

The Cry of the Harp: A Harper's Tour of Scotland

James Ruff, Tenor & Early Gaelic Harp
2021 BEMF Fringe Festival

Program

- (0:34) Fàilte Mhic Cai/Lord Reay's Salute – tune from A Collection of Ancient Scots Music, Daniel Dow, 1776
- (2:08) Welcome talk
- (4:08) Port 1, Port 2 – tunes from the MacLean-Clephane MS, Isle of Mull, copied 1816
- (9:47) Cumha Ni Mhic Raghnaill/Ni Mhic Raghanill's Lament - Scottish Gaelic lament, composed c. 1663 by sister of the two MacDonal of Keppoch victims, Alasdair & Raghnaill
- (17:14) MacDonal of Keppach's Lamentation being Murdered by his two Cusin German's – tune from A Collection of Ancient Scots Music, Daniel Dow 1776
- (18:59) Lady Lothian's Lilt – from the Panmure MS, Scotland 17th c. Transcribed from lute tablature by Vicente da Camera.
- (21:51) Puirt à Beul set - Traditional Scottish Gaelic vocal dance music, from the singing of Kenna Campbell
- (25:27) McGregor's Search - from The Gesto Collection, 1895, as well as A Collection of Ancient Scots Music, Daniel Dow, 1776
- (28:18) Iseabail Nic Aoidh – Pibroch song by Rob Donn MacAoidh (1714-1778), c. 1747
- (31:31) Port Atholl - attrib. Rorie Dall; tune from A Collection of Ancient Scots Music, 1776
- (34:45) A' Choille Gruamach/The Gloomy Forest – by Scottish Bard, Iain Mac Ailein (John MacLean), 1819; emigrated from Scotland to Barney's River, Antigonish County, Nova Scotia
- (39:16) Cumha Iarla Wigton/Earl of Wigton's Lament – tune from A Collection of Ancient Scots Music, Daniel Dow, 1776.

Program Notes

From ancient times, the Gaelic Music Tradition was an oral tradition, and one that continues as such to this day. Fortunately, there was a movement to record some parts of this tradition before it was lost, first on paper and later via sound recording. The mid-18th century saw the beginnings of a movement to collect Gaelic music in the Highlands as well as in Ireland, much of which was published, often arranged for modern instruments - the fiddle or the piano. It is an interesting exercise in the fertile meeting of Classical music and Traditional music to attempt to recreate the

music of the Early Gaelic Harp – an ancient oral tradition though including repertoire and information recorded by eyewitness musicians in the late 18th century.

The Early Gaelic Harp or Clarsach is known to have been played for about 1000 years: from around 800AD – its evidence seen on stone carvings in both Ireland and Scotland - until it died out in Ireland around 1800AD. This was never a folk instrument, but rather the ‘High Art’ instrument of the Gaelic peoples, and its players were highly valued musicians in the courts of Earls and Clan Chiefs, as well as Kings and Queens. Though we are now used to hearing fast traditional dances played on the harp, this fashion appeared with the folk revival of the 1960’s; Prior to this, the harp had its own repertoire. In fact, early Gaelic texts describe Clan feasts in detail, telling of guests dancing wildly to the music of the pipes, and when they tired, the harps were brought out to soothe their spirits.

Along with the *Piper*, the *Poet* and the *Fool* (Jester), the Harper made up part of the *Aos Dana*: those who practiced the Gaelic Arts, and were assembled and supported at court by nobility. They were required to provide music for important occasions such as births, deaths, and the arrival of important guests. They were given lands and prestige in court. With time, the harpers also took on the writing of poetry and sang their own works. With the fall of Gaelic Order – 1690 in Ireland and 1745 in Scotland – these artists were no longer supported by noble courts, and harpers became traveling musicians, the last example of this being the famous Turlough Carolan in Ireland.

In this concert, I am attempting to give you a sampling of some of the courtly music that might have been played and sung at the homes of the Scottish nobility through Scotland. I am making use of some of my own recent research on the old harp tunes called ‘Ports,’ both in the MacLean Clephane MS from the Isle of Mull (now in the library of Trinity College Dublin), as well as the first publication of early Scottish music: Daniel Dow’s 1776 ‘Collection of Ancient Scots Music.’ The Ports, which largely show up in written form in the 17th century Scottish Lute Books, make up one of the genres of music composed for the Early Gaelic Harp. Even the semi-mythical 17th c. harper Rorie Dall appears as composer of Port Atholl on this program. In fact, Atholl was a great crossroads of travel in central Scotland (Perthshire), and where the noble families had a great love of the harp – both the Queen Mary Harp and the Lamont Harp were owned by the Robertson family near here. It was also the location of the famed *Taigh nan Teud* (House of Strings) – probably a place where travelers waited to change coaches, horses, etc. and where much music was played to pass their time there. The lovely Lady Lothian’s Lilt comes to us from the 17th c. Panmure MS – which includes music taken by the Scottish Royal Family to France when they went into exile.

I’ve included two different versions of Cumha, or Laments – another of the genres expected to be composed and played by a 17th c. harper. The Ni Mhic Raghnaill Lament is an impassioned song of sorrow by the sister of two famous MacDonald of Keppoch brothers murdered in 1663 of in Argyle: a recurring example of sisters bemoaning their brothers’ death in Gaelic poetry and song. The Lament for the Earl of Wigton was probably composed for the first Earl of Wigton,

John Fleming, who died in southwest Scotland in 1619, having been ambassador for James I to Christian the IV of Denmark. It is a set of variations in fiddle pibroch style, said to have been taken over from harp pibroch. I have also included a Fàilte or Salute for Lord Rey up in Sutherland, a musical welcome, which may have come from the early harp repertoire.

I've included a few different styles of early Scottish song. The lovely pibroch song *Isebail Nic Aoidh* by the famed poet Rob Donn from Sutherland shows the popular use of pipe music in Gaelic poetry in the mid 18th century, where we hear the form of the pibroch, as well as the wonderful Gaelic language rhythms imitate the short cutting notes of the pipes. A set of *Puirt à beul* or vocal dance music – though uncertain of their age - certainly bring out the sheer joy of the Gael in aural qualities of their language. The lilt, rhythm and rhymes are all encompassing and overlay much need for deep poetic meaning. Lastly, probably the most beautiful Gaelic song from Nova Scotia, *A' Choille Ghruamach*, displays a deep resonance of the long musical and poetic tradition of the Gael. It perfectly elicits their strong love and longing for their homeland in its warning to friends back home of the perils found in their new North American home.

Cry of the Harp: Gaelic Song Translations

Cumha Nì Mhic Raghnaill na Ceapaich

Dh' èirich mise moch Di-dòmhnach
Hò rò 's na hù ill ò rò
'S shuidh mi air an tulaich bhòidhich
Fàth mo leann-duibh hò rò
'S daingean a bhuaill iad anns gach taobh sibh
Bhràithrean nan gaol, ò chòin!

Shuidh mi air an tulaich bhòidhich
'S leig mi air an tuireadh bhrònach
Ràinig mi Ceappach na dòrainn,
Taigh a' Chnocain 's e gun chòmhladh
Dh'fhosgail mi doras an t-seòmair
'S i falach barr-iall mo bhrògan,
Fuil ur cuim an dèis a dòrtadh
'S teann nach d' òl mi fèin mo leòr dhi
'S i fuil Alasdair a leòn mi,
Is fuil Raghnaill duinn a b'òige.
Dìol na muice duibhe, dòighte
Air gach aon a bha mun fheòlach.
Tha mi 'n earbsa 'n Rìgh na glòireadh
Gun toir sibh dhachaigh an tòrachd.

Puirt-à-beul

A' mhisg a chuir an Nollaig oirnn
Cha robh dìth dollaidh oirnn

Nì Mhic Raghnaill's Lament

I arose early on Sunday
Ò rò 's na hù ill ò rò
And I sat on the lovely knoll
The reason for my misery, hò rò
Strongly they attacked you on all sides
Beloved brothers, ò chòin!

I sat on the lovely knoll
And began the sad lamentation.
I arrived at Keppoch of the hardship,
House on the hill, missing its door
I opened the door of your room,
It covered my shoelaces,
The blood that flowed from your bodies
I nearly drank my fill of it.
It was Alasdair's blood that wounded me,
And of the youngest, brown-haired Ronald.
It must be the curse of the black pig
Upon each one involved in the slaughter.
I put my trust in the King of Glory
That you will avenge them.

Mouth Music

The spree we had at Christmas
We didn't lack for liquor to make us drunk

A' mhisg a chuir an Nollaig oirnn
Cha chuir i tuilleadh call oirnn
A' mhisg a chuir an Nollaig oirnn
Cha robh dìth dollaidh oirnn
A' mhisg a chuir an Nollaig oirnn
Cha chuir i tuilleadh call oirnn

The spree we had at Christmas
Won't cause us any more loss
The spree we had at Christmas
We didn't lack for liquor to make us drunk
The spree we had at Christmas
Won't cause us any more loss

Shaoghail, a shaoghail duibh
Cò chuir an dollaidh oirnn?
A shaoghail, a shaoghail duibh
Cò ghabhadh dall sinn?
A shaoghail, a shaoghail duibh
Cò chuir an dollaidh oirnn?
A' mhisg a chuir an Nollaig oirnn
Cha chuir i tuilleadh call oirnn

World, black world
Who made us drunk?
Oh world, black world
Who would have us as drunk as we were?
Oh world, black world
Who made us so drunk?
The spree we had at Christmas
Won't cause us any more loss

Brochan tìoraidh Anna Tholm,
Brochan tìoraidh, tìoraidh, tìoraidh
Brochan tìoraidh Anna Tholm,
Brochan mòr is grèim ann.

Anna Tholm's scorched porridge
Scorched, scorched, scorched porridge
Anna Thom's scorched porridge
Thick porridge with bite.

Dh'ith thu ìm a' Ghlinne Mhòir,
Dh'ith thu ìm is muc is ìm,
Siud is ìm a' Ghlinne Mhòir
Dh'ith thu siud mun d'fhalbh thu.

You ate butter from the Great Glen
You ate butter, pork and butter
That and Great Glen butter
You ate that before you went away.

Fhir a dh'ith am bonnach mòr
Chunna mis' e 's cha bu bheag e,
Fhir a dh'ith am bonnach mòr

The one who ate the big bannock
I saw him and he was not small,
The one who ate the big bannock

‘S a leth-chairteal annlain.

And half a quarter of the provisions.

Ma bha ‘s gun robh tuilleadh ann,
Gun robh peice mine ann,
‘S gur h-i tè Mhuinntir Mhingenis,
A dh-fhuinn gu tioram teann e.

If there was more
There was a peck of meal there
And it was a woman from Minginish
Who baked it dry and firm.

Cuir sa chiste mhòir mi
‘s còig bonnaich fo mo cheann;
Cuir sa chiste mhine mi
is beag is miste mi bhith ann.

Put me in the meal chest
with five bannocks under my head;
Put me in the meal chest,
I will be none the worse for being there.

Tha buachaille dubh Fionnghal
air iorball a’ reatha dhuibh.
Air iorball air earball
air iorball a’ reatha dhuibh.

Fiona's black-haired shepherd
is on the tail of the black ram
On the tail, on the tail,
on the tail of the black ram

O tha’n tombaca daor,
O tha’n tombaca gini,
O tha’n tombaca daor.
B’fheàrr leam gun robh e tuilleadh.

Oh the tobacco is dear
Oh the tobacco is a guinea
Oh the tobacco is dear
I would prefer it to be more.

Gini air a h-uile phunnd
Punnd air a h-uile gini
Tha e gini air a’ phunnd
Agus punnd air a gini.

A guinea for a whole pound
A pound for the whole guinea,
It is a guinea for the pound
And a pound for the guinea.

Iseabail Nic Aoidh

Iseabail Nic Aoidh aig a’ chrodh-laigh

Isabel MacKay

Isabel MacKay tending the cows with their calves

Iseabail Nic Aoidh is i 'na h-aonar
Iseabail Nic Aoidh aig a' chrodh-laoigh
Iseabail Nic Aoidh is i 'na h-aonar.

A Mhoire is a Rìgh,
A dhuine gun mhnaoi
Ma thig thu a-chaidh
Is i seo do thim
Nach faic thu Nic Aoidh
Aig a' chrodh-laoigh

Am bonaibh na frìth
Am bonnaibh na frìth
Am bonnaibh na frìth is i 'na h-aonar.

Seall sibh air a' cheannaidheachd
An iomallaibh nam mullaichean
Am bliadhna 's i gu muldach
Na h-uile latha 'na h-aonar
Nach faic thu Nic Aoidh
Aig a' chrodh-laoigh

Am bonnaibh na frìth
Am bonnaibh na frìth
Am bonnaibh na frìth is i 'na h-aonar.

A' Choille Ghruamaich

Gu bheil mi 'm ònrachd 's a' choille ghruamaich,
Mo smaointean luaineach, cha tog mi fonn;
Fhuair mi 'n t-àite seo 'n aghaidh nàdair
's gun d' thréig gach tàlant a bha nam cheann;

Isabel MacKay all alone,
Isabel MacKay tending the cows with their calves,
Isabel MacKay all alone.

God and Mary!
You who have no wife
If you go (to seek one),
Now is your time:
Look at Isabel MacKay
Tending the cows with their calves

At the foot of the hills,
At the foot of the hills,
At the foot of the hills, all alone.

Look at the scene
At the edge of the moor:
(She is) sad this year,
Every day all alone.
Look at Isabel MacKay
Tending the cows with their calves

At the foot of the hills,
At the foot of the hills,
At the foot of the hills, all alone.

The Gloomy Wood

I am alone in the gloomy wood
My mind is restless, I cannot raise a tune
I found this place unnatural
And my mind's every talent has deserted me

Cha dèan mi òran a chur air dòigh ann --
Nuair nì mi tòiseachadh bidh mi trom;
Chaill mi a' Ghàidhlig seach mar a b'abhaist dhomh
Nuair a bha mi 's an dùthaich thall

Chan fhaigh mi m' inntinn leam ann an òrdugh
Ged bha mi eòlach air dèanamh rann;
'S e 'mheudaich bròn dhomh 's a lùghdaich sòlas
Gun duine còmhla rium a nì rium cainnt.
Gach latha 's oidhche 's gach car a nì mi
Gum bi mi cuimhneachadh anns gach àm
An tìr a dh'fhàg mi bha 'n taic an t-sàile
Ged tha mi 'n dràs'd ann am bràighe ghleann.

Gur h-ìomadh caochladh tigh'nn air an t-saoghal,
'S ro-bheag a shaoil mi 'n uair bha mi thall;
Bu bheachd domh
nuair sin mu'n d'rinn mi gluasad,
Gum fàsainn uasal nuair thiginn nall
An car a fhuair mi cha b' ann gum bhuannachd
Tigh'nn thar a' chuain air a chuairt 'bha meallt',
Gu tìr nan craobh anns nach eil an t-saorsainn
Gun mhart, gun chaora, 's mi dh'aodach gann.

Chan fhaigh mi innseadh dhuibh anns an dàn seo,
Cha dèan mo nàdar a chur air dòigh,
Gach fios a b' àill leam 'thoirt do mo chàirdean
'S an tìr a dh'fhàg mi, 'rinn m' àrach òg;
Gach aon a leughas e tuigibh reusan,
'S na tugaibh éisdeachd do luchd a' bhòd:
Na fàidhean bréige a bhios 'gar teumadh
'S gun aca spéis dhuibh ach déigh 'ur n-òir

Ged bhithin dichìollach ann an sgrìobhadh
Gu 'n gabhainn mìosa ris agus còrr
Mu 'n cuirinn crìoch air na bheil air m'inntinn
'S mu'n tugainn dhuibh e le cainnt' mo bheòil,
Tha mulad diamhair an dèigh mo lìonadh
Bho'n is èiginn strìochdadh an seo ri'm bheò,
Air bheag thoil-inntinn 's a choille chruim seo,
Gun duine faighneachd an seinn mi ceòl

It cannot create a song for me
When I begin one, I am filled with sorrow
My Gaelic is nothing compared to what it was
When I was in yonder country

I can't get my mind in order
Though I was acquainted with fashioning verse
I have no one to whom to whom I can speak
And this increases sorrow and lessens joy
Each day and night and everything I do
Recalls to my mind
The land that I left, dependent on the sea
Though I am now at the head of a glen

Many changes come over the world
And little did I think of them when I was over there
I thought then, before I emigrated

That I would grow prosperous when I came here
The course I took was not to my gain
Crossing the ocean on a misleading journey
To the land of trees where there's no freedom
Without cattle, without sheep, and short of clothes

I can't tell you in this poem
My mind won't put together
Each piece of information I wish to convey to my friends
In the land I left, where I was reared
May everyone who reads it understand reason
And not listen to the boastful ones
The lying prophets who wound you
Who have no regard for you, but for your gold

Though I were diligent in my writing
I would take a month and more
To finish what is on my mind
And deliver it to you in my own words
A secret sadness has filled me
Since I must surrender to this place forever
With little contentment in this dense forest
Where no one asks me to sing a song

Biography

James Ruff, Tenor and Early Gaelic Harp: Since 2005, James Ruff has focused his energies on researching and performing both the Early Scottish Gaelic Song and the Early Gaelic Wire Harp repertoires. He currently enjoys presenting concerts of this music at festivals and on music series such as the Scoil na gClairseach Festival of the Early Irish Harp in Kilkenny, Ireland, the Boston Early Music Festival Fringe, Gotham Early Music Scene Midtown Concerts in New York, Beacon Hill Concerts in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, Stone Church Arts Concert Series in Bellows Falls, Vermont, and the Vassar College Concert Series.

He has studied Scottish Gaelic Song with award winning Scottish singers Kenna Campbell, Mary Ann Kennedy and Christine Primrose, and early harp techniques with noted Irish harpist Siobhan Armstrong. He has spent two summers studying at the Scoil na gClairseach Harp School in Kilkenny, Ireland - where he now teaches the Early Gaelic Harp. He enjoyed a month researching & studying early Gaelic Song in Edinburgh and Glasgow in 2012, funded by a grant from Vassar College. In both 2017 and 2016, he won First Place/Men's Division and Highest Overall Score in Gaelic Song at both the ACGA North Carolina Gaelic Mòd and the U.S. National Gaelic Mòd. He won Second Place in the Silver Pendant Gaelic Song Competition at the 2018 Royal National Mòd in Dunoon, Scotland, having been a finalist in the same competition in 2009. His first CD, **The Gaels' Honour: Early Music for Harp and Voice from Gaelic Scotland and Ireland**, was released in December 2018.

Mr. Ruff has received critical praise for his versatile singing on both the concert and operatic stage. He has sung as soloist with such Early Music groups as the Handel and Haydn Society, Newberry Consort, King's Noyse, Aradia Ensemble, New York Collegium, Early Music New York, Music of the Baroque, NYS Baroque, My Lord Chamberlain's Consort, Ensemble Abendmusik, La Fenice and Arcadia Players, and under such conductors as Christopher Hogwood, Andrew Parrott and Jane Glover. As a specialist in French Baroque repertoire, he sang Charpentier's *Messe de Minuit* and *Te Deum* over the CBC airwaves from Toronto. He has made numerous tours singing the title role in *The Play of Daniel*, both with Gotham Early Music Scene and Early Music New York, at the Spoleto Festival in Italy as well as in Florida, Tennessee, Missouri and New York City.

On the concert stage, Ruff continues to sing the oratorios and concert works of Mozart, Bach, Haydn and Britten. He has made a specialty of the "Roasting Swan" in Orff's *Carmina Burana*, singing at numerous colleges in the Northeast. He has sung at various summer festivals including Tanglewood, Ravinia, Boston Early Music Festival, Connecticut Early Music Festival and the Spoleto Festival in Italy.

On the operatic stage, Ruff has performed leading roles such as Tamino in Mozart's *The Magic Flute* (Opera New England), Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni* (Longwood Opera) and Ferrando in *Così fan Tutte* (Boston University), the title role in Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* (Concord Symphony), Lindoro in Rossini's *l'Italiana in Algeri* (Harvard University), Don Narciso in *il Turco in Italia* (Boston Academy of Music) and the title role in *Le Comte Ory* (Boston University, Glimmerglass Opera, Canadian Opera Company). He also has sung leading roles in light opera, such as Pâris in Offenbach's *La Belle Hélène* (Boston Academy of Music) and the title role in Romberg's *The Student Prince* (Ohio Light Opera). His work in Baroque opera includes Pirithous in Conradi's *Ariadne* at the Boston Early

Music Festival, various Jesuit operas at Boston College, the title role in Charpentier's *Actéon* at the Longy School and Holofernes in Scarlatti's *Giuditta* with the Newberry Consort. He has enjoyed singing many modern works, including the role of Dov in the U.S. East Coast premiere of Michael Tippett's *The Knot Garden*, and *William of Malmesbury* in Richard Wilson's *Aethelred the Unready*. He was featured in Benjamin Britten's *Paul Bunyan* at Glimmerglass Opera, which was reprised at New York City Opera and broadcast nationally on PBS, "Live from LincolnCenter."

Ruff has served on the music faculties of Smith College, Amherst College, MIT, the University of Connecticut, Emerson College, Longy School of Music, Deerfield Academy and the Walnut Hill School for the Arts. He has taught at Vassar College since 2009 and maintains a private studio for both voice and harp.