and I have to say, maybe throughout my whole life, that the most moving thing I've ever heard was very recently. It was in the CIS cup final at the end of the game – many people know that Celtic sing Walk On, or Rangers sing Simply the Best and we know what that means – but the Hibernian fans were singing Sunshine on Leith at the top of their voices, a wonderful Proclaimers song which can be a lament, but can also be joyous as well. It was an extraordinarily moving moment for the fans, for the players and for the manager John Collins as well, because there were tears in his eyes as he watched his fans singing that after their 5-1 win, so the importance of it is very very clear to see.

Reid/Reid – Sunshine on Leith

The Proclaimers [and the Hibernian crowd at Hampden on 18 March 2007]

CD Sunshine on Leith

Chrysalis CCD 1668 Track 6

JP: The Proclaimers, with Sunshine on Leith. Not all football songs are full of sunshine, though they can be witty.

Pat Nevin interview:

My difficulty with the witty singing is that most of it is completely unbroadcastable – well, it's broadcast sometimes because we can often hear it in the background of the commentary, and you can't really commentate on it. You know, I'm often doing the co-comms on a lot of these games, and you hear something in the background that's very very funny indeed, but it has to be said, all the funniest ones are usually unrepeatable.

JP: Perhaps it's time to move north, away from the green and blue and the maroon, to the red – which brings me to Aberdeen. I don't know what those sheep are doing in the background, but whatever is implied, Michael Marra's song, Reynard in Paradise, brings an extraordinary rough beauty to the beautiful game.

Reynard is a fox who once invaded the pitch at an Aberdeen-Celtic game, and Paradise is another name for Celtic's Parkhead football ground. And when the Reds of Aberdeen came to play, the fox didn't see any huntsmen anymore, but "a working model of the one big thing".

Michael Marra- Reynard in Paradise

Michael Marra

CD Posted Sober

Inner City Sound ICS001 Track 5

JP: Michael Marra's Reynard in Paradise - a wonderful song, wonderfully sung. But just in case we start taking ourselves too seriously, we're going to end with Ivor Cutler's Pass the ball Jim. It ends suspiciously like a bit of Flower of Scotland. Years ago we broadcast an April Fool on Radio Scotland. I pretended to have discovered a Mendelssohn manuscript in Edinburgh – a piano piece called Eine Schottische Blume – Flower of Scotland. Listen out and maybe you'll recognise it.

Ivor Cutler - Pass the ball Jim (for John Peel)

Ivor Cutler with Linda Hirst

LP Privilege

Rough Trade ROUGH59 Side 2 Track 15

Roy Williamson arr. David Dorward – Eine Schottische Blume

David McGuinness, piano

BBC recording