

## Book Reviews

*The Folk Music Revival in Scotland* by Ailie Munro (with a chapter on 'The Folk Revival in Gaelic Song' by Morag MacLeod). Kahn and Averill, London 1984. Pp. 359. £7.50. Accompanying cassette Scotsoun SSC 076, Glasgow 1986. £4.50.

To many musicians the idea of folk music as a still-living tradition is somewhat surprising. We have been 'educated' to the idea that true folk music was a product of rural localities and that the combined effects of rural depopulation and the spread of sophisticated aspects of twentieth-century living (particularly the media) led to decline, with the loss, or potential loss, of valuable folk melodies, some of which were rescued by enthusiastic collectors such as Bartok in Hungary and Vaughan Williams in Britain. Many of us were aware of a continuing though declining legacy of Gaelic folk music, which collectors were still gathering—and examples of which were stored in the archives of the School of Scottish Studies at Edinburgh University, along with recordings of what we thought was a dying breed of Scottish folk singers. For a musician such as myself it is therefore a pleasant surprise to discover in Ailie Munro's book, *The Folk Music Revival in Scotland*, that not only has there been a revival in Scotland, but also that it has been so fruitful that the use of the word 'revival' can almost be considered obsolete—the tradition being so firmly rooted and so continuously nurtured.

In her first chapter 'Setting the Scene' Mrs Munro outlines her definition of folk music, extending the 'oral transmission' *desiderata* of the I.F.M.C. 1954 definition by considering the use of print (whether of words or music) and of disc or tape to be admissible. In Scotland in particular printing has been an important part of keeping folk traditions alive! The continuing evolution and variation of material has demonstrably not been affected. After a brief historical survey, she outlines the problems of twentieth-century musical life, showing the contrast of the Scottish musical renaissance as typified by the concert hall, with that of folk music 'unvarnished rather than rough'; and gives us thumbnail sketches of a possible evening's entertainment at a folk club in a country town, and at a folk pub (Sandy Bell's bar) in the city of Edinburgh. She presents the lively multi-cultured scenes with a sharp eye (and ear!) for detail, and colourfully conveys the characteristic conversational effervescence and the wide-ranging career details of performers and listeners. She concludes the chapter with some consideration of the contribution of competitive festival movements to the revival.

The next chapter surveys the progress of folk music in America, the early-twentieth-century manifestation of which was to play such an important part in the post-Second World War revival in Scotland. To the author, the element of 'protest' is an important part of the life-blood of folk cultures and in these American and Scottish developments

in the industrialised societies, it would seem to be a basic ingredient of progress. She outlines the Trade Union aspects of 'protest' song-making in the United States, stressing in particular the contributions of the lamented Joe Hill, 'The Wobblies' and 'The Almanacs', and demonstrates how the marrying of new topical words to existing known melodies (for example from Country and Western and Salvation Army sources) is itself in the time-honoured tradition of nurturing and keeping alive folk song material. The prevailing poverty of the 'thirties in the States continued to provide fruitful territory for protest, and the folk song developments in the hands of such a figure as Woody Guthrie were impressive and influential in the subsequent revival of a Scottish folk music tradition.

During a bird's-eye account of the early development of folk music in Scotland, repressed as it was by the domination of the Presbyterian Church with its metrical psalm singing, the author attempts to explain why no major Scottish composer emerged with a style more than superficially affected by folk music tradition until this century—a problem not unique to Scotland, as the development of Hungarian folk-influenced music shows through the work of Liszt, Bartok and Kodaly. She shows commendable embarrassment at what the world-at-large has perceived to be Scottish folk music culture (as represented by such figures as Harry Lauder), and points out how a sense of national identity appeared through literary movements prior to a similar development of the folk music tradition—the latter not really getting under way until the 'fifties, with a story of left-wing orientation as in America earlier in the century. The use of American folk and hymn melodies for anti-American (that is, anti-Polaris) sentiments was an interesting paradox. At such a short distance of time from these problems (which incidentally are still with us) it is difficult for an author to preserve that complete scholarly detachment from the actual political issues which is necessary for the basic thesis, and I am not sure that she has always fully succeeded—although she points out that some eminent folk musicians did not consider left-wing bias to be a necessary prerequisite for fueling the folk music tradition.

The core of the book is the chapter entitled 'Songs heard in the seventies' which consists of a set of transcriptions of folk song performances by key figures such as Jeannie Robertson, Lizzie Higgins, Jimmy Hutchinson, Jean Redpath *et al*, which have been preserved on tape and stored at the School of Scottish Studies. The author distinguishes between 'source' singers and 'revival' singers, and shows how the distinctions have been blurred, this being no bad thing. She also explains her own notational system which she describes as a 'compromise'. This seems to me to give the essence of the material—as I hear it on the book's companion tape—in a way which can be appreciated by an informed musical layman. This tape contains treasured performances by the above-mentioned folk singers and many others, mostly unaccompanied. Listening to these performances seems to me to be an essential adjunct to seeing notated versions, and the author herself expresses the hope that the notated versions will serve the purpose of causing her readers to listen to records and tapes of a wide range of folk music material

(despite the indelible stamp they tend to put on particular performances), and, better still, to hear live performances in folk clubs, ceilidhs and folk pubs. She demonstrates, where necessary, the variants of the folk melodies used in individual verses, and in a valuable first appendix has four different versions of five folk songs, with variants of tunes and words as conveyed by four different singers of each song. Both 'source' and 'revival' singers are used here as elsewhere, the latter category employing either print or recordings for their material. One of these five songs, 'The banks o' red roses', is demonstrated in sound in four different performances on the tape, and the differences of tune detail, tempo, nuance and ornamentation are fascinating to study. Throughout this chapter and Appendix I, the author provides detailed commentaries on matters of text and tune and identifies the mode.

Morag MacLeod of the School of Scottish Studies (a native of Harris) provides a beautifully written and succinct chapter on 'The Folk Revival in Gaelic Song.' The familiar causes of decline are outlined, and the measures taken to stem this trend, her final judgments being marginally more optimistic than I had imagined they would be—for example, in her statement that some of the original songs bowdlerized by Marjory Kennedy Fraser can still be heard in their pristine state in the Islands. This chapter whets my appetite for what I hope might eventually be a book on the Gaelic tradition. Miss MacLeod clearly has so much to offer, which can only be hinted at in a single chapter. Additionally, two Gaelic songs are sung on the tape—which throughout has singers of spirit, imbued with the traditional styles which they have inherited, re-emphasising Ailie Munro's point that vocal training is totally unnecessary in this art. To what extent it is an actual handicap, as the author and others suggest, is a matter of opinion. I would hope that trained singers would not feel discouraged in singing some of this repertoire, and I am pleased that the author does not suggest that they should bypass it. I would have thought that the result of good training should be a naturalness and spontaneity of delivery appropriate to folk-song, though I would agree that this does not always occur.

A splendid chapter on 'The Travelling People' is provided by Ailie Munro (who has studied the singing of Jeannie Robertson) showing how central to the Scottish folk music tradition is their contribution, not least in the aspect of spoken story-telling which assists in setting the atmosphere: she quotes a full-length story.

A chapter entitled 'Signposts' puts forward a number of discussion-points such as the class of society in which folk music flourishes—namely, the lower classes—and the extent to which feminist causes are taken care of in these traditions (not too well, I fear!) She ventures opinions on the state of art music today, and has a special word of praise for such a 'bridge builder' as the composer Ronald Stevenson, who incorporates elements of folk traditions in a number of works.

The second appendix analyses the extent to which Scottish school and further education institutions nurture the traditions of Scottish folk music. Obviously, caring treatment of these traditions in schools is important. Indeed, in an earlier chapter the

author showed school folk singing groups under an enthusiastic teacher to be helping on the revival in its earlier days. This care for true indigenous traditions is not, however, universal in the educational system, as the author makes plain.

Altogether I have found this book enjoyable and thought-provoking; it is full of valuable information, and benefits from the insight born of the author's own experience as a trained musician. The musical examples both in print and in the accompanying sound-tape, together with the careful analyses of verbal and musical procedures, are especially important. The sources of all her quotations are assiduously acknowledged. Ailie Munro's book deserves the widest possible circulation.

LEON COATES

## Books Received

Some of these books may be reviewed later in *Scottish Studies*

- Close to the Floor: Folk Dance in Newfoundland* by Colin Quigley. Folklore and Language Publications. Memorial University of Newfoundland, St John's 1985. 128 pp. \$10.
- Singer, Song and Scholar*, edited by Ian Russell, Sheffield Academic Press 1986. 178 pp. £8.95. [Papers given at Conferences organised by the English Folk Dance and Song Society between 1982 and 1984.]
- Middle Scots Poets: A reference guide to James I of Scotland, Robert Henryson, William Dunbar, and Gavin Douglas* by Walter Scheps and J. Anna Looney. G. K. Hall, Boston, Mass. 1986. 292 pp. [N.P.]
- Bloodfeud in Scotland 1573-1625: Violence, Justice and Politics in an Early Modern Society* by Keith M. Brown. John Donald, Edinburgh 1986. 300 pp. £25.
- Ayrshire Abbeys: Crossraguel and Kilwinning* by Ian B. Cowan. Ayrshire Collections Vol. 14 No. 7. Ayrshire Archaeological and Natural History Society 1986. 30 pp. £1.25.
- Scotland Through the Ages*, written and photographed by Michael Jenner. Michael Joseph, London 1987. 256 pp. £14.95. [A colour photograph on almost each page.]
- Two Glossaries by Robert Burns*, with an introduction by Donald A. Low. University of Stirling Bibliographical Society occasional publications, 1987. 48 pp. £5.50.
- Scottish Pottery: A brief history* by Graeme Cruikshank. Shire Publications, Aylesbury 1987. 32 pp. £1.25. [Illustrated with photographs.]
- Uraicecht na Riar. The Poetic Grades in Early Irish Law*, edited by Liam Breatnach. Early Irish Law Series Vol. II. Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1987. xii + 189 pp. £16.
- Tales until Dawn. Sgeul gu Latha. The World of a Cape Breton Gaelic Story-Teller, Joe Neil MacNeil*, translated and edited by John Shaw. McGill-Queen's University Press, Toronto & New York 1987. 484 pp. \$50 (hardback). \$15.95 (paperback). [Gaelic-English Edition.]
- Eine Geschichte Der Folkmusik* by Jürgen Frey and Kaarel Siniveer. Hamburg 1987. 318 pp. DM19,80.
- Traditional Celtic Fiddle Music of Cape Breton*, compiled and annotated by K. E. Dunlay with D. L. Reich. Published by the authors, P.O. Box 14065, Portland, Oregon, U.S.A. 1987. 114 pp. \$10.
- Viga-Glum's Saga with the Tales of Ögmund Bash and Thorvald Chatterbox*, translated and with an Introduction by John McKinnell. The New Saga Library (General Editor Hermann Pálsson). Canongate, Edinburgh 1987. 160 pp. £5.95.
- The Three United Trades of Dundee: Masons, Wrights & Slaters* by Annette M. Smith. Abertay Historical Society Publication No. 26, Dundee 1987. 86 pp. £3.50
- The Auld Grey Toun. Dunfermline in the time of Andrew Carnegie 1835-1919* by Eric Simpson. Carnegie Dunfermline Press, Dunfermline 1987. 120 pp. £4.95. [Many drawings and photographs, and a fold-out plan.]
- The Elgin or Charlestown Railway 1762-1865* by Duncan MacNaughton. Carnegie Dunfermline Trust, Dunfermline 1987. 56 pp. £2.
- Magnus' Saga. The Life of St. Magnus Earl of Orkney 1075-1116*, newly translated, and with an Introduction, by Herman Pálsson and Paul Edwards with wood engravings by Kathleen Lindsley. Perpetua Press 1987. 52 pp. £5 (general edition, paperback). £30 (limited edition, 120 numbered copies, royal octavo, bound in Ingres paper-covered boards).

- The Native Horses of Scotland: Scottish Breeds of Horses and their Folk* by Andrew Fraser. John Donald, Edinburgh 1987. 185 pp. £12.50. [illustrated with photographs.]
- Whalsay. Symbol, segment and boundary in a Shetland island community* by Anthony P. Cohen. Manchester University Press 1987. 236 pp. £12.50. [Some line and photographic illustrations.]
- The Iceland Journal of Henry Holland 1810*, edited by Andrew Wawn. Second Series Vol. 168. The Hakluyt Society, London 1987. 342 pp. £16.
- Country Life in Scotland: Our Rural Past* by Alexander Fenton. John Donald 1987. 194 pp. £7.50.
- Periods in Highland History* by I. F. Grant and Hugh Cheape. Shephard-Walwyn, London 1987. 306 pp. £14.95.
- The Heroic Process, Form, Function & Fantasy in Folk Epic*, The Proceedings of the International Folk Epic Conference, University College, Dublin, 2-6 September 1985, edited by Bo Almqvist, Séamus O'Catháin, Pádraig Ó Heálaí. Glendale Press, Dublin 1987. 650 pp. £36. [Pp 1-264 also published in *Béaloides* Vols. 54-5, 1986-7.]
- Passive Obedience and Prophetic Protest: Social Criticism in the Scottish Church 1830-1945* by Donald C. Smith. American University Studies Series IX History Vol. 15. Peter Lang, New York 1987. 408 pp. \$57.50.
- A Circle of Friends: The Tennysons and the Lushingtons of Park House* by John O. Waller. Ohio State University Press, Columbus, Ohio 1987. 290 pp. \$29.50.
- Early Middle Ages 2: Studies in the Early History of Britain Series*. Leicester University Press 1987. 274 pp. £30 (hardback). £9.95 (paperback).
- To Move With The Times. The Story of Transport and Travel in Scotland* by Anne Gordon. Aberdeen University Press 1988. 260 pp. £14.90 (hardback) £7.95 (paperback). [Photographic illustrations.]
- Perspectives in Scottish Social History. Essays in Honour of Rosalind Mitchison*, edited by Leah Leneman. Aberdeen University Press 1988. 204 pp. £14.90.
- Sgriobhaidhean Choinnich Mhicleoid: The Gaelic Prose of Kenneth MacLeod*, edited by Thomas Moffat Murchison. Scottish Academic Press for The Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, Edinburgh 1988. 186 pp. £12.50.
- The First Freemasons. Scotland's Early Lodges and Their Members* by David Stevenson. Aberdeen University Press 1988. 232 pp. £21.
- On Soul and Conscience. The Medical Expert and Crime: 150 Years of Forensic Medicine in Glasgow* by M. Anne Crowther and Brenda White. Aberdeen University Press 1988. 188 pp. £14.90 (hardback) £7.95 (softback).
- New Statistical Account. Midlothian. Part 3 The Northern Parishes: Dalkeith, Newton & Newbattle*. Midlothian District Libraries, Roslin 1988. 142 pp. £3.50. [First published 1845.]
- ROSC Review of Scottish Culture* No. 4, edited by Alexander Fenton. Edinburgh 1988. 152 pp. £6.
- Alexander Pope. Essays for the Tercentenary*, edited by Colin Nicholson. Aberdeen University Press 1988. 278 pp. £14.90.
- Gaelic Scotland: The Transformation of a Culture Region* by Charles W. J. Withers. Routledge, London 1988. 464 pp. £47.50.
- Bonnie Prince Charlie* by Rosalind K. Marshall. H.M.S.O., Edinburgh 1988. 208 pp. £8.50.
- Buildings of St. Kilda* by Geoffrey P. Stell and Mary Harman. The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Buildings of Scotland, H.M.S.O. 1988. 58 pp. £7.95. [Illustrated with line drawings and photographs including some archival ones of life in St. Kilda before the evacuation.]
- Argyll: An Inventory of the Monuments. Vol. 6. Mid Argyll & Cowal Prehistoric & Early Historic Monuments*. The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, H.M.S.O. 1988. 234 pp. £57.
- The City that Refused to Die. Glasgow: The Politics of Urban Regeneration* by Michael Keating. Aberdeen University Press 1988. 220 pp. £57.

- St. Magnus Cathedral and Orkney's Twelfth-Century Renaissance*, edited by Barbara E. Crawford. Aberdeen University Press 1988. 302 pp. £25. [Many illustrations: black and white, and colour, photographs, and line-drawings.]
- By the Three Great Roads. A History of Tollcross, Fountainbridge and the West Port*, edited by Drew Easton. Aberdeen University Press 1988. 177 pp. £4.95. [Many photographic illustrations.]
- The Protean Scot: The Crisis of Identity in Eighteenth-Century Scottish Literature* by Kenneth Simpson. Aberdeen University Press 1988. 300 pp. £16.90.
- Aberdeen in the Nineteenth Century. The Making of the Modern City*, edited by John S. Smith and David Stevenson. Aberdeen University Press 1988. 100 pp. £4.50. [Well-illustrated with photographs.]
- Food Conservation: Ethnological Studies*, edited by Astri Riddervold and Andreas Ropeid. Prospect Books 1988. 224 pp. £14.95. [Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference on Ethnological Food Research, Sogndal, Norway, June 1987.]
- The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's Century 1590-1710* by David Stevenson. Cambridge University Press 1988. 246 p £25. \$44.50.
- A Welsh Bestiary of Love; being a translation into Welsh of Richart de Fornival's Bestiare D'Amour*, edited by Graham C. G. Thomas. Mediaeval and Modern Welsh Series Vol. IX. Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies 1988. xliii + 84 pp. £8.
- Magyar Néprajz V. Népköltészet*. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest 1988. 878 pp.





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