Lizzie Higgins, and the Oral Transmission of Ten Child Ballads

AILIE MUNRO

The value of exact transcription of musical events has often been questioned: such transcriptions are laborious and time-consuming to make—and hard to read. Their chief *raison d'être* is to aid the comparison of different aspects of musical performances. While nothing can take the place of recorded sound, exact visual representation avoids dependence on memory and facilitates a more detailed study.

As nine out of the ten ballads transcribed here were learned orally by Lizzie Higgins from her famous mother Jeannie Robertson—first of the travelling folk to gain the M.B.E.—and the remaining one from her maternal grandmother, Maria Stewart, it seemed that a comparison of exact transcriptions of performance by mother and daughter might be fruitful and that some points of interest and value might emerge. This comparison can only be made by close reference to James Porter's and Herschel Gower's study of Jeannie Robertson in the previous issue of this journal, with its accompanying transcriptions of these same ballads*.

The backgrounds of the two singers are very different. In addition to the generation gap (Lizzie is now 40, while Jeannie is 62), Lizzie was born and bred in Aberdeen, attended school there until the age of 14 and thereafter worked for no less than 23 years as a fish-filleter. In time she became so skilled at this work that she was champion filleter for the whole of N.E. Scotland at the age of 27, acquiring her nickname 'The Fastest Knife Alive'! The work was arduous and gruelling, with long hours and all too frequently no pay for overtime. The women had to plunge their arms up to the elbow in water which was often unheated and as icy as the water around their booted feet. They had to lift 10-stone boxes of fish from the ground on to high tables, also load them into lorries (the latter is now done by men), and there was constant danger of accidents from the razor-sharp knives they were required to use. Yet these women, especially the highly skilled, felt a pride in their work, and Lizzie becomes almost lyrical on the subject of lemon soles: 'Clean and nice like little works of art when they're finished and turned out.' And although this work was essential to one of Aberdeen's most important trades, there was a stigma attached to it: it was difficult to obtain other work once you had been a fish-filleter. To quote Lizzie again, she 'felt trapped in a

* The transcriptions in the present article are arranged in the order in which Lizzie chose to sing them.

jungle'; and . . . 'navvies on the roads were not working the way we young girls was working'. The prejudicial effects of this work on a woman's health and stamina were aggravated in Lizzie's case by a serious accident at work, when she was struck by a moving trolley. One indirect result of this is that she now suffers from a mild form of diabetes. She also developed heart trouble four years ago, and not until she left the fish-filleting trade some two years later did this condition clear up.

In addition to work and health problems, Lizzie has had much heartbreak and sorrow of a nature too personal to describe here, and only in the last two years (purely coincidental, she says, with her becoming a professional folk-singer) has her life become happy and relatively carefree. Many years ago, Jeannie told her daughter that she had not suffered enough to be a really good folk-singer. 'Well,' says Lizzie, 'now I *have* been through it, I know what I'm singing about and I can put my whole soul into the song.' That this tremendous feeling flows out of her singing and is communicated to her audience can be in no doubt to anyone who has heard her perform in a ceilidh situation, or has listened to recordings of her ceilidh and studio performances. Lizzie is now on the threshold of her career, with a great tradition behind her and at a time when unaccompanied traditional folk-singing has never been more appreciated in the folk-scene, particularly throughout Britain.

Another factor which should be mentioned in Lizzie's development as an artist is of a more subtle nature, but it is common to all those who follow in the footsteps of an illustrious parent. Jeannie herself is the first to appreciate this and understand it. But although at first Lizzie felt daunted by her mother's fame, and felt especially that the 'big classical ballads' were associated with Jeannie and that audiences would resent her attempting to sing them, she is rapidly gaining confidence and finding that her voice *has* the power to deliver the ballads as well as the more lyrical songs: in fact having Jeannie as her mother is now a positive help to her. This quality of voice is one of the most striking differences between the two: Lizzie's has a husky element to it, very expressive and attractive, with a strength and steadfastness which contains hardly a trace of vibrato.

Yet her singing is even more highly ornamented than her mother's. Lizzie herself is convinced that *all* her ornamentation has been strongly influenced by bagpipe music and in particular by the playing of her father, the piper Donald Higgins, whom she has listened to from her earliest years. There was no such influence on Jeannie in her youth. As it is impossible to imitate vocally the complex ornaments of pipe-music, it seems fair to assume that Lizzie's conscious attempts to imitate these ornaments have resulted in her more frequent use of the mordent*—and, in songs to actual pipe-tunes such as 'MacCrimmon's Lament' (not transcribed here), she uses the inverted mordent and the turn, both in a rather slow and deliberate manner.† To the careful listener these

* Mordent. This term is used according to the accepted usage of the present day, *viz.*: the given note followed by the note above and a return to the original note, in quick succession.

† Lizzie uses rather loosely the terms 'trebling', 'trilling' and 'looping the loop' (the latter an original description of the turn!) in referring to these vocal ornaments.

suggest the ornamentation of eighteenth-century 'art-music' rather than that of the pipes. Be that as it may, Lizzie says her father taught her these decorations, and also used pipe-diddling—a kind of lay-piper's substitute for canntaireachd—in teaching her some of the tunes, *e.g.* 'Lady Mary Bell' (an older form of 'The College Boy', not transcribed here). There can be no doubt of Lizzie's genuine love of pipe music: 'the pipes just sends me daft—or maybe my Highland blood gets up—but I love this music best in the whole world.' And . . . 'when my father starts playing a sad air I've heard his fingers sobbing like a human voice'. And although 'little or no animation', to use Herschel Gower's expression about Jeannie's singing, is usually a feature of the traditional ballad-singer's style, especially as regards dynamics, I believe that subtle variations in the tune and in the use of ornaments often convey the meaning of the words with great dramatic power and precision. (See notes on transcriptions below for examples, especially notes on 'The Bonnie Hoose o'Airlie'.)

This brings us to the more technical side of this study, and before giving the exact transcriptions it is necessary to say something about my approach to time-signatures and the whole question of pulse or beat. Two of the ballads—'The Trooper and the Maid' and 'The Gypsy Laddie', *i.e.* those with the most overtly rhythmic and almost march-like tunes, with similarities of shape and structure—have a very regular beat over two-line 'stretches' (see transcriptions and comments for exceptions to this), but at the end of each couplet of the text the bar is lengthened. In these two cases I have adopted the clear beat within the line as the unit. In the other eight, after listening to each version repeatedly and trying out various speeds of metronome beat to find the one which seemed nearest to what the singer 'had in mind' (Bronson 1959, I: XXVII), the transcription was then made and exact time-lengths ascribed to the notes, including all but the very shortest of grace-notes (the latter are marked but the tails stroked through in the usual manner, thus ). The bar-lines were decided by the metrical accents of the verse. When the exact time-lengths of each bar were added up and the total divided by the number of bars (in 'The Jolly Beggar' the change in the last two bars of the basic tune must be taken into account), the average in each case approximated very closely to the time length indicated by the time-signature. (For the assistance of anyone who cares to check this I have added the temporary time-signature or time-length [11/8, 15/16, *etc.*] *above* the bar-line before the numerous bars which do not exactly correspond to the time-signature given at the beginning.) This seems a reasonably mathematical proof of what I have felt from the first in listening to folk-song, and especially ballads—that the metre of the words of the poem and an accompanying pulse-structure, govern in a subtle and instinctive way the timing of most singers from an *over-all* viewpoint.

The conclusion seems to be that these ballad performances show, within a fairly rigid frame, *rubato* in its truest sense—that rubato for which Peter Pears, a superlative singer in another field, recently made such a powerful plea: ' "Rubato" means "robbed" —but in practice, it means something much more civilised than stolen. It is a transaction for mutual advantage, an agreed contract that you may borrow as much time or sound

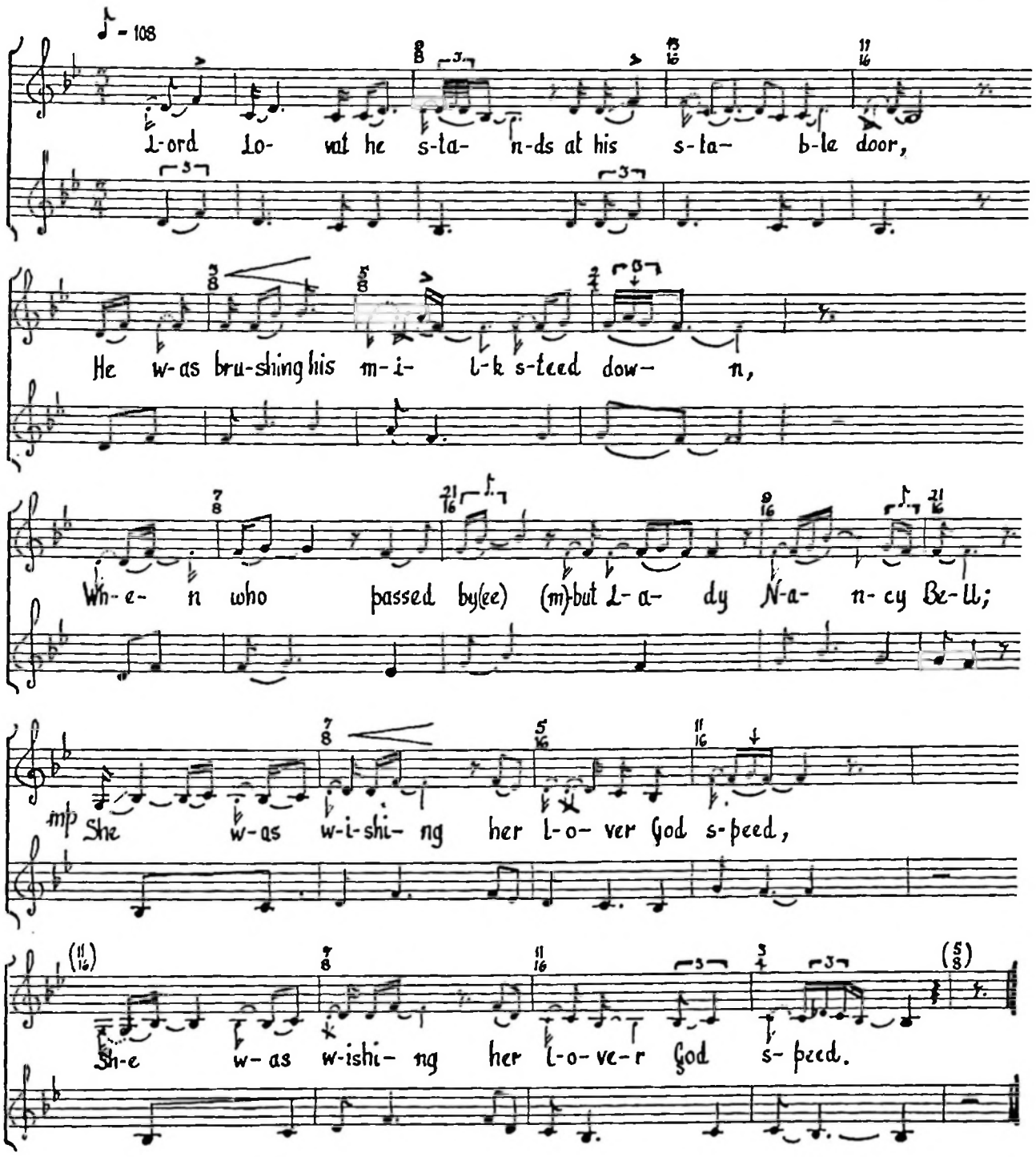
as you like as long as you are prepared to pay it back . . . . The simplest of phrases cannot come to life without give and take, freedom, *rubato*' (Pears 1970 : 15). But the rubato in strophic songs such as ballads, where the tune is bound to the metrical structure of the words, is quite different from the rubato of recitative and its folk equivalent, *i.e.* musical settings of speech which is not metrical in the usually accepted sense of metre, as Ossianic ballads in Gaelic which have a set number of syllables per line: the pulse of the latter is probably nearer the 'internal pulse', to which James Porter refers (p. 37). I think the ballads have an over-all external pulse, and I do not understand his reasoning here (see p. 37 from 'The rhythmic pulse' . . . to 'supplies the metrical structure'); I would argue rather that the metrical structure of the words, which are *in verse form*, suggests the metrical structure of the tune and/or is fitted into the over-all pulse-grouping of that time. I may be accused of strait-jacketing the tunes, but the speed of pulse was arrived at by listening *first* to the whole performance, and the calculations made only *after* transcription gave the findings I have described.

An interesting comparison would appear to be provided in pibroch music. In R. L. C. Lorimer's 'Studies in Pibroch' (Lorimer 1962 : 9), also referred to by James Porter, the author concludes that *all* types of urlar, or ground, consist of 16 bars, including the small group which the Piobaireachd Society say are in metre 4 : 6 : 4 : 1(or 2); (p. 9): 'In principle, no extant pibroch in this metre which does not have 16 (4 : 6 : 4 : 2) bars in a measure will here be accepted as regular.' One may query whether 'bar' is the correct term to apply to pibroch analysis, but it is possible that pibroch performance, lingering as it does on some notes and hurrying over others, may provide a true example of rubato. Even apart from the additional factor of words in the ballad-tunes (and we do not yet know for certain if pibroch *may* have had word connections in its earliest days) this judgment is not entirely unconnected with our subject here: traditional non-Gaelic music in Scotland would appear to have a predilection for symmetry, at least as regards over-all time-structure, and this partiality extends to pibroch music.

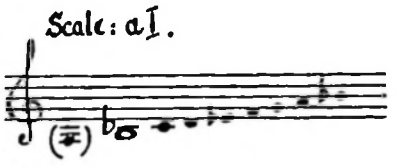
The question of ornaments poses a problem for the transcriber: they are so lavishly used by Lizzie that it would make the transcriptions more difficult to read if they were all written as grace-notes. It is hoped that the 'basic shape' given line by line under the transcription will be an aid to clarity: it was arrived at by listening to *all* the verses. In general, mordent, appoggiatura and anticipatory note are written as part of the tune, while the notes shown as grace-notes are (*a*) the acciaccatura type already mentioned () which are too short to have any time-length assigned to them, (*b*) notes used for consonants (given their exact time-values where these are measurable), and (*c*) notes showing a change of vowel sound *at the same pitch*, as my-(ee). The implied pitch of a voiceless consonant, *e.g.* t, p, tends to be subjective to the transcriber and is suggested by the note immediately preceding or the note immediately following it.

LORD LOVEL (Lovat) Child 75

Collector: A. Munro SA 1970/20A4



Scale: aI.



Form: ABCDE

(Note: Throughout this article the time-signature of the last bar is bracketed where it includes the anacrusis before the first bar)

1 Lord Lovat he stands at his stable door,
He was brushing his milk steed down,
When who passed by but Lady Nancy Bell;
She was wishing her lover God speed,
She was wishing her lover God speed.

2 'Oh whair are you going, Lord Lovat?' she said.
'Come promise, tell me true.'
'Going over the seas strange countries to see,
Lady Nancy Bell I'll come and see you,
Lady Nancy Bell I'll come and see.'

3 He hadn't been gone a year or two,
Scarcely had been three,
When a mightiful dream came into his head,
'Lady Nancy Bell I'll come and see you,
Lady Nancy Bell I'll come and see'.

4 He's passed down through Capelton church,
An doon through Mary's haa;
An the ladies were aa weeping for,
An the ladies aa weeping for.

5 'Who is dead?' Lord Lovat he said.
'Come promise, tell me true.'
'Lady Nancy Bell died for her true-lover's sake,
An Lord Lovat was his name,
An Lord Lovat was his name.'

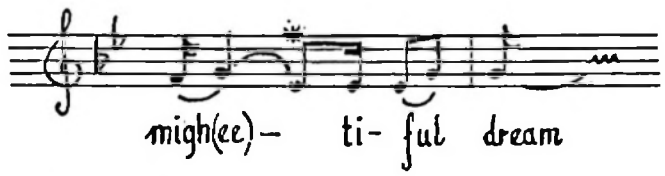
6 He's ordered the coffin to be opened up,
And the white sheet rolled down;
He's kissed her on the cold-clay lips,
An the tears came trickling down,
An the tears came trickling down.

This ballad occupies a special place in Lizzie's affections (and she only sings it when 'in top form'), for Jeannie sang it to her every night of her childhood up to the age of about eleven, as a lullaby. I cannot agree with Bronson's dismissal of the story: 'this too, too insipid ballad', which is popular only because of its fine tune (Bronson 1962, II: 189). The girl dies, as Child points out, 'not of affection betrayed, but of hope too long deferred', yet the tragedy is real and reflects one of the problems of the man-woman relationship which has only recently been resolved. A young man wants to see something of the world before settling down to marriage with its immediate family responsibilities: nowadays his girl could accompany him and postpone these responsibilities—or alternatively could pursue her own independent life, instead of passively waiting while the durability of their love is tested—and the tragedy of 'Lord Lovat' would be unnecessary.

Comparison of performances by mother and daughter here show at once (in addition to the absence of vibrato already mentioned) two differences which recur in all their singing: (1) Lizzie uses the mordent decoration more often than Jeannie, and here almost universally for the last word of each line; (2) she hardly slides at all from one note to the next, preferring to land straight on the new sound—a contrast to Jeannie's frequent use of the slide (marked ⁄ or ⁄, between two adjacent notes).

Differences in the basic tune

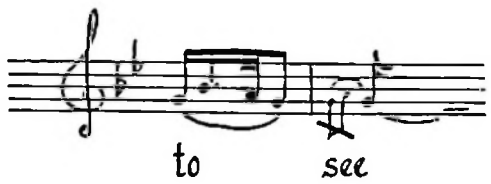
(1) Lizzie in verses 1 and 2, at bar 9 (word 'passed' in line 3, verse 1) sings the fifth of the scale, but by verse 3 and thereafter to the end of the song (except verse 4 which omits this line) reverts to Jeannie's stronger version using the fourth* of the scale, *e.g.*:



(2) In bar 5, Lizzie again uses the fifth instead of Jeannie's sixth of the scale (verse 1: 'brushing') and keeps consistently to this throughout: she seems to have a strong preference for the notes of the tonic chord (one, three and five) in all her versions.

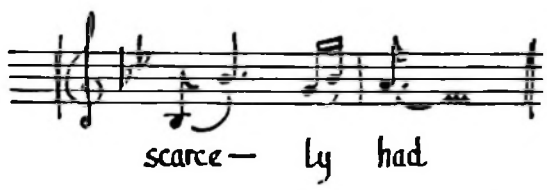
Word-painting (*or musical expression of the meaning of the words*)

(1) Verse 2, line 3 ends:



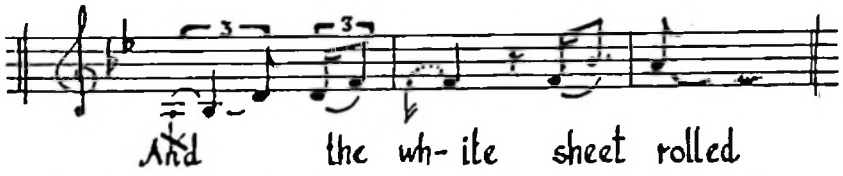
The 'wandering' shape of the four notes for 'to', where A, the seventh of the scale, is used for the only time at this part of the tune, is most graphic.

(2) Verse 3, line 2 begins:



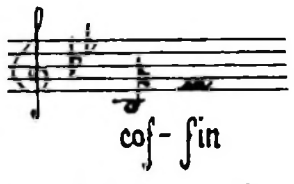
The unique octave leap up at this point suggests a sudden shock of discovery and resolution.

(3) Verse 6, line 2 begins:



The octave span of rising arpeggio (one, three, five, eight) plus the momentary silence after 'white' (a favourite trick of Lizzie's, as we shall see) underlines the drama here and gives us the tragic climax of the story.

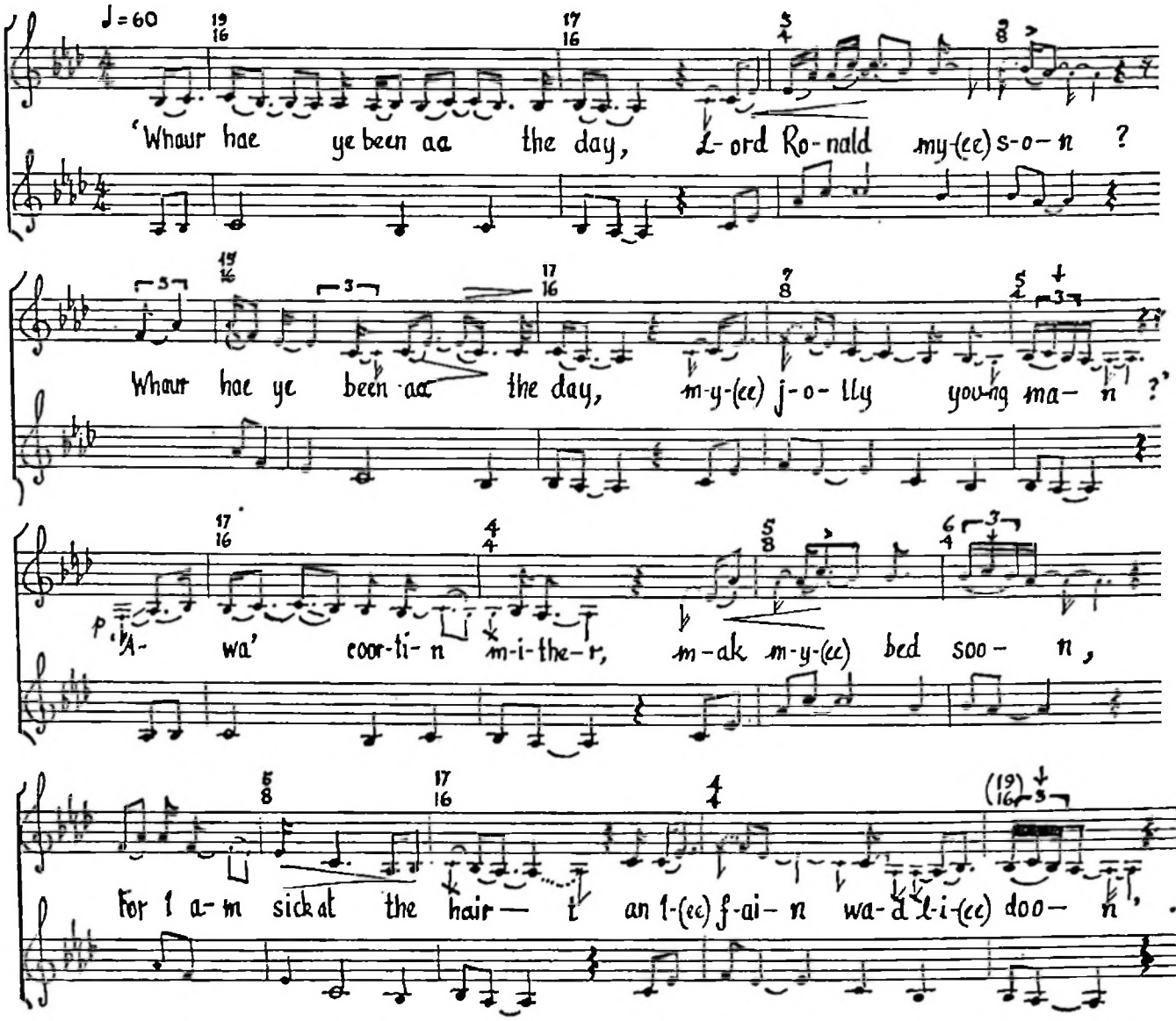
An exact similarity in detail between the two singers appears in verse 6, line 1:

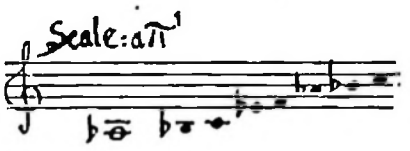


Lizzie's tempo is faster by about one-eighth, and her pitch is a minor 3rd higher.

LORD RANDAL (Lord Ronald) Child 12

Collector: A. Munro SA 1970/20 B4





Form: ABCD (for 8 bars)

1 'Whaur hae ye been aa the day, Lord Ronald my son?
Whaur hae ye been aa the day, my jolly young man?'
'Awa coortin, mither, mak my bed soon,
For I am sick at the hairt, and I fain wad lie doon.'

2 'What got ye for supper, Lord Ronald my son?
What got ye for supper, my jolly young man?'
'I got little smaa fishes all speckled around,
Mother make my bed soon,*
I am sick at the hairt, and I fain wad lie doon.'

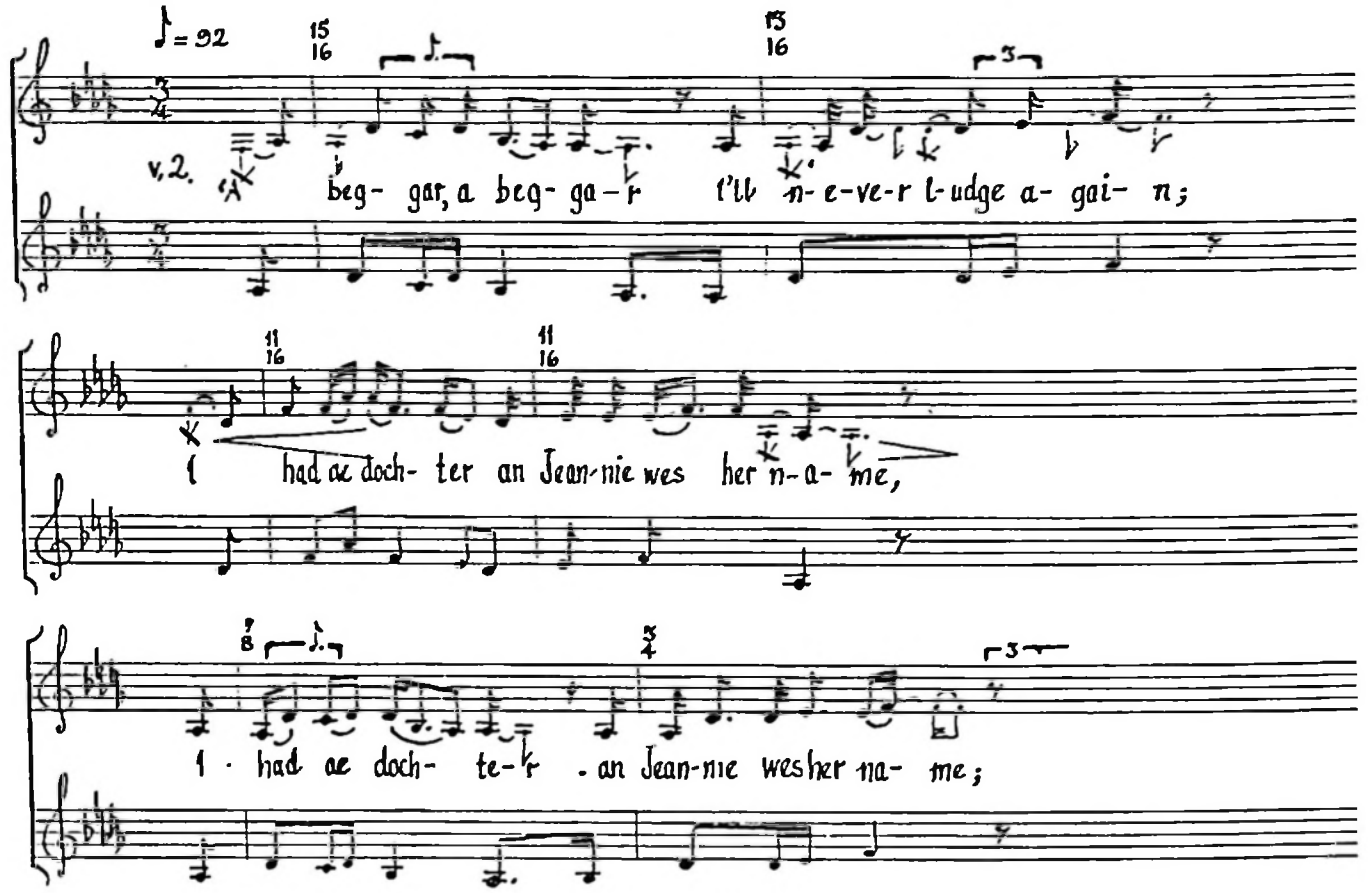
The singer clearly feels least at home in this ballad—witness her uncertain start to the tune—and for the listener it is the most difficult of the ten to apprehend rhythmically. Feeling that the folk-clubs associate this with Jeannie, Lizzie hardly ever sings it and could only remember two verses (*i.e.* double verses, with the tune repeated for the second half).

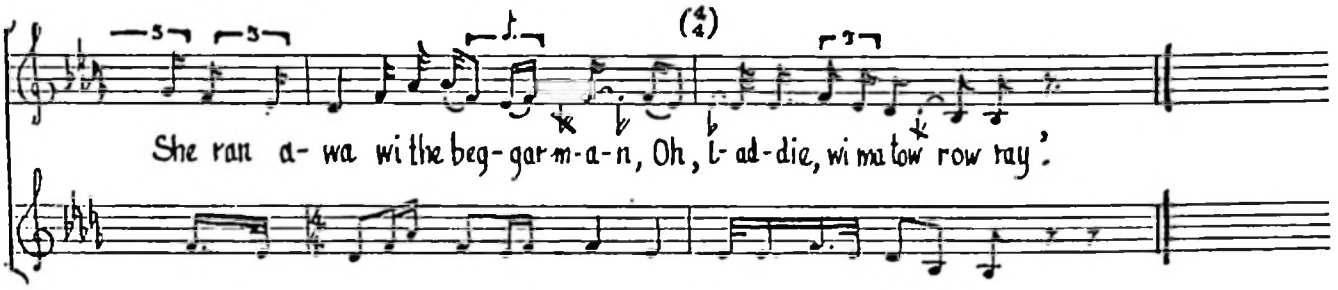
Lizzie's fondness for the common chord notes is again shown in the upward arpeggio at 'Lord Ronald', in the first line of both verses, where she avoids the sixth note of the scale with which Jeannie starts 'Donald'. (The difference in this name suggests a mixture of 'Donald' and 'Randal'.) Jeannie uses the mordent more frequently here, but Lizzie prefers again to keep this ornament for the final word of a line. Lizzie's tempo again is slightly faster, and the pitch is only one semitone higher. She starts the accented 'hae' in line 2 on the upper tonic note: this adds emphasis to the word.

* This line is sung to section C of the tune, which is repeated in the first half of the next line.

THE JOLLY BEGGAR Child 279

Collector: A. Munro SA 1970/20 B7





Form: ABAC

1 A beggar, a beggar come owre the lea,
He was askin lodgins for charity,
He was askin lodgins for charity:
'Wad ye ludge a beggar-man?
Oh, lassie, wi ma tow row ray.'

2 'A beggar, a beggar I'll never ludge again;
I had ae dochter an Jeannie wes her name,
I had ae dochter an Jeannie wes her name,
She ran awa wi the beggar-man,
Oh, laddie, wi ma tow row ray.'

3 'I'll bend my back and I'll bou my knee
And I'll pit a black patch owre my ee,
And a beggar, a beggar they'll tak me to be,
And awa wi you I'll gang,
Laddie, wi ma tow row ray.'

4 'Oh lassie, oh lassie ye're far too young,
And ye hannae got the cant o the beggin tongue,
Ye hannae got the cant o the beggin tongue
And wi me ye winnae gang,
Lassie, wi ma tow row ray.'

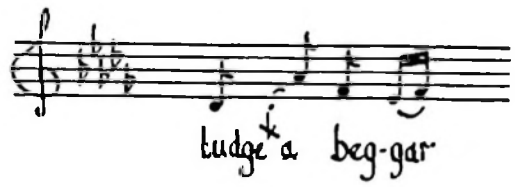
5 But she's bent her back an she boued her knee,
And she put a black patch owre her ee,
She's kilted her skirts up abuin her knee,
And awa wi him she's gane,
Oh, laddie, wi ma tow row ray.

6 'For yer dochter Jean comin owre the lea,
And she's taking hame her bairnies three,
She's one on her back and anither on her knee
And her other een toddlin hame,
Oh lassie, wi ma tow row ray.'

This is Jeannie's original version (Child calls it 'The Gaberlunzie Man') which she passed on to her daughter: the version shown in the previous issue of this journal is one which Jeannie learned later from someone in the folk-world. Lizzie sings this ballad with great spirit and compassion: verses 3 to 5 are a 'flash-back' and the last verse brings a happy ending. Note that the last line varies 'lassie' or 'laddie' according to the sex of the person addressed—the beggar, the mother or the girl—so one feels the refrain is *said by* each character in turn: this is implicit in verse 5. In Jeannie's earlier version this line has 'laddie' every time and is the usual kind of refrain. Also, in verses 3 and 4, where the lovers speak to each other, the 'Oh' is omitted from this line. The tune ends not on the tonic but on the 6th of the scale. It is interesting that although Jeannie's tune here is quite different it is also the only one out of the ten which does not end on the key-note. In the folk music of most West European Countries melodies end on the key-note of the scale or mode. When the ending is on a different note (and Scottish music has some interesting examples) the effect, on the writer at least, is of something unfinished—or perhaps the end of the story has not been told. Lizzie's performance here is further distinguished from her other nine by the complete absence of mordents.

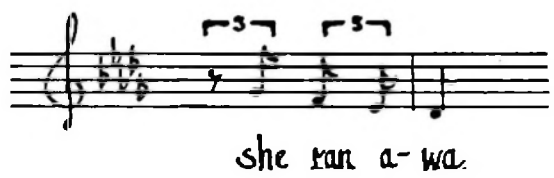
Word-painting

(1) In verse 1, where the beggar asks for lodging, the variant (bar 7) is:



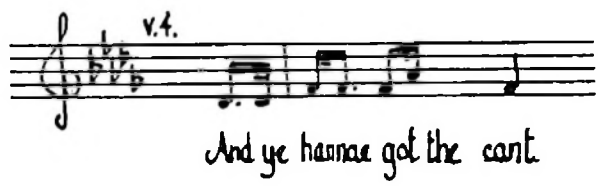
Here the 'a' has an aggressive ring to it.

(2) In verse 2 shown above, note the variant which starts the fourth line:



This downward scale passage with its lilting rhythm expresses the words most effectively. This is the only occurrence of the fourth of the scale ('she') in the whole song; it is not an ornament but is part of the scale and clearly shows the singer has the Ionian mode in mind.

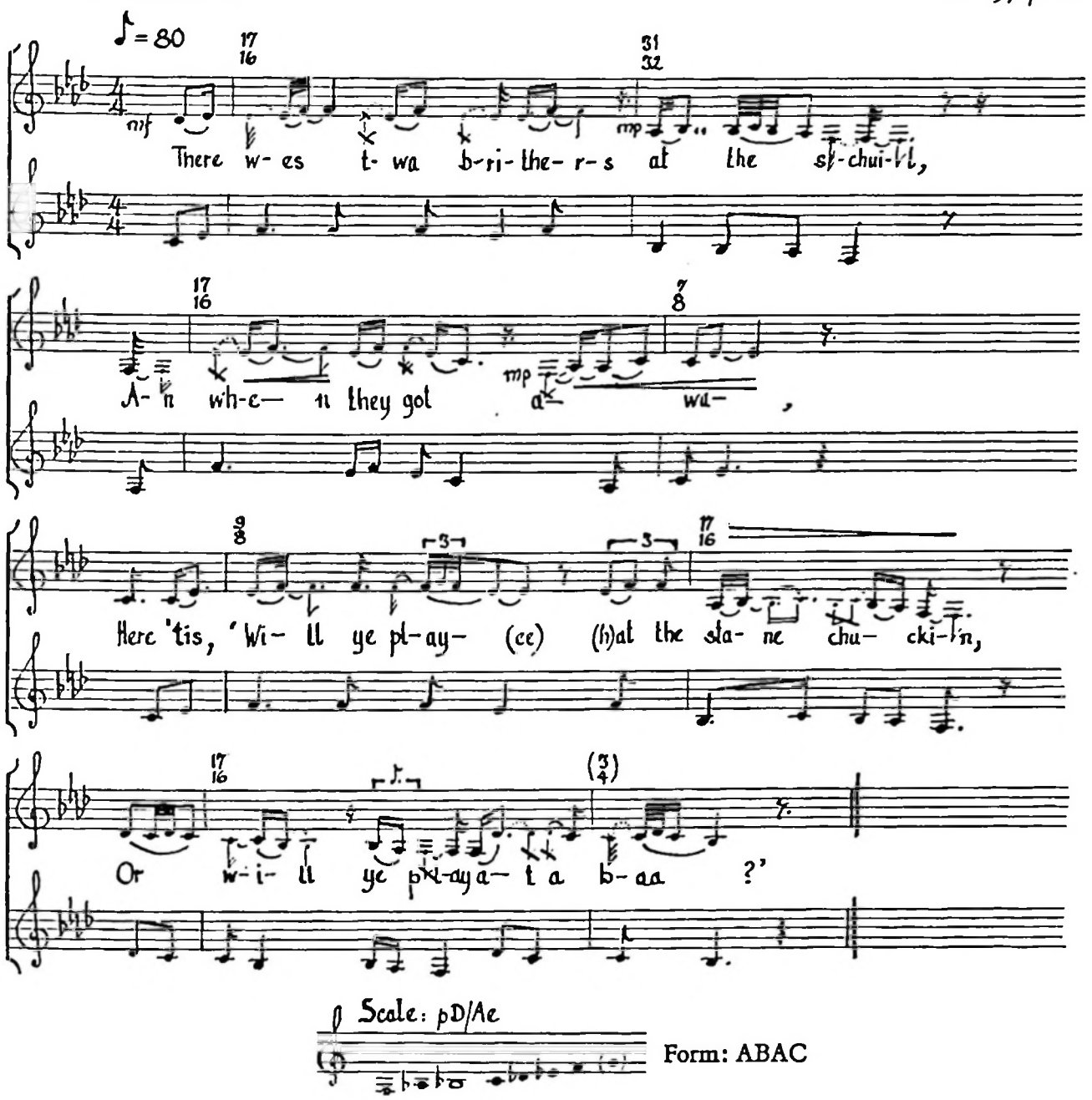
(3) Verse 4, line 2:



The three-fold repetition of the third of the scale ('hannae got') suggests an argumentative tone, an attempt to drive home the point.

THE TWA BROTHERS Child 49

Collector: A. Munro SA 1970/21 A1



Scale: pD/Ae

Form: ABAC

1 There wes twa brithers at the schuil
An when they got awa,
Here 'tis, 'Will ye play at the stane-chuckin,
Or will ye play at a baa?
Or will ye gae up tae yon bonnie green hills
An there we'll wrastle an faa?'

2 'I winnae play at the stane-chuckin,
Or will I play at a baa,
Bit I'll gae up tae yon bonnie green hills
An there we'll wrastle an faa.'

3 They wrastlet up and they wrastlet down
Till John fell to the ground;
A dirk came out of William's pooch
Gave John a deadly wound.

4 'Lift me, lift me on yer back,
Tak me tae yon well sae fair,
Wash the blood frae off my wounds
So it may bleed nae mair.'

5 He's liftit him upon his back,
Taen him to yon well sae fair,
He's washed the blood frae off his wounds
But aye they bled the mair.

6 'Ye'll tak aff yer holland sark,
Reive it frae gair tae gair,
Ye'll stap it in the bloody wound
So it may bleed nae mair.'

7 He's taen off his holland sark
Reived it frae gair tae gair,
He's stapt it in the bloody wound
But aye it bled the mair.

8 'Lift me, lift me on yer back,
Tak me tae Kirkland fair,
Dig a grave baith wide an deep
An lay my body there.

9 'Lay my arrows at my head,
My bent bow at my feet,
My sword an buckler by my side
As I wes wont tae sleep.'

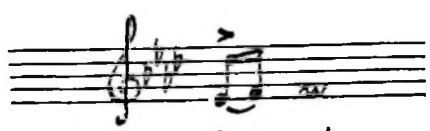
Lines 5 and 6 of verse 1 have the same basic shape as lines 3 and 4.

This is basically the same tune as Jeannie's, but I cannot agree that its initial tonality is E-flat (a major key here) for Jeannie, or D-flat (major) for Lizzie; the minor feel is implicit right from the start, *i.e.* the relative minor of this major key (C minor for Jeannie, B-flat minor for Lizzie) and is explicitly confirmed by the first note of bar 2—'at' in verse 1. All verses except the first start as in the basic shape. The note G above middle C, often slightly flat but still nearer G than G-flat, only appears as the upper note of mordents on F—so the ambiguity of mode, Dorian or Aeolian, is not resolved by it.

Word-painting

(1) In verses 4 to 7 the word 'bled' or 'bleed' in the last line is short and is followed by a rest. Jeannie does the same in 3 of the 4 verses. The absence of this rest at the same point of the tune, which is the lowest note in the range, in any other verse except the last (and this final line of the song slows down considerably) is partly due to the fact that this note comes in the middle of a two-syllable word in all other verses; but the abrupt treatment of this active verb at these four points of the narrative and dialogue is arresting.

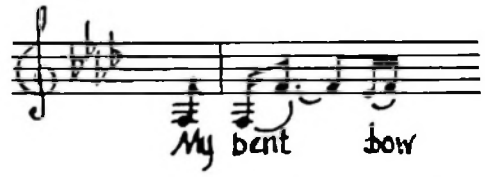
(2) The imperatives 'Lift', 'Wash', 'Reive', 'Dig', and 'Lay', first words of lines in verses 4, 6, 8 and 9 are sung thus



on a strongly accented beat; also 'Reived' in verse 7.

Jeannie has both 'Reive' and 'Reived' on a weak beat, the anacrusis of line 2; she has the other imperatives on the strong beat, but Lizzie has omitted the preceding 'Oh', 'An' and 'Ye'll', and the result is more commanding. (She also omits the first words in verses 6 and 7.)

(3) Lizzie's one difference in the basic shape of the tune, *viz.* the lower 5th of the scale (F) with which she starts line 2, gives rise to a unique and arresting variant in verse 9:



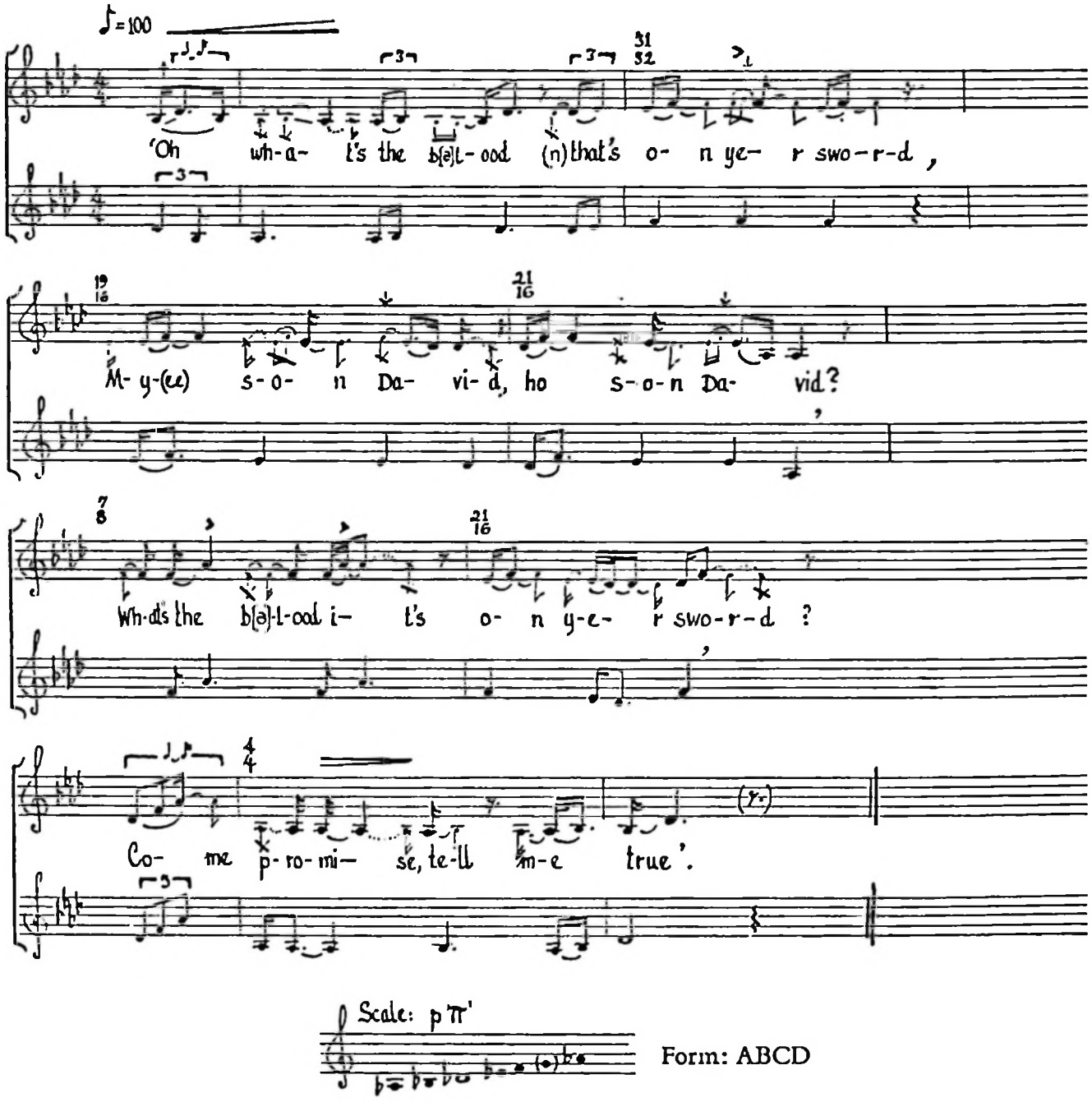
The octave leap from the grace-note for' bent' gives a faithful impression of effort and tautness to the word.

Mordents are used freely here by Lizzie; an average of five per verse, usually including the last word of line 4, but the final words of other lines are not so musically suitable for this ornament. Jeannie uses only five mordents throughout the whole song.

The *tempo* gradually increases throughout the song until the 'dying away' of the very last line. But the pace generally is slower: Lizzie's time spent on one verse is almost one-third again as long as Jeannie's. The pitch is one tone lower.

EDWARD (Son David) Child 13

Collector: A. Munro SA 1970/21 A3



Form: ABCD

1 'Oh what's the blood that's on yer sword,
My son David, ho son David?
What's the blood it's on yer sword?
Come promise, tell me true.'

2 'Oh that's the blood o my grey meer,
Hey lady Mother, ho lady Mother,
That's the blood o my grey meer,
Because she wouldnae rule by me.'

3 'Oh that blood it is owre clear,
My son David, ho son David,
That blood it is owre clear,
Come promise, tell me true.'

4 'Oh that's the blood o my huntin-hawk,
Hey lady Mother, ho lady Mother,
That's the blood o my huntin-hawk,
Because it wouldnae rule by me.'

5 'Oh that blood it is owre clear,
Hey son David, ho son David,
That blood it is owre clear,
Come promise, tell me true.'

6 'Oh that's the blood o my brither John,
Hey lady Mother, ho lady Mother,
That's the blood o my brither John,
Because he wouldnae rule by me.

7 'But I'm gaun awa in a bottomless boat,
In a bottomless boat, in a bottomless boat,
Oh I'm gaun awa in a bottomless boat,
An I'll ne'er return again.'

8 'Oh when will you come back again,
My son David, ho son David?
When will you come back again?
Come promise, tell me true.'

9 'When the sun an the moon meets in yon glen,
Hey lady Mother, ho lady Mother.
When the sun an the moon meets in yon glen,
For I'll return again.'

This is a very different interpretation from Jeannie's: the slower of Jeannie's two versions (version 1) is *twice as fast* as this and she sings both with tremendous impetus and urgency, whereas Lizzie chooses a much steadier, doom-laden style and pace. A comparison of the two singers' interpretations of this ballad would almost suggest the difference between Toscanini at his fastest and Klemperer at his slowest! The contrast is striking, but each conception has its own integrity and the listener is persuaded that both are equally valid.

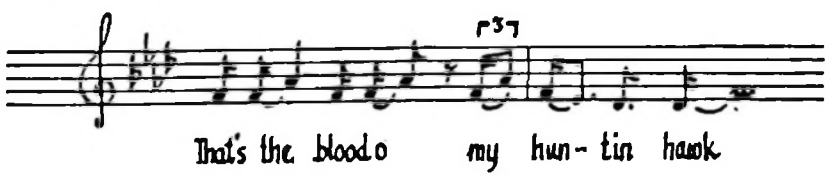
Differences in the basic shape

(1) The first note of line 2 (*i.e.* bar 3) is the tonic in Jeannie's version and the supertonic in Lizzie's (for one crucial exception, see last example on p. 172).

(2) For the start of the fourth line, Jeannie has the fifth of the scale, preceded by the third as a virtual grace-note, while Lizzie has a slow rising triplet phrase in her favourite doh—me—soh, which has a pleading effect in the word 'Come' at verses 1, 3, 5 and 8.

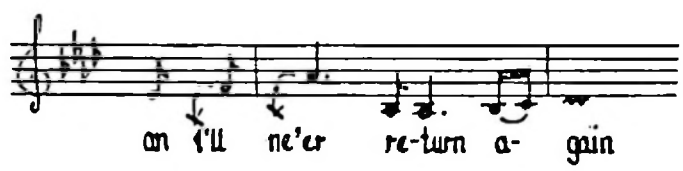
Word-painting

(1) Verse 4, line 3:



This has a false, blustering jauntiness to it. (Jeannie keeps strictly to the basic shape here.) A similar variant occurs in the same line of verse 6, but less rhythmically, and it hurries over 'my brother John'.

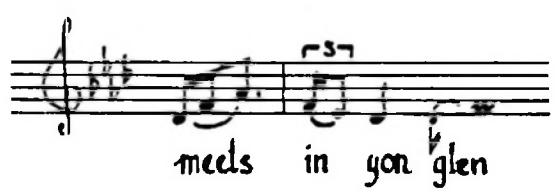
(2) Verse 7, line 4:



—at 'ne'er' the note is an octave higher than in any other verse at this point (it is really the third note of the usual triplet, but postponed to the following strongly accented beat.) This gives great stress to the word. (Lines 2 and 3 of this verse depart from the basic shape, with three-fold repetition of 'in a bottomless boat'.)

(3) The mother's repetition of her hopeless question, in line 3 of verse 8, has a break *at a different point* in the middle of the line, *i.e. before* the second appearance of the 5th note of the scale: 'When will you'—(rest)—'come back again?' It suggests a break in the voice, as if she cannot take in the finality of the parting.

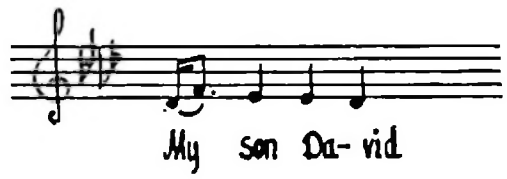
(4) Last verse, line 3:



expresses the dramatic words and again shows Lizzie's favourite rising doh—me—soh.

Variant showing a single reversion to Jeannie's

Verse 8:



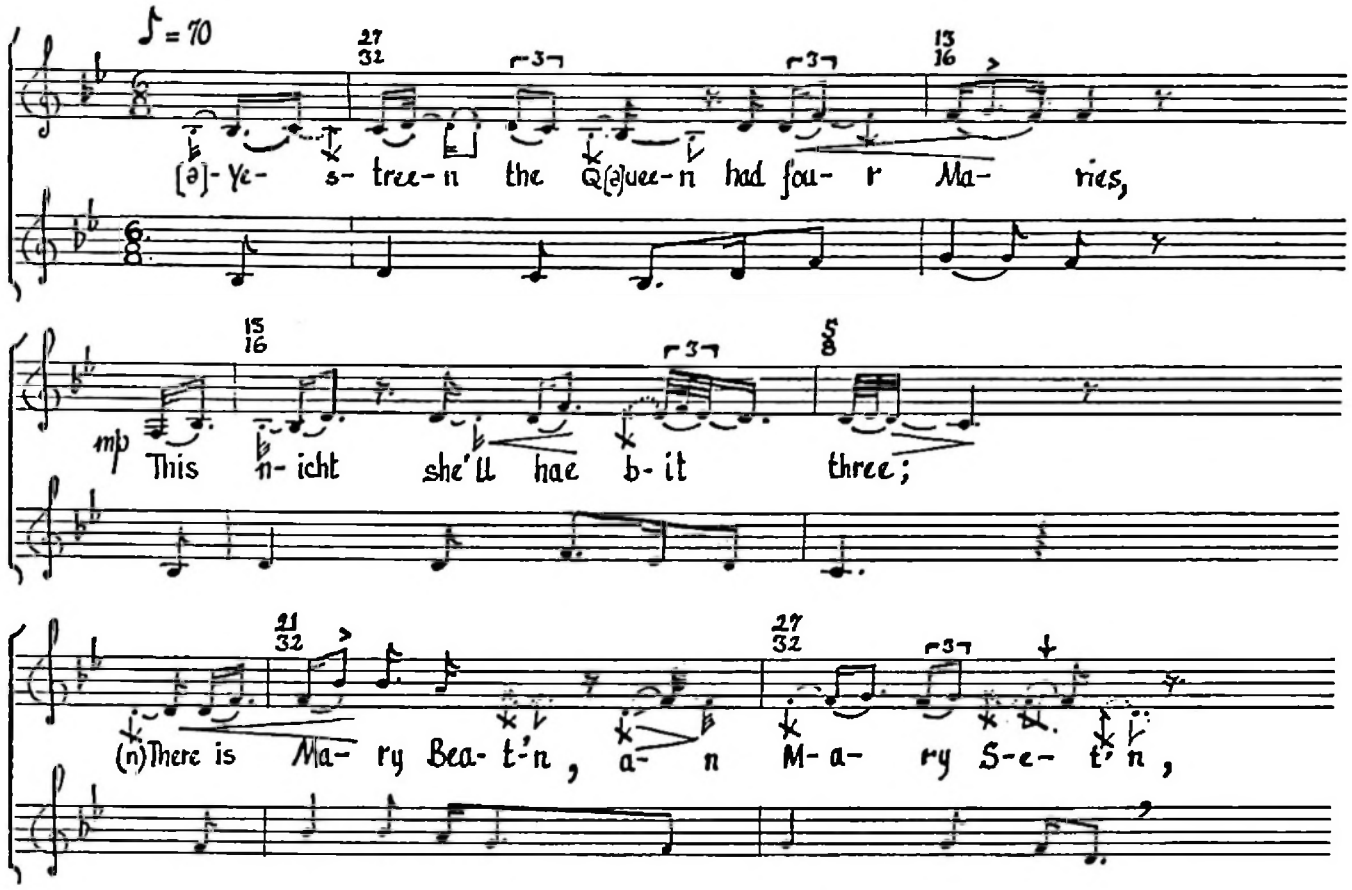
This is a stronger 'my' and this is the last time she says 'My Son'.

The difference in speed between the verses is interesting. Lizzie as usual has gradual accelerando, but verse 6 with its reluctant confession is slower, the urgency of verse 7 gives rise to the fastest speed of all, verse 8 is slower again and the final verse reverts to the speed of the first.

The incidence of mordents here and in Jeannie's two versions is in inverse proportion to the speed, a slower pace allowing more time for decorations, but Lizzie has the largest number proportionately: 12 mordents throughout her 9 verses.

MARY HAMILTON Child 173

Collector: A. Munro SA 1970/21 A4-B1



Form: ABCD

1 Yestreen the Queen had four Maries,
This nicht she'll hae bit three;
There is Mary Beaton, an Mary Seton,
An Mary Carmichael an me.

2 Often I hae dressed my Queen
An put gowd in her hair,
An little I thought for my reward
Wes the gallows tae be my share.

3 Oh little did my mither ken
The day she cradled me,
The land I wes tae travel in
Or the daith I wes tae dee.

4 Oh happy, happy is the maid
That's born o beauty free;
It wes my dimplin rosy cheeks
That wes the ruin o me.

5 A knock come tae the kitchen door
It sounded through aa the room,
That Mary Hamilton had a wean
Tae the highest man in the toon.

6 'Whaur is this wean you had last night,
Whaur is this wean I say?'
'I hadnae a wean tae you last night,
Nor yet a wean the day.'

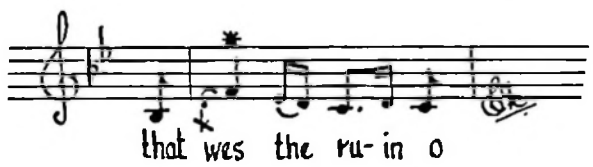
7 They searched high and they searched low,
An they searched below the bed,
And there they found her ain dear wean;
It wes lyin in a pool o blood.

Here again we find some striking contrasts to Jeannie's way of singing this ballad, though the basic tune is still almost identical with its source. (For two exceptions, see variants 1 and 3 below.) Lizzie uses the same verses as Jeannie, with slight changes, but in a different order: after the opening verse (which she does not repeat later, as Jeannie does twice) she then gives us the reflective part and ends with the story behind Mary's downfall.

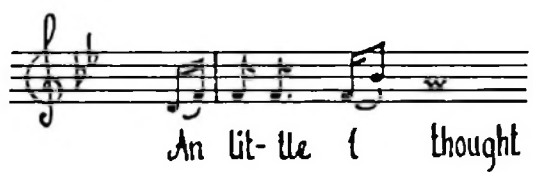
Lizzie's average time-length per verse is about one and a quarter times Jeannie's, and this slower tempo, as already suggested, may partly account for her greater use of mordents; but a comparison of the transcriptions shows that she also uses many other grace-notes, in contrast to her mother's simpler and more restrained rendering.

Variants

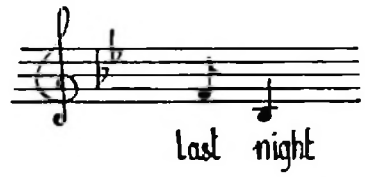
(1) At the start of the last line in verses 4, 5 and 7 the tune rises to the fifth * of the scale as in Jeannie's version, instead of the usual 4th ($E^{\flat}$ here) shown above; *e.g.* in verse 4:



(2) In line 3 of verses 2 and 5, the top $B^{\flat}$ is delayed, showing her love of the common chord again; *e.g.* verse 2:

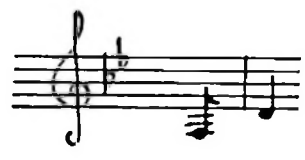


(3) The end of line 3: by verses 6 and 7, Lizzie reverts more closely, though not exactly, to Jeannie's verse 1, *e.g.* verse 6:



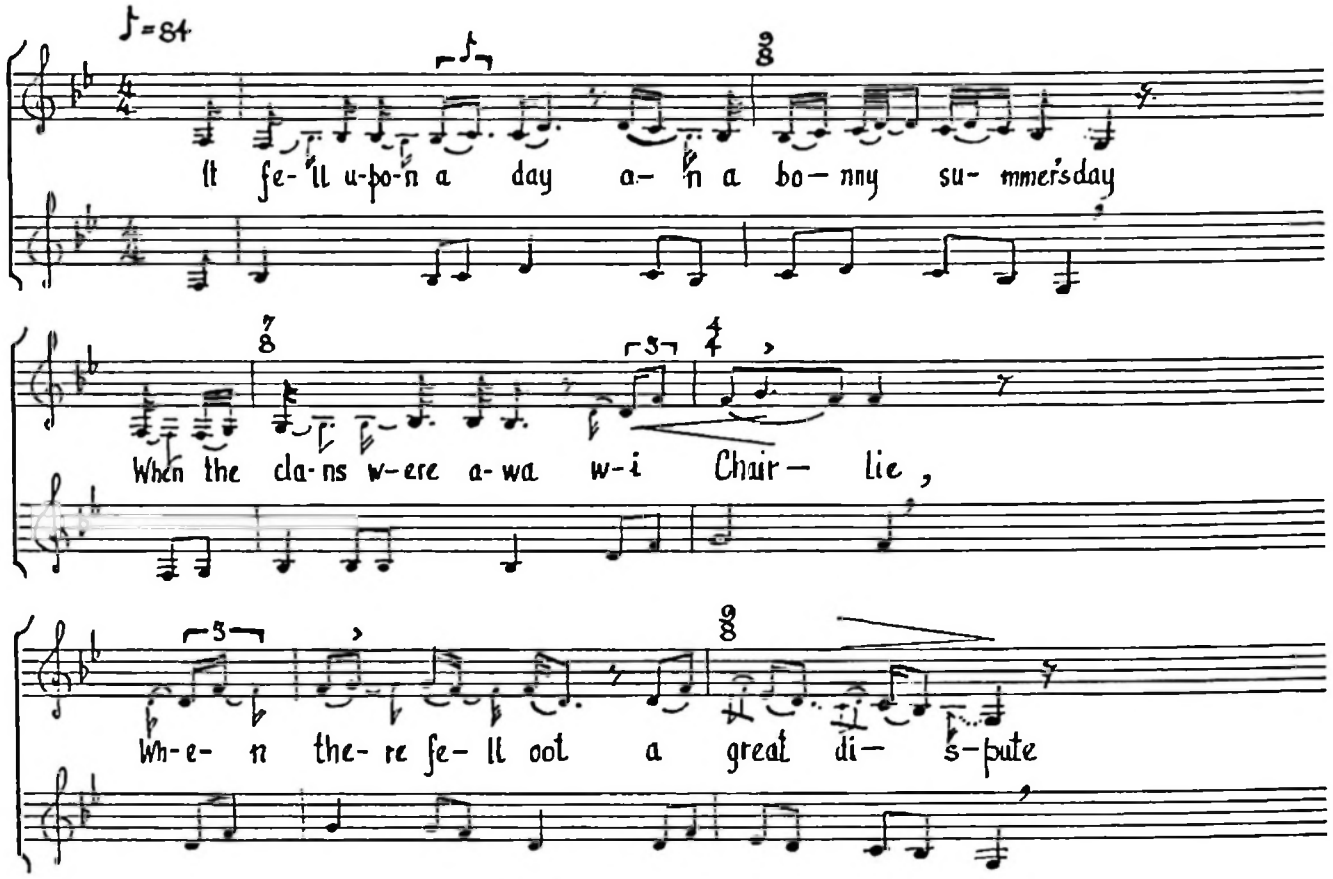
In verses 1–5 Lizzie consistently drops to the 3rd here, as shown in the basic tune; Jeannie stops on the 5th in all verses except the first and its repetitions.

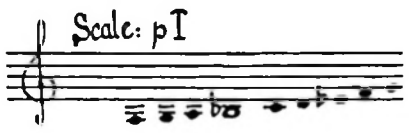
(4) Lines 1 and 2 of some verses begin:



THE BONNIE HOOSE O AIRLIE Child 199

Collector: A. Munro SA 1970/22 A3





Form: ABCD

1 It fell upon a day an a bonny summer's day
When the clans were awa wi Chairlie,
When there fell oot a great dispute
Between Argyll an Airlie.

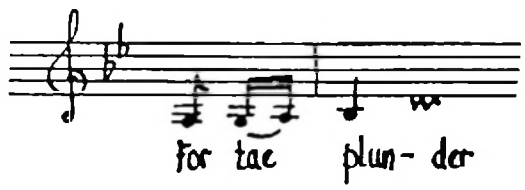
2 Argyll he hez raised one hundred of his men
It is [?ch] bein the mornin airly,
An he hes gane doon by the back o Dunkeld
For tae plunder the bonnie hoose o Airlie.

3 Lady Ogilvy looked frae her high castle waa,
An oh but she sighed sairly
Tae see Argyll an aa his men
Come tae plunder the bonnie hoose o Airlie.

4 'Come doon, come doon, Lady Ogilvy,' he cried,
'Come doon an kiss me fairly,
For ere the mornin's clear daylight
I will no leave a stanin stane o Airlie.'

5 'I widnae come doon, you false lord,' she cried,
'Or wid I kiss thee fairly,
I widnae come doon, ye false Argyll,
Tho ye dinnae leave a stanin stane o Airlie.'

In verses 2, 4 and 5, line 4, the seventh of the scale is included in the rising melody, *e.g.* in verse 2:



(Jeannie does this *once*, at the same point in verse 4 of her words.) This places the tune firmly in the (heptatonic) Ionian mode.

Exactly the reverse is true about the relative tempi of the two singers here as compared with 'Mary Hamilton': yet Lizzie has twice as many mordents as Jeannie in proportion to the number of verses sung, so in this case one cannot correlate their frequency with the amount of time available.

The pitch here is a minor third lower and seems to intensify the whole difference of style between the two singers. Lizzie, with practically no vibrato and considerably less variation in dynamics*, has a steadier, more detached quality in her singing, and achieves expressiveness through the variants of phrase, ornaments, rests, *etc.*, which have been described: Jeannie's singing is more emotional, is freer as to rhythm, has many more sliding notes and employs wider dynamic differences—is in fact more suggestive of what may be a separate tradition of the travelling folk and which may have something in common with singers of the streets, the pubs and the music-halls (*cf.* James Porter's comments on the tune of 'The Golden Victoree'). Charlotte Higgins, Andy (Andra) Stewart and Belle MacGregor or Stewart all show in their singing these thumb-prints of what seems to be the tinkers' style. Another mannerism is the insertion of an extra syllable into a word, *e.g.* 'hairit' for 'hairt', 'doctoree' for 'doctor', 'purisue' for 'pursue', 'britheris' for 'brithers', *etc.* (The last-named cannot be a perpetuation of the archaic form which although written as three syllables was pronounced as two.) It is just possible that there may be a connection here with the Gaelic intrusive vowel which appears between certain consonants in that language.

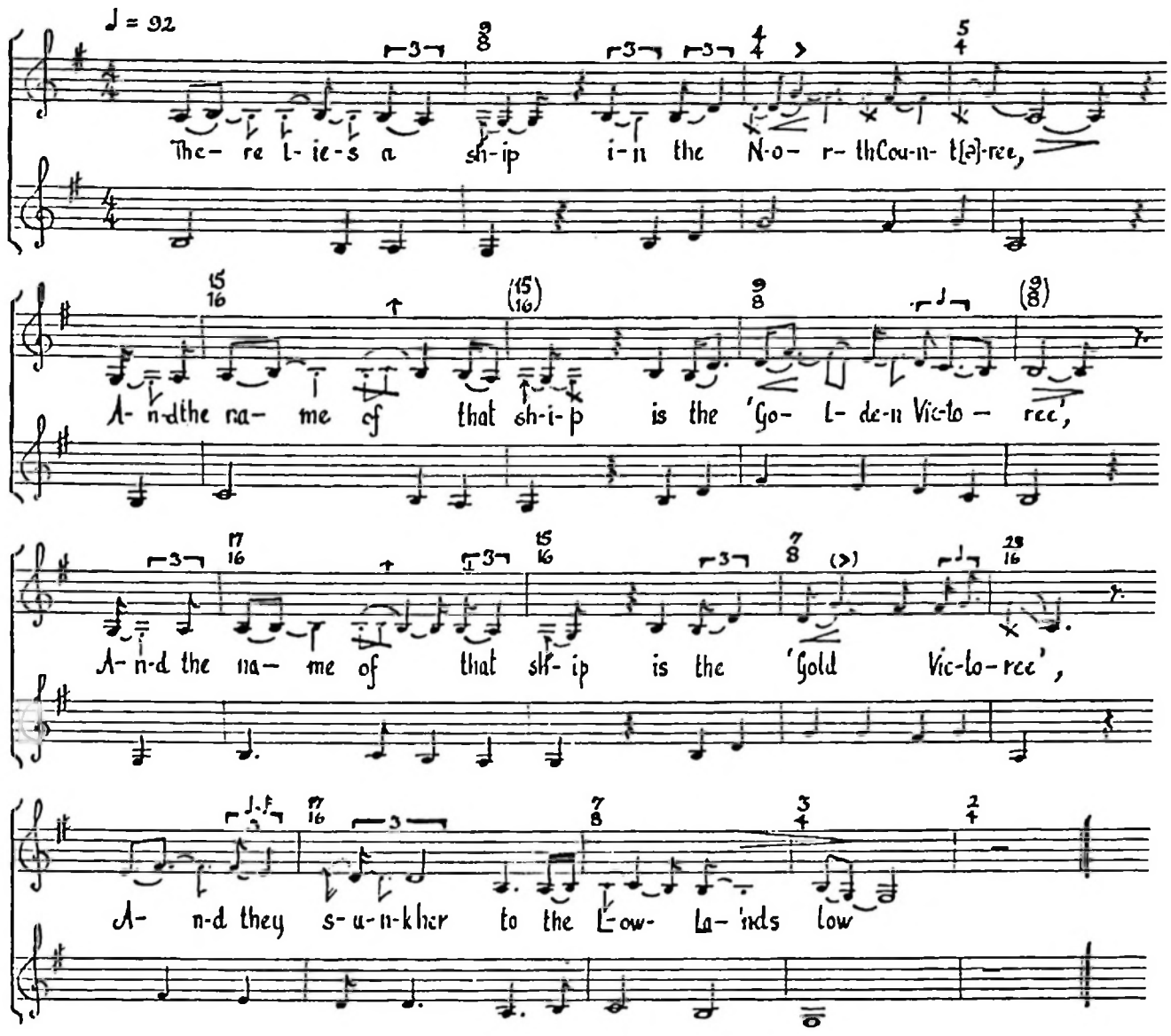
* Change of tone, mainly in volume.

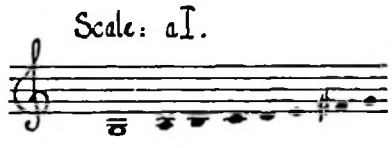
Whatever the origins of this whole style, it has been raised to new heights by the most gifted artist the travellers have yet produced, and one of the supreme artists of all folksong. Jeannie conjures up a picture of the campfire with an audience, probably small but always responsive and inspiring the singer to sway them in the style that moves them most—and she had this from her earliest years, long before she was acclaimed by the folk clubs.

By contrast, there is Lizzie's distance from the travelling way of life by the gap of a generation, her lack of an audience *of this type*, and her comparative inexperience of any large audience until the last year or so; the fact that she learned from her mother's singing in the home ('every day of my life', says Lizzie); her definite statement that she heard no-one else sing these ballads—and if, as seems probable, she *did* hear others from time to time, she has forgotten the singers but may unconsciously have remembered some of their variants; the possibility that Jeannie may have sung somewhat differently in her own home while going about her work and with no audience but her own family; Lizzie's own temperament; and finally the influence of her father's pipe-playing. All these combined to produce a very different style from Jeannie's. It is of course impossible to make hard and fast distinctions: in every art-form there are many different styles and disciplines all of which contribute to that art and none of which are immune from mutual influence. What is certain is that Lizzie, like her mother, has transformed a style by her own highly individual artistry. And it is possible that her comparative lack of dynamic variation and her freedom from vibrato may be attributable to the strong influence of pipe-music since one of the chief characteristics of this music is its unwavering uniformity of volume.

THE 'SWEET TRINITY' (The 'Golden Victoree') Child 286

Collector: A. Munro SA 1970/22 A5





Form: ABAC

1 There lies a ship in the North Countree,
And the name of that ship is the 'Golden Victoree',
And the name of that ship is the 'Gold Victoree',
And they sunk her to the Low Lands low.

2 Up spoke the captain an up spoke he,
'Is there any man on board who will sink this ship for me?
Is there any man on board who will sink this ship for me,
Who will sink her to the Low Lands low?'

3 Up spoke the cabin-boy an up spoke he:
'What will ye give to me if I sink this ship for thee?
What will ye give to me if I sink this ship for thee,
If I sink her to the Low Lands low?'

4 'I'll give you silver and I will give you gold,
Likewise my youngest daughter if you turn bold,
Likewise my youngest daughter if you turn bold,
If you sink her to the Low Lands low.'

5 Some was playin dominoes an others playing draughts,
An the water coming in gave them all a great start,
The water coming in gave them all a great start,
And he sunk her tae the Low Lands low.

6 'Oh captain, dear captain, it's will ye let me in?
Oh captain, dear captain, it's will ye let me in?
Oh captain, dear captain, it's will ye let me in?
For I've sunk her to the Low Lands low.'

7 'We'll shoot you, we'll drownd you, we'll stab ye to the heart,
We'll shoot you, we'll drown you, we'll stab ye to the heart,
We'll shoot you, an drown you, and stab ye to the heart,
An we'll sink you tae the Low Lands low.'

This is the only one of these ten ballads which Lizzie learned from her grandmother: 'I used to hear her singing it steady on', she says. Although her words omit the boy's reply to the captain's appeal (which Jeannie gives), this is implicit in the prompt action described in the following verse. It is not clear whether the scuttling was carried out from inside or from outside the vessel; Jeannie's 'He bendit his breast' suggests the latter. Lizzie adds two verses: the boy's despairing appeal, 'Oh captain, dear captain, it's will ye let me in', could be uttered while he was still in the water, but from the captain's treacherous reply which includes 'We'll stab ye to the heart' it would appear that the boy was then back on board ship.

Lizzie thought she only remembered two verses of this song, as she had not sung it since she was a teenager, but 'at the second verse I seemed to keep going and remembered aa the thing. I got a surprise the day!' The tenacious memory of the artist who learns

from oral transmission also amazes those of us who learn almost entirely from the written page, whether it be words or music.

Differences in the basic tune

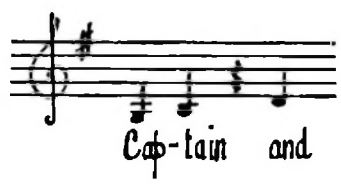
(1) For the beginning of lines 2 and 3, Jeannie consistently sticks to the notes of her 1st verse, starting on the 2nd of the scale and going to the 3rd, while Lizzie's most frequent practice is as given above, starting with the tonic note and in line 2 proceeding to the fourth.

(2) Jeannie gives much less *time* to the first word of 'Low Lands' except in the last verse.

Word-painting

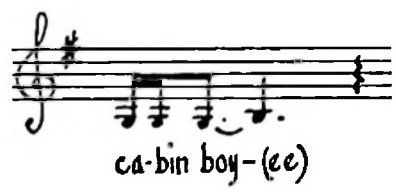
(1) The 7th of the scale (F♯ above) at the start of line 4—which is surely the climax of the tune—is held rather longer for the cabin-boy's final 'If' in verse 3. This coincides with the climax of the boy's attempt to bargain and also his wavering in face of the crucial decision confronting him.

(2) Wherever the first half of bars 2, 6 and 10 accompanies a two-syllabled word, the rhythm becomes:



but in verse 3, instead of:

we get:

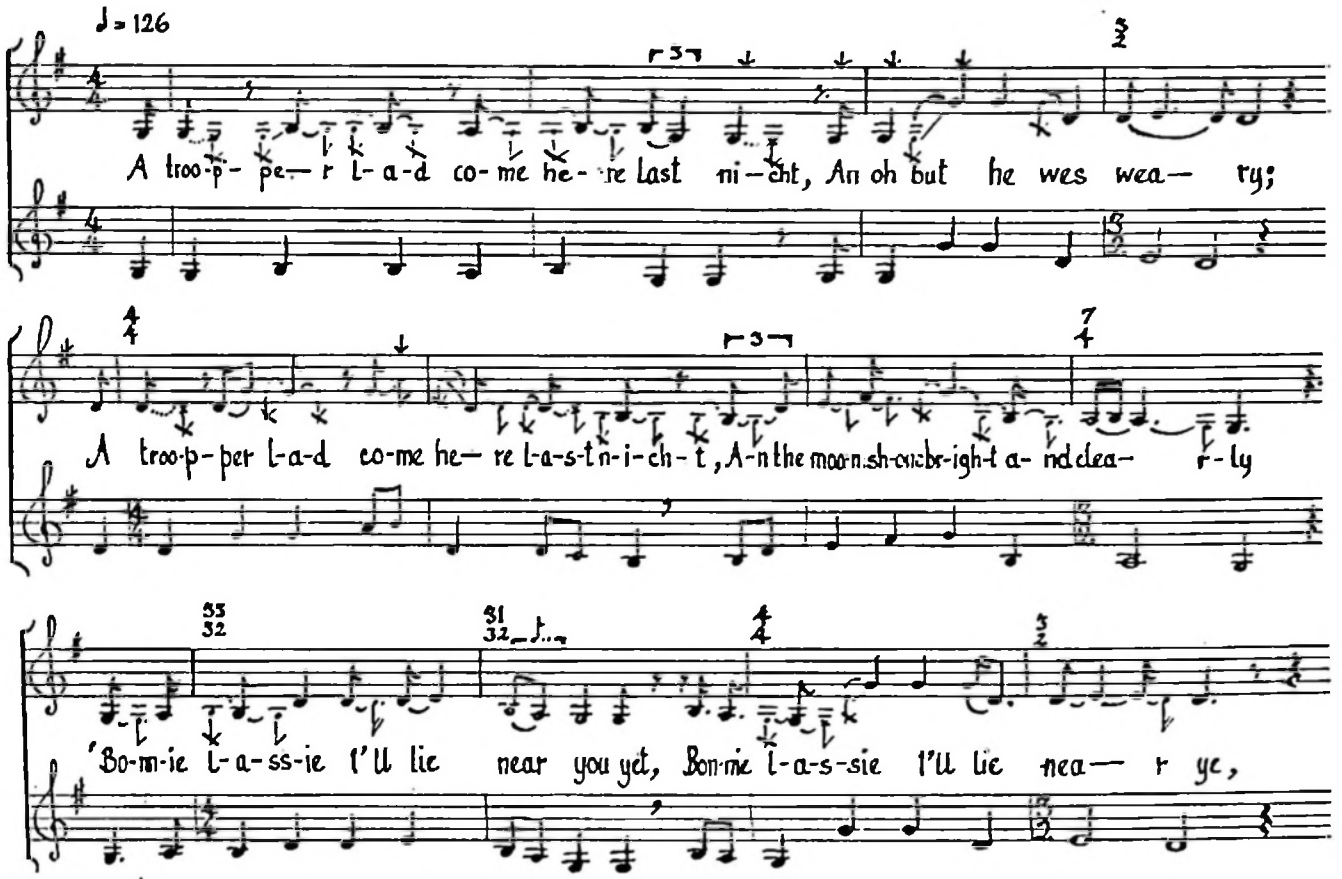


which assumes a perky, jaunty air. The same variant in verse 5 adds a carefree atmosphere of play to the word 'dominoes'.

Mordents are sparingly used here: more in verse 1, but elsewhere an average of one per verse, though Jeannie uses 3 more than this. Lizzie's pitch is again lower, by 1 tone, and her tempo throughout is a little slower. Variations of speed as the song progresses are slight, verse 1 again being the slowest.

THE TROOPER AND THE MAID Child 299

Collector: A. Munro SA 1970/22 B1



Form: ABCD+A¹BCD

1 A trooper lad come here last nicht,
An oh but he wes weary;
A trooper lad come here last nicht,
An the moon shone bright and clearly.

Chorus
'Bonnie lassie, I'll lie near you yet,
Bonnie lassie, I'll lie near ye,
An I'll gar all yer ribbons reel
In the morn or I leave ye.'

2 She's taen his horse by the bridle-head
An led it awa to the stable,
An corn an hay for a pretty soldier boy
To eat while it was able.
(Chorus)

3 She's taen him by the lily-white haun,
And she's led him up tae her chamber,
She's gied him a stoup o wine for to drink
An it's flaired tae his lugs like aimber.
(Chorus)

4 She stript off her lily-white goon
Also her hat an feather,
He stript off his shoes an his spurs
And they both lay down together.
(Chorus)

5 They hadnae been in bed an hour
An hour but a quarter,
When the drums come beatin owre the hill
An ilka beat grew sharper.
(Chorus)

6 'When will you come back again
Tae be the wee thing's daddy?'
'When cockleshells grow in silver bells
Bonnie lassie we'll get mairried.'
(Chorus)

7 She's kilted her petticoats up tae her knees
And she's efter her trooper-laddie;
Her stays got 'at fou that she cannae bou
An he's left her in Kirkcaldy.
(Chorus)

As with 'The Jolly Beggar' Lizzie's version is substantially the same as her mother's original one (recorded by Hamish Henderson in 1959 as a duet by Jeannie and himself). Lizzie must have learnt this version from her mother. At some time Jeannie picked up another tune, the one transcribed by James Porter, and in this case kept the original story and most of the words, except for the first verse which was clearly added with the new tune. Margaret Stewart of Aberdeen also sings this unusual first verse with slight differences in words; but her tune has a major seventh in line 3 which puts it in the Ionian mode. As in all the nine ballads which Lizzie says she learned from her mother, there are two possibilities to account for word differences: (1) both may vary their words from time to time, as do most traditional singers; (2) Lizzie may have heard other singers and chosen some words or verses which she prefers—also tune-variants; but her long hours of work left her little time for listening to others.

The pace of the tune shown here is twice that of Jeannie's and is sustained throughout: it is in any case a tune which lends itself to a more regular, march-like rhythmic treatment and a quicker tempo. (Jeannie uses twice as many mordents in comparison.) There is a broad symmetry in the time-structure of the basic tune: a two-fold repetition of 4+4+4+6 crotchet beats, for every 4 bars, or 2 lines of the verse; the one exception —the 5/4 at bar 14, just before the last line of chorus—is rarely exact and always appears

hurried, so that it may have been originally a 4-beat measure and an extra rest has been added to dramatise a break between the last two chorus-lines.

Word-painting

In fact, the chief method used here to bring out the meaning of the words is the skilful use of extra rests.

(1) Verse 3: There are two extra crotchet rests after 'She's taen him by the lily-white haun', which underline a dramatic moment in the story.

(2) Verse 3: There is an *extra* minim rest, before the chorus, while the wine 'flairs tae his lugs like aimber'.

(3) Another eloquent pause occurs in verse 6, after 'When will you come back again?'

(4) In the same verse there is a striking mid-line break of almost 2 beats in the third line after 'when cockle-shells . . .' before the impossibility of return is expressed in a traditional figure of speech (*cf.* 'When apples grow on a pear-tree', *etc.*)

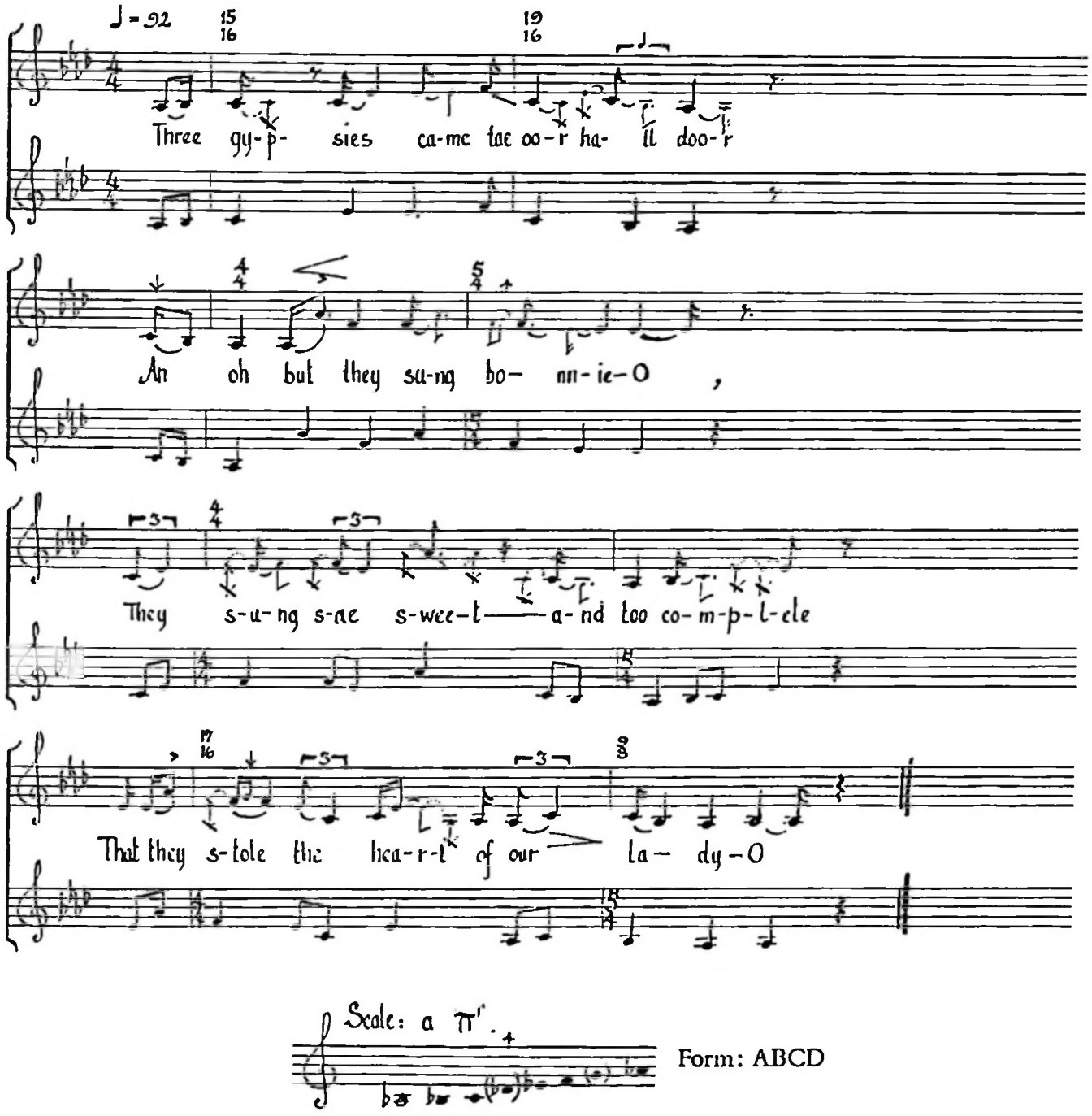
(5) An extra rest in the last verse, after 'she cannae bou', precedes the girl's realisation that she is deserted.

(6) In the final refrain there is another mid-line break, after 'I'll gar all . . .', which highlights this ultimate repetition.

There is very little variation in dynamics throughout.

THE GYPSY LADDIE Child 200

Collector: A. Munro SA 1970/78 2



1 Three Gypsies came tae oor hall door
An oh but they sung bonnie-O,
They sung sae sweet and too complete
That they stole the heart of our lady-O.

2 She came trippin doon the stairs
Her maidens too before her-O,
An when they saw her weel-faur'd face
They throwed their spell aroun her-O.

3 When her good lord came home that night
Askin for his lady-O,
The answer the servants gave tae him,
'She's awa wi the gypsy laddies-O.'

4 'Come saddle tae me ma bonnie bonnie black,
Ma broon it's ne'er sae speedy-O,
That I may go ridin the long summer day
In the search of my true lady-O.'

5 He rode east and he rode west
An he rode through Strathbogie-O,
Until he's seen a gey auld man
He wes comin through Strathbogie-O.

6 'Did ye come east, did ye come west,
Did ye come through Strathbogie-O,
An did ye see a gay lady?
She wes followin three gypsy laddies-O.'

7 'I've come east and I've come west
An I've come through Strathbogie-O,
And the bonniest lady that e'er I saw
She was followin three gypsy laddies-O.'

8 'The very last nicht I crossed this river
I had dukes an lords to attend me-O,
This nicht I must put in ma warm feet an wide
An the gypsies widin before me-O.'

9 'Last night I lay in a good feather bed
With ma own weddit lord beside me-O,
This nicht I must lie in a caul[d] corn-barn
An the gypsies lyin aroun me-O.'

10 'Will you give up yer houses an yer lan[d]s?
Will you give up yer baby-O?
An will you give up your own weddit lord
An keep followin three gypsy laddies-O?'

11 'I'll give up ma houses an ma lan[d]s,
An I'll give up my baby-O,
An I'll give up ma own weddit lord
An keep followin three gypsy laddies-O.'

12 There are siven brothers of us all,
We all are wondrous bonnie-O,
An for this very night we all will be hung,
For the stealin o the Earl's lady-O.

This tune is very similar in shape and structure to that of 'The Trooper and the Maid', although the pace is slower—and both are sung to a far more march-like rhythm than any of the others. The cadence-points at the end of each line are the same, with the exception of line 3, where the harmonic implications are the same although the melodic shape of the last three beats is reversed. The time-structure is also similar, but instead of the added 2 beats after every pair of lines, one beat is added here after each single line (4+5) except the first: Lizzie usually sings the first two lines with no departure from the march rhythm.

The D$^{\flat}$ and the G (4th and 7th notes of the scale) appear only as the upper notes of mordents, the D$^{\flat}$ five times and the G more often. The mordent is used frequently and more than one and a quarter times as often as in Jeannie's version. The tunes are the same except for two points of difference: (1) the second note of bar 3, where Lizzie consistently uses the lower tonic in a compelling octave-wide upward leap ('but' in verse 1). When Jeannie does use a grace-note here, as in verse 1, it is the 6th of the

scale, with a leap of a third up to the tonic. (2) The first 2 quaver-notes of line 4: Lizzie starts on the 5th and Jeannie on the 6th. In both these differences I suggest that Lizzie's avoidance of the 6th makes the *next* note (which is *always* the 6th in both versions—line 2, 'they', and line 4, 'stole') more telling, with a greater element of surprise. The mid-line break, used with such effect in 'The Trooper', appears once here: the last verse, line three, which reveals the fatal consequences of the adventure, has a one-beat break after 'all' and before 'will be hung'.

Lizzie's tempo is somewhat faster than Jeannie's here, but it is interesting that both singers slacken their pace as the song proceeds.

The pitch is a major 3rd lower than Jeannie's.

Second performance

One ballad, her favourite 'Lord Lovat', was recorded by Lizzie on a second occasion some weeks after the first, in order to provide a clue as to how much difference might be expected between separate performances by the same singer. Her pace the second time is a little slower throughout but again gradually increases; all the instances of word-painting are there except the octave leap in 'scarce-' (verse 3, line 2) which is reduced to an upward leap of a third, *i.e.* from the 6th to the upper tonic, and is thus less compelling; but she uses decorations of *all* the kinds previously observed even more lavishly. The 'wandering' phrase used for 'to' in the first performance (verse 2, line 3) is used again, and is *also* applied to 'his' in verse 3, line 3—the 'mightiful dream' embodies *his* wandering thoughts; the dream idea is also present in the words of verse 2, for he has dreamed of the 'strange countries' so much that he has an overpowering urge to travel. The pitch is virtually the same in the second performance (one semitone lower). As regards the basic tune, she uses the 4th (after Jeannie's version) in line 3 of verse 1 this time ('passed'), the 5th in verse 2, and thereafter reverts to the 4th for the other three verses; this confirms the basic shape of tune given, and suggests that she uses the 5th here only occasionally, as the mood takes her. The general shape, mood and style are the same and many details present in her first performance are exactly reproduced; we may safely assume therefore that the performances transcribed above are a faithful representation of Lizzie's singing.

Conclusion

Of the two singers, Lizzie uses the mordent considerably more *on average* (this includes the one song where she uses none at all), and the other grace-notes—the appoggiatura, and the anticipatory note—with invariably greater frequency. It is difficult to compare the incidence of acciaccature, voiced consonants and unvoiced consonants as the

two transcribers may have approached this differently, but my impression is that Jeannie makes more of the plosives while Lizzie lingers more on the voiced consonants, especially m, n, l and r. Lizzie's pitch is on average slightly lower, but the huskier, 'furry-er' quality of her voice often creates an illusion of lower pitch. Their speeds are roughly the same, though Lizzie sings more slowly in some songs and Jeannie in others. Both, but especially Lizzie, tend to increase their tempi as the song proceeds, with a few exceptions: Lizzie gradually slackens her speed in 'The Gypsy Laddie', but keeps it at the same level in 'The Trooper and the Maid' (the fastest), and 'Lord Randal (a fragment); both occasionally vary the speed of individual verses in sympathy with the meaning of the words, and Jeannie sings action verses more quickly, *e.g.* in 'The Jolly Beggar', 'Son David', 'Mary Hamilton', and 'The Golden Victoree'. Lizzie shows very much less change in dynamics, uses the slide sparingly and has no vibrato: these three differences, plus her greater reliance on all types of ornament, may stem from the strong influence of pipe-music which she was exposed to from earliest childhood. Lizzie 'paints' the meaning of her words by these ornaments and by subtle variants in the tune and the dramatic use of rests—Jeannie by greater accenting and variation of dynamics, by a natural and unforced vibrato, and by a greater emotional voicing of her words. To quote Hamish Henderson, she is more histrionic: this word sums up many factors in her style. (See also pp. 177–8.)

Lizzie's singing undoubtedly bears the hall-mark of her mother's words and tunes, plus that indefinable something which suggests that if one were to hear them both separately and with no knowledge of their relationship, a likeness would be immediately discernible. But she is very, very far from being a carbon copy. In some respects each singer is *sui generis* in style and temperament. Lizzie inherits so much of her mother's superb artistry and adds her own unique contribution in the finest tradition of Scottish unaccompanied singing.

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