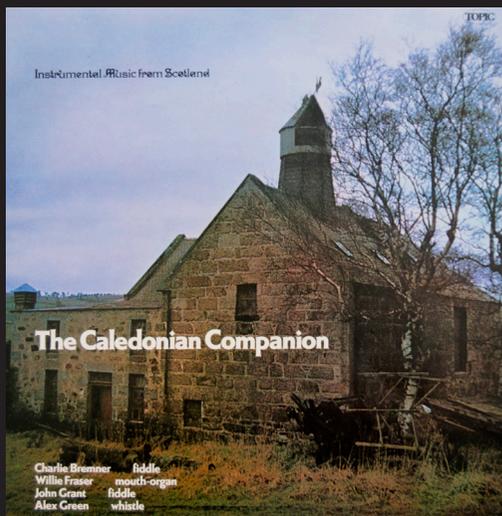




The Caledonian Companion



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INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC FROM SCOTLAND

- 1 **Lady Madeline Sinclair** - Strathspey/The High Road to Linton – reel Alex Green - *whistle*
- 2 **The White Cockade/Niel Gow's Farewell to Whiskey** Miss Jean Milligan – reels/Willie Fraser - *mouth-organ*
- 3 Jig Selection - **The Muckin' o' Geordie's Byre/Kinnegad Slashers/The Bugle Horn/The Muckin' o' Geordie's Byre** Charlie Bremner - *fiddle*
- 4 **The Brig o' Perth** /The Reel o' Tulloch/John Grant - *fiddle*
- 5 Strathspey & Reel: **Forbes Morrison and The Ten Pound Fiddle** Alex Green - *whistle*
- 6 Pipe-Marches: **MacLean of Pennycross and The Midlothian Pipe Band** Alex Green - *whistle*
- 7 Strathspey & Reel: **The Smith's a Gallant Fireman/Jenny Dang the Weaver** Willie Fraser - *diddling*
- 8 Reels: **John McFadden/Timour the Tartar** Charlie Bremner - *fiddle*
- 9 March: **The 79th's Farewell to Gibraltar** Willie Fraser - *mouth-organ*
- 10 Jig Selection: **Bonnie Dundee/Hot Punch/Kenmuir's on an' awa.** Willie Fraser - *mouth-organ*
- 11 **J B Milne/The Lovat Scouts/The Breakdown/Caddam Woods** Charlie Bremner - *fiddle*
- 12 **Polka** Charlie Bremner - *fiddle*
- 13 **The Smith's a Gallant Fireman/ Soldier's Joy** John Grant - *fiddle*
- 14 **The Kirrie Kebbuck/Sir David Davidson of Cantray** - strathspey & reel Alex Green - *whistle*
- 15 Marches: **Tam Bain's Lum and The Blue Bonnets** Alex Green - *whistle*
- 16 Strathspey and Reel: **Far Frae Scotia's Shores and Ally Crocker** (The New Brig o' Ayr) Willie Fraser - *mouth-organ*
- 17 Strathspey and Reel: **Orange and Blue/Mrs MacLeod of Rothesay** Willie Fraser - *diddling*
- 18 March: **Highland Wedding** Willie Fraser - *mouth-organ*
- 19 **Dr MacDonald** – reel Charlie Bremner - *fiddle*
- 20 **Lady Charlotte Campbell** - slow strathspey & reel Alex Green - *whistle*
- 21 Reels: **High Road to Linton/The Mason's Apron/The De'il Among the Tailors/Timour the Tartar** Charlie Bremner - *fiddle*

First published by Topic 1975
 Recorded in Aberdeen and Banffshire 1974/75
 Recorded and produced by Tony Engle
 John Grant recorded by Hugh MacDonald for the School of Scottish Studies
 Notes by Hugh MacDonald
 Sleeve design and front cover photograph by Tony Engle

Traditional dance music is generally associated (in European countries, at least) with peasant society. And yet in Scotland this dance tradition has been shared by aristocracy and peasantry alike. Indeed, many of the tunes played by fiddlers today were written in the 18th and 19th centuries by such fiddler-composers as Niel Gow (1727-1807) and William Marshall (1748-1833) who enjoyed the patronage of aristocratic families and were employed to compose and play for dances in the castles and great houses of the Lairds. These traditional fiddlers developed an elegantly bowed style of playing which still has its talented exponents today, especially in the north-east of Scotland. But it is essentially a courtly tradition, certainly Scottish in idiom, though beautifully turned and finished in a way that might be less appropriate to the more heated dancing of a country wedding.

Country musicians - farm labourers and the like - have probably played much the same repertoire for just as long, and their fiddling shares many of the same traditional stylistic features, tricks of the bowing and subtleties of rhythm. But the village fiddler, playing his fingers to the bone into the early hours of the morning in a crowded, noisy barn, tends to produce a different sound - simpler, perhaps, more robust and direct in effect, and often liberally filled out with open string 'chording'. The playing of Charlie Bremner and John Grant represents two contrasting country fiddle styles from the Spey Valley where a long established fiddle tradition is now sadly on the wane among farm and distillery workers.

Until well into this century, home for the 'fee'd' farmworkers of the North-East was the bothy - a grim, barrack-like bunkhouse where communal music-making could be a merciful release from the hard reality of a long day's toil. Most bothies could muster an impromptu band of some kind, with fiddle and melodeon at the centre; and it was here that smaller, inexpensive pocket instruments like the tin whistle, mouth-organ and 'trump' (jew's harp) really came into their own. No doubt their popularity was as much due

to their versatility (players could tackle almost anything that was possible on fiddles or pipes) as to their obvious economic attractions. Mostly the bothy 'chiels' liked to play dance music, and many of the tunes on this record were part of their staple diet.

Alex Green's repertoire crosses with easy versatility from the courtly to the bothy side of the tradition. He is equally at home with the genteel grace of Gow, the outrageous virtuosity of Skinner and the bristling ornamentation of a pipe march. *Lady Madeline Sinclair* is not, in fact, by Niel Gow - though he published it under his own name in his Third Collection of 1792. It bears an uncanny resemblance to a tune of Charles Duff written a few years earlier. Unfortunately, the Gows, justly famed as composers in their own right, were not above the widespread practice of poaching tunes. *The High Road to Linton* is sometimes known in England as 'Jenny's Gone to Linton' and apparently in Norfolk as 'The High Road to Lynn'. *The White Cockade*, one of the most popular Scottish country dances, owes its name to the white rosette worn by Jacobite soldiers in defiance of the black ones worn by the Hanoverians. *Niel Gow's Farewell to Whiskey* appeared originally in his First Collection, and later in the Fifth. Gow was nothing if not a true Highlander and he prefaced it thus: 'This tune alludes to prohibiting the making of Whiskey in 1799. It is expressive of a Highlanders sorrow on being deprived of his favourite beverage.'

The Lancers was a popular dance in the village halls of the North-East at least until the Second World War (and still is in parts of Shetland), and here Charlie Bremner plays a jig selection of the kind that was used for that most energetic of dances. *The Muckin' o' Geordie's Byre*, one of the best known Scots jigs, is here followed by a couple of good Irish tunes - *Kinnegad Slashers* (named after a village in County Westmeath) and *The Bugle Horn*, known in Ireland as 'The Lady in the Boat'.

John Grant learned his version of *Reel o' Tulloch* from his father, and he's the last in a long line of Tulloch fiddlers to have grown up with this tune in his blood. It's one of the oldest Scots reels in the repertoire, dating possibly from the middle of the 16th century; and though there is an Aberdeenshire Tulloch which claims the tune as its own, the Speyside one has the slightly more plausible legend. It is said that a MacGregor fought a Robertson for the hand of the Laird of Tulloch's daughter and celebrated his victory by improvising the reel on the spot.

Forbes Morrison and *The Ten Pound Fiddle* are both by Scott Skinner (1843-1927), the celebrated 'Strathspey King', whose recordings and performances throughout the north of Scotland in the early years of this century are vividly recalled by older fiddlers like John Grant. Skinner was, in fact, the last of the great fiddler-composers, possessor of a prodigious technique which owed more than a little to the influence of the violin virtuosi of 19th-century concert halls.

Pipe tunes, marches particularly, are popular with fiddlers. But, of course, they're even better suited to the whistle's crisp articulation of the ornaments. *MacLean of Penny Cross* and *The Midlothian Pipe Band* are two of the best-known pipe marches, the second in six-eight time.

Diddling has in recent years become popular as a competitive sport at folk festivals like Kinross; and Willie Fraser has won prizes to prove his pre-eminence in the art. But diddling – the singing of meaningless syllables to dance tunes – was never taken that seriously by the bothy 'chiels' who found it a useful and entertaining substitute when there was a shortage of instruments for dancing or swapping tunes. *The Smith's a Gallant Fireman* (sometimes called 'Carrick's Rant') is arguably the most often played (and diddled) strathspey in Speyside, and perhaps in the whole of the North-East. *Jenny Dang the Weaver* is said to have been composed in 1746 by an Aberdeenshire minister who had seen his wife setting about his handyman, a rather indolent weaver, for refusing to clean

his master's shoes. Actually, the tune appeared in print at least twenty years before that date.

Timour the Tartar, a very widely disseminated reel, is named after the 14th-century founder of the Mogul dynasty in India. In England he was known as Tamburlaine.

The last of Willie Fraser's jig selection, *Kenmuir's on an' Awa*, commemorates a Scottish nobleman who was captured and executed by the English after leading a Jacobite force to defeat at Preston in 1715.

Charlie Bremner begins track eleven onwards with a selection of modern tunes such as you might hear played by one of the many popular country dance bands of today. Caddam Woods probably takes its name from a place near the Angus town of Kirriemuir.

John Grant, like many self-taught fiddlers, plays *The Soldier's Joy* with a sharpened top G in the second strain, giving the tune an unusual modal flavour. His *Smith's a Gallant Fireman* is filled with the ringing, open-string fifths characteristic of his style.

The Kirrie Kebbuck is another Skinner tune, doubtless named after Kirriemuir, still an active centre of fiddling. Kebbuck is a type of home-made cheese.

Blue Bonnets is well known as the tune of Walter Scott's song 'Blue Bonnets over the Border'. It was originally entitled 'Leslie's March' after a 17th-century general who led an army of Covenanters against Cromwell's Ironsides. The blue bonnet (striped with red and white in the Highlands) was then almost universally worn by Scotsmen of the lower classes.

In the Gaelic-speaking West Highlands, *puirt-a-beul* ('tune from the mouth') is roughly equivalent to diddling (though not quite, since actual words are used) and there, *The Orange and Blue* is better known as 'Brochan Lom'. *Mrs McLeod of Raasay* is another popular mouth tune in the Highlands. Niel Gow writes in his Fifth Collection that he got it from Mr McLeod of Raasay who described it as 'an original Isle of Skye Reel'.

Doctor MacDonald (complete with variation) was composed by Scott Skinner in honour of his friend the compiler of the Skye Collection of Ancient and Modern Dance Music. Gow includes Robert MacIntosh's *Lady Charlotte Campbell* in the second part of his 'Repository'. It is played first as a slow strathspey, with an exaggerated, drawn-out rhythmic style typical of the 'listening' (rather than dancing) tunes favoured by aristocratic ladies of the time.

Strutt wrote, in 'Sports and Pastimes of the English People' (1876), of a skittles game called *Deil Among the Tailors* which was played '... at low public houses, where many idle people resort and play it for beer and trifling stakes of money.' Victorian concert fiddlers were notoriously prone to a flamboyance we might consider more suited to a circus ring; and it's no surprise to learn that one, Duncan McKerracher, was in the habit of donning his own *Mason's Apron* before playing the tune as an encore!

John Grant

John Grant, now in his late sixties, was born and has lived all his life as a crofter in the parish of Tulloch in the Abernethy Forest. He comes from a long line of Speyside fiddlers, and learned many of his tunes from his father who took him, at the age of eight, to hear Scott Skinner play in the nearby village of Nethy Bridge. Apart from his father's encouragement he is self-taught. In his younger days he was in demand as fiddler at local dances and 'harvest homes' and won the cup at the Grantown-on-Spey Fiddle Competition.

Willie Fraser

Largely a self-taught musician Willie Fraser has played a number of instruments over the years but has settled on the mouth-organ after losing the fingers of one hand in a circular-saw accident. Before this he played fiddle, bagpipes, accordion and double bass.

His main influences on the mouth-organ in his youth were Adam McWilliams, from Grange in Banffshire, and Alex 'Tushtie' Stewart but he says that his style derives largely from a neighbour - a fiddler by the name of Bob Lawson.

Of diddling, Willie says 'I've been more or less brought up with that since my cradle days. If you passed a tune on and couldn't play it, you just diddled it or whistled the tune through until the other person picked it up. We had no money to buy music and most people couldn't read it anyway - including me. I kept at the mouth-organ most of the time because it was easy to carry about.'

Charlie Bremner

Charlie Bremner started playing the fiddle with music lessons when he was nine, but these lasted a couple of years only as he lost interest. When he was fifteen he joined a local dance band as drummer and played until he was called up for national service at eighteen. After demob he started a dance band - mostly playing drums but swapping with the saxophone player for Scottish dancing - when he played fiddle. He gradually took to playing fiddle all the time and this carried on for some fourteen years or so until he started work at The Glenlivet Distillery - the oldest licensed malt whisky distillery in Scotland - where he works as a mashman. He is accompanied on some selections by Bob Bruce - piano.

Alex Green

Alex Green, a lecturer at Aberdeen Technical College, comes from a musical background - his father, a Scottish Dance Band enthusiast, played fiddle and saxophone in a local band, and both he and his brother were adept on tin whistle. Alex recalls 'My father, to amuse us youngsters, would cut 'whistle' holes in a straw and play tunes on it.' Alex took up the whistle and, despite the setback of losing two fingers in a mill-accident when he was five, has become one of Scotland's foremost whistle players making frequent appearances on radio and television. Esme Shepherd accompanies Alex on piano on several selections.

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