

TSDL128

**BONNY LASS COME O'ER
THE BURN**

**RAY & ARCHIE FISHER
DOLINA MACLENNAN
ENOCH KENT
ROBIN GRAY**

**Songs, Ballads and
Broad­sides from Scotland.
Songs, Ballads, Waulking
Songs and Mouth Music
from the Western Isles.**

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TOPIC

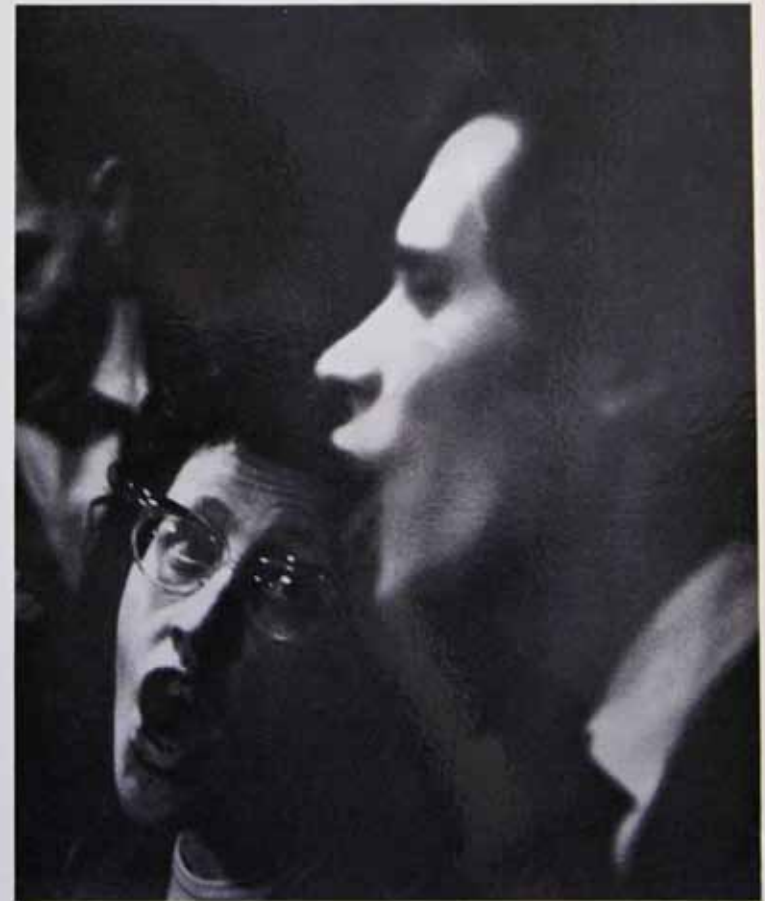
Songs, Ballads
and Broad­sides
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from the
Western Isles.



Dolina MacLennan



Enoch Kent



Ray and Archie Fisher

Photographs: Brian Shuel

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1. **The Twa Corbies** *Ray Fisher acc. Archie Fisher (guitar)*
2. **Fil U O Ru Hu O** *Dolina MacLennan unacc.*
3. **Gypsy Laddie** *Robin Gray acc. himself (guitar)*
4. **Beggar Man** *Enoch Kent unacc.*
5. **Hug O Ran O Ru** *Donna MacLennan unacc.*
6. **Donal Don** *Enoch Kent acc. himself (guitar)*
7. **Kilbogie** *Ray & Archie Fisher acc. Archie Fisher (guitar)*
8. **The Night Visiting Song** *Ray & Archie Fisher acc. Archie Fisher (guitar)*
9. **Bonny Lass Come O'er the Burn** *Enoch Kent unacc.*
10. **Far Over the Forth** *Ray Fisher unacc.*
11. **The Butcher Boy** *Enoch Kent acc. himself (guitar)*
12. **Port a Beul** *Dolina MacLennan unacc.*
13. **Erin Go Brath** *Enoch Kent unacc.*

14. **Bratach Bana** *Dolina MacLennan acc. Robin Gray (guitar)*

Notes by Norman Buchan

Notes on the Gaelic Songs and 'The Gypsy Laddie' by Robin Gray

RECORDING DATES

Ray and Archie Fisher
Hampstead, St. Pancras and Edinburgh
1960
Dolina MacLennan
Cricklewood 1961
Enoch Kent
Hampstead 1962

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The folk song revival in Scotland is of importance well beyond song itself. The total Scottish cultural tradition is a popular one. Our medieval writers were at their strongest when drawing on the popular sources around them. It was equally true of the 18th century Renaissance – Ramsay, Fergusson, Burns himself, were all moulded by the popular song and balladry that ran strong and clear through Scottish history despite invading armies, despite the Reformation, despite the Calvinists, and indeed partly because of them. Conversely Scottish culture was at its weakest when most divorced from the popular, and therefore the radical, dissenting, and humanist tradition. There were, for example, two Walter Scotts; one, the painful Gothic romanticist, but also the Scott of the sweep of his 17th century and 18th century novels from 'Old Mortality' to 'The Antiquary', drawing from and enriching the peasant life of his immediate past into a kind of epic.

But after Scott and Burns, the elite culture turned sour. It took up and bowdlerised the popular, made it pawky, quaint and weak, and therefore false; The Kailyard School was born. And, terribly this reflected back upon and weakened the genuinely popular. Sir Harry Lauder, accompanying himself on a stick, was taken as the genuinely Scottish. Not a glen but had its but and ben. The smoke of burning cottages in the highland evictions was obscured by the thicker

smoke reeking from the wee roon lum of 'Ma Granny's Hieland Hame'. But in poetry and the novel – MacDiarmid and Grassic Gibbon – the strength of truth began to win through. And now in song also the genuinely popular revives once more:

'Noo is the Kailyard biled and hashed,
While muses bide in slums,
The ball o' Kirriemuir has smashed
The window-pane in Thrums'

and Scottish song is returning to strengthen the mainstream of our national life. And it is all the better because it draws on two cultures and not on one, both Scots and Gaelic.

150 years ago Margaret Laidlaw, the daughter of James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd, said to Walter Scott, 'There were never ane o' me songs prentit till ye prentit them yersel, an' ye hae spoilt them awthegither. They were made for singing an' no' for reading; but ye hae broken the charm noo an' they'll never be sung again'. But thank heaven she was wrong. They are being sung in clubs up and down Scotland by youngsters who have rejected the pap of commercial pop and Scottish Kailyardery alike.

In this record you will hear four of the young singers who have helped to smash the 'window-pane of

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Thrums’.

The brother and sister team of Ray and Archie Fisher first became known to a wider audience in 1961 when they appeared for a long run in the Scottish Television documentary ‘Here and Now’, and more recently as regular guests on B.B.C. ‘Hootenanny’ and ‘Singalong’. But they were already well established among Scottish folk-enthusiasts. Popular in the Glasgow Folk Song Club and as regular singers at ‘The Howff’ and ‘Festival Late’ in Edinburgh, they launched their own experimental ‘singers’ club with other young folk in 1961. They called it appropriately ‘Folk Song Workshop’. When Arnold Wesker toured the Scottish Trade Unions talking on Labour and the Arts, these were two of the group he took with him to illustrate his theme. Individually and together they have had a big influence on other young singers; Archie with his easy, pleasant manner and sensitive accompaniment; Ray of all the young singers, probably closest to the ‘big’ Scottish ballad tradition as personified by such singers as Jeannie Robertson from whom she has learned so much.

Dolina MacLennan is a native of the island of Lewis. English is in fact her second language, although she makes light of its difficulties. Her Gaelic songs have been passed down to her through her family, and are

as much part of her as guitar playing to a Spaniard.

Robin Gray is of mixed Lewis and Shetland descent, but has lived most of his life in Edinburgh. His maternal grandmother was a well known Gaelic bard.

In Enoch Kent you will find a living synopsis of most of the best characteristics of the folk-song revival. He was ready and eager to learn from the great ethnic singers of Scotland like Jeannie Robertson and Jimmy Macbeath. Years before the skiffle-inspired revival was more than a glimmer in Lonnie Donegan’s eye, he was singing the big classical ballads of Scotland, and the songs of the Glasgow streets. He sang anywhere and everywhere – ceilidhs, the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, Trade Union Branches, illustrating academic lectures – and by his sheer joy in singing helped to pave the way for the revival. He helped to form and was a member of The Reivers Folk-song group, bringing, for a two-year stint on Scottish Television, folk song once more to a mass audience. He was recorded extensively by the School of Scottish Studies and by Alan Lomax, and appeared on most of the early radio programmes on the contemporary ballad scene. He now sings mainly in the folk song clubs in London (where he works as a graphic designer) and especially in the Singers Club where he is one of the resident team along with Ewan MacColl

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and Peggy Seeger.

THE TWA CORBIES When is a ballad not a ballad? Answer – when it isn't sung. *The Twa Corbies* has for long been regarded as one of the most flawless as it is one of the grimmest of all our ballads; but it wasn't being sung. No tune appeared to survive in oral tradition and attempts at setting it remained literary, academic and dead. Then R. M. Blythman (the Scots poet 'Thurso Berwick') set it to this marvellously sombre old Breton tune, *Al Alar'ch*, the Swan, learned from the Breton folk singer Zaig Montjarret. The result was astonishingly right and *The Twa Corbies* has passed into the repertoire of our younger folk singers. It is related to the English *Three Ravens*. A corbie is a crow.

FIL-U-O RO HU-O is a work song, a waulking song. Waulking or shrinking the tweed is done by many women round a table and proceeds through many stages, each of which is done to a specific rhythm. This is from the luard stage.

THE GYPSIE LADDIES This is a telescoped Scots version of a song found in many lands - *Raggle Taggle Gypsies* in England, *Gypsy Davy* in the United States for instance. The story common to them all is of the noble lady leaving all to go with the penniless,

romantic and presumably very virile Gypsies.

THE BEGGAR MAN A version of this ballad under its more common title *The Gaberlunzie Man* first appears in print in 1724 in Allan Ramsay's *Tea Table Miscellany*. Tradition in Scotland has always attributed it and its allied ballad *The Jolly Beggar* (Child 279) to James V. That James was a poet we know – We have Davie Lindsay's *Answer to the King's Flyting* as proof that James was not averse to challenging the best verse polemicist in Scotland at his own game. Unfortunately it is easier to prove that he was a poet than to give examples of his work. Both ballads have a certain connection with the King's reported propensity for wandering his kingdom in disguise (*The Gudeman of Ballengeich*) and, presumably, seducing the farmers' daughters in the process, if we are to believe *The Jolly Beggar*. Their identification with James, however, probably tell us more about the way tradition works than of historical truth.

Alan Ramsay specifically mentions *The Gaberlunzie Man* in his preface as one of the songs which 'only wanted to be cleared of the dross of blundering transcribers and printers' - and, he might have added modestly, of editors. At any rate most versions in oral tradition (e.g. in the Gavin Greig collection) continue

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the story to a happy return as is sung here. Enoch first heard it from John McEvoy, author of *The Wee Magic Stane*.

HUG O RAN O RU Many Gaelic songs are in a sad vein, bemoaning a lost love, or in praise of an island the singer is leaving for ever. This is one such sad love song, telling of a maid whose love has sailed off to fight for Prince Charlie. She dreams that he is standing by her bed, but when she awakens she finds the mighty ocean still separates them.

DONAL DON The text of this hymn of praise to a successful smuggler and illicit whisky distiller comes from Ford's *Vagabond Songs*, where it is printed without music. Enoch sings it here to a tune best known as *In and Out the Dusty Blue Bells*, the Gaelic *O theid mi fhein . . .* 'Gauger bodies' means customs officers, to evade whom was not only a national pastime but at times a patriotic duty.

KILBOGIE The theme of the poor man who casts off his rags to show himself a shining prince is common in folk-lore, and especially in love stories. In Scotland it was given a realistic twist, reflecting the pride-in-poverty of the Highlands and its contempt for the pride of property in the Lowlands. Indeed the historian could read much into the frequency with

which Highland Lords in disguise carried off Lowland maids and then confounded the canny commercial instinct for property of bride or father. In *Glasgow Peggy* (Child 228) to which *Kilbogie* is closely related, this is made clearest in the verse:

He's taen her up to yon high hill,
When that the sun was yet shinin' clearly,
Says: 'A' that is yours as far as you can see
For lyin' doon wi' a Heilan' laddie'

THE NIGHT VISITING SONG This is a composite version from field-recordings made by Hamish Henderson. There is a whole series of night-visiting songs in Scotland, ranging from the bawdy, such as *The Laird o' Windy Wa's* to the tender. This is a particularly good version of the latter. An English version, *The Grey Cock*, but with a supernatural theme, may be found in *The Penguin Book of English Folk-Songs*.

BONNIE LASS COME O'ER THE BURN A short and pithy piece of mouth-music. From Jeannie Robertson with an additional verse by Enoch Kent.

FAR OVER THE FORTH An expanded version of a song sometimes attributed to Burns. It is a curious mixture of the folk-sentimental and the literary-

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sentimental. It was learned from Lizzie, the daughter of the great Aberdeen folk-singer, Jeannie Robertson.

THE BUTCHER BOY Though Francis James Child characterised the broadside ballads as 'Veritable dunghills' he conceded the occasional 'moderate jewel'. This one, ennobled by a splendid tune, is a good deal more than that. It contains little of the conventional trappings of the professional product – no last dying speech, no explanation for the murder, usually pregnancy, no 'take warning by me'. Indeed it shows much of the bare economy of story line of our classical ballads and is obviously moulded by a community in which the great tradition was still very much alive. It will come as no surprise to know that Enoch learned it from perhaps the greatest living expression of that tradition, Jeannie Robertson.

PORT A BEUL literally 'mouth music' – has been handed down from the days when the voice had to substitute for bagpipes for dancing. The words are often unimportant. The tripping flow of syllables is what counts.

ERIN GO BRATH Despite its title, which means 'Ireland for Ever', this is a Scots song from the nineteenth century, which in its own rumbustious way exemplifies the twin Scottish virtues of anti-

racialism and anti-polis. Indeed the whole song is a kind of anti-'no Irish need apply' polemic. (Compare *No Irish Wanted Here* and *The Wild Irishman in London*.) Enoch first heard it from Jimmy Macbeath. Texts can be found in Ord's *Bothy Ballads* and Ford's *Vagabond Songs*.

BRATACH BANA The old Highland belief in the 'wee folk' is illustrated in this song in praise of the ship of the Earl of the White Banner. This fairy vessel is described as a ship with a golden helm, silver masts and rigging of the finest Spanish silk

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