

Jock Duncan – The Man and his Songs: Traditional Songs and Bothy Ballads from the repertoire of Jock Duncan of Fyvie and Pitlochry. Compiled and edited by Peter Shephard. Perth: Rymour Books, 2024. Pp. 206. Illus. ISBN 978-1-7394801-7-2.

Jock Duncan (1925–2021) was the grand old man of the Scots song tradition, expert in the history and performance of bothy ballads and older songs. Pete Shephard (himself a folksong expert and long-time champion of Jock’s singing) has brought together and transcribed sixty of Jock’s songs, along with comprehensive notes on their context and background.

The first quarter of the book is edited from Jock’s own writings. It’s partly an autobiography of his early life and of the local characters he grew up surrounded by. Jock’s natural storytelling is heard throughout, whether discussing farming techniques now long superseded, or introducing bothy ballads like ‘Bogheid of Asleid’ and ‘Nether-ton of Millbrenx’ long neglected by singers. He finishes with a commentary on the singers he was influenced by and those he sang alongside. This comment, from 1992, is a great snapshot of traditional singing in north-east Scotland at that time (45):

I will now go back to Angus to Monnikie, where the famous Davie Glen lived when I knew him in the 60s, Davie competed at the diddling matches, famous in that parts for raising funds for WRI, and consisted of singing – funny and straight songs, diddling tunes in which he held two dolls on strings and made them dance in time. Then there were melodeon and moothie competitions too, followed by telling tall tales, Davie excelled at all, and with his long flowing beard was a fine kenspeckle figure. When he died the diddler matches ceased.

The rest of the book is all about the songs, with a useful (if slightly intimidating) musicological guide, followed by texts and tunes from Jock’s repertoire. These were largely drawn from recordings made in preparation for Jock’s debut album ‘Ye Shine Whaur Ye Stan!’ (Springthyme Records, 1996), as well as from his second album ‘Tae the Green Woods Gaen’ (Sleepytown Records, 2001) and his appearances at FifeSing – the annual Fife Traditional Singing Weekend of which Pete Shephard is a longtime organiser.

The sixty songs are presented in alphabetical order by title, and consist mainly of muckle songs, bothy ballads, and ‘other’ Aberdeenshire songs. ‘The Battle of Harlaw’, ‘Lang Johnnie More’ and ‘Bonnie Mill Dams o Binnorie’ were some of Jock’s favourites for traditional singing competitions. The bothy ballads range from ‘Rhynie’ through to ‘Last Trip Home’ and include ‘The Tradesman’s Plooin Match on Hogmanay’ – in performance, Jock’s most memorable song, in which at every chorus he ‘ploughed’ his way across the stage, pausing on the endrig to admonish or encourage his horses. By contrast, many of Jock’s ‘other’ Aberdeenshire songs tend to be about ploughing the sea (‘Fareweel Tae Tarwathie’ and ‘The Diamond Ship’) or other waterway (‘Banks of Inverurie’, ‘Ythanside’, ‘Where the Gadie Rins’).

The book finishes with song notes, index, and a guide to relevant recordings. Pete’s Springthyme Records is known for its excellent liner notes, and he certainly educates and entertains here, combining anecdote and academic reference to fit the songs into the wider tradition. Jock himself was very knowledgeable both about the songs he performed himself and those that other people sang, and there are snippets of his commentary throughout. Jock’s comment on “The Barnyards o Delgaty” confirms Shephard’s characterisation of the song as ‘a parody of life as it would really have been’ (172):

There’s no way the Barnyards would hae a deen pair of horses. The Barnyards had aye the best pair o horses – a great ferm toun that. And I aye reckon that Drunken Scot, he wisna mairried – that wis his sister, Lang Meg Scot that wis in the hoose.

The song texts are a great resource for singers and for those wanting to learn about Scots song, and Jock’s comments and Pete’s song notes make thoroughly enjoyable reading. In 2024, the Folklore Society shortlisted *Jock Duncan – the Man and his Songs* for their Katherine Briggs Award, awarded annually to the book which, in the opinion of the judges, has made the most distinguished contribution

to folklore studies. Although the award itself went elsewhere, this book stands as a deserving tribute to one of our most revered tradition bearers.

SCOTT GARDINER

***Memories of Musical Lives: Music and Dance in Personal Music Collections from Australia and New Zealand.* Rosemary Richards and Julja Szuster, eds. Melbourne: Lyrebird Press, 2022. 218+xiii pp. ISBN 9780734037992 (paperback) or 9780734038005 (ebook).**

Music is light and easy to pack when it travels in the memory, or when condensed by hand into a few notebooks of favourite melodies. Edited by two Australian musicologists, the essays in this book explore how Scots and other emigrants recorded the music that was important to them, how it helped them survive the heartache of exile far from home, and how subsequent generations used their musical inheritance, remembered from abroad and recirculated in a new environment, to build mature communities and define an emerging colonial identity. Closer to our own time, these articles provide readers with a sense of what might be at the heart of this ‘roots’ music for descendants of the Scottish diaspora in post-colonial Australia and New Zealand.

While some of the case studies in this book explore print evidence, it is the account of how emigrants preserved their musical memories in handwritten manuscripts that will be of particular interest to readers of *Scottish Studies*. Manuscript scrapbooking, or ‘commonplacing’, is not unique to the colonial world. Almut Boehme, Music Curator at the National Library of Scotland, comments in the book’s preface that before the arrival of the photocopier, manuscript circulation was a pragmatic solution for sharing music: ‘composite volumes allow insights into musical tastes of the owner, musical ability, availability of instruments, and thus music making in the owner’s household’ (ix). These patterns were not unique to Australia and New Zealand, but perhaps even more necessary in areas far distant from European publishers. This review will focus on those essays that assess what we can learn from the personal libraries of antipodean emigrants of Scottish heritage.

Rosemary Richards’ essay, entitled “‘Heart, my heart, why so sad?’: Two migrants to Melbourne and their manuscript music collections’, draws on her doctoral research into the ‘home-bound’ music albums associated with Georgiana McCrae (1804–1890), illegitimate daughter of George Gordon, Marquis of Huntly.¹⁵ McCrae spent most of her childhood with her mother in London, but was exposed to Scottish music in happy interludes spent with her Gordon relatives as well as during her early adult life in Edinburgh, where she developed a reputation as an accomplished portrait painter. When she left Scotland aged thirty-six with her children to join her husband in Australia, she took with her not only clothes and furniture, but also music books containing handwritten transcriptions of her favourite songs, part of an extensive collection of music books that she eventually compiled and collected in her new home, the McCrae Homestead on the Mornington Peninsula in the state of Victoria, now [a site run by the Australian National Trust](https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/places/mccrae-homestead/).¹⁶ Scottish music constituted only part of her extensive library, although it is the part that will interest us here.

Comparing McCrae’s efforts to reproduce the Scottish drawing-room music-making of her youth with the collection made by another emigrant, Englishman Robert Wrede (1817–1857), Richards shows how both were interested in a similar range of European ‘fashionable’ music: operas, songs and dance. McCrae’s collection is distinctive, however, for revealing her interest in traditional music. One highlight in her library, in an album entitled the ‘Chaplin Music Book’, is a handwritten copy of a bagpipe lament, originally titled in Gaelic, that she may have encountered in Patrick MacDonald’s *Collection of Highland Vocal Airs* (1784). McCrae’s handwritten version combines this tune with a

¹⁵ Rosemary Jean Richards, ‘Georgiana McCrae’s Manuscript Music Collections: A Life in Music.’ (PhD diss. University of Melbourne, 2017), <https://minerva-access.unimelb.edu.au/handle/11343/192295>, accessed 10 April 2024. ‘Home-bound’ refers to personal collections of music – manuscripts, printed sheet music, or both – that were assembled and hand-bound into volumes by their owners.

¹⁶ <https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/places/mccrae-homestead/>.