

TOPIC

Northumbrian Country Music

Morpeth Rant



Billy Atkinson mouth-organ
Alan Coulson accordion
Martin Dunn piccolo
Tommy Edmondson button-accordion
Jimmy Pallister fiddle
Geoff Purvis fiddle

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Recorded and produced by Tony Engle
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Photographs by Tony Russell

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- 1 **Morpeth Rant/Miss Gayton's Hornpipe/Kathleen's Fancy/Morpeth Rant** Tommy Edmondson
 - 2 Jig selection: **AM Shinnie/The Hogmanay Jig/Elizabeth Adair** Billy Atkinson
 - 3 Strathspey Medley: **Laird o' Thrums/Iron Man/Laird o' Drumblair** Jimmy Pallister
 - 4 Medley of **Scott Skinner Waltzes** including **Our Highland Queen and Piper's Wait** Alan Coulson & Geoff Purvis
 - 5 **Kinclaven Brig/Bill Sutherland** Martin Dunn
 - 6 Hornpipes: **The Glen Aln/The Redeside** Billy Atkinson
 - 7 **The Crusaders March** Billy Atkinson
 - 8 Jig & hornpipe: **Bill Charlton's Fancy & Madam Bonaparte** Geoff Purvis & Alan Coulson
 - 9 Military Two Step: **Doctor Angus** Tommy Edmondson
 - 10 **The Beeswing with variations** Martin Dunn
 - 11 **Jimmy Allen/The Girl with the Blue Dress On** Jimmy Pallister
 - 12 **The Cheviot Hills** Jimmy Pallister
 - 13 **Crossing The Minch/Banjo Breakdown** Alan Coulson
 - 14 **Latham Ladies** Alan Coulson & Geoff Purvis
 - 15 **Farewell to the Creeks** Billy Atkinson
 - 16 **Longueval** - waltz Billy Atkinson
 - 17 **The Farewell with variations** Martin Dunn

Of all the regions in England where traditional music exists, the North East is probably where it flourishes most strongly. *Morpeth Rant* is the second record of Northumbrian music to be published from a series of recording field trips made over the past three years. The first was *Bonny North Tyne* on Topic. The two records demonstrate some of the wide-ranging aspects of the music to be found in a variety of landscapes from the bleak, sheep-inhabited moorlands to the industrial and mining areas.

The proximity of Scotland with its many well known country dance bands has had a great effect on local repertoires - as has the migration of Irish musicians to Tyneside. Northumbria has its own very strong tradition of indigenous music - often from the small-pipe repertoire - and concern and love for the local music has led to the composition of many tunes in the traditional form.

The tunes on this record reflect the varied influences which have come to bear on the music of the North East. The record opens with *Morpeth Rant* - with its distinctive ranting rhythm - perhaps one of the best known of the area's traditional tunes. *Miss Gayton's Hornpipe* follows - a less well-known native, and this is followed by a recent composition of Tommy Edmondson, *Kathleen's Fancy*. Billy Atkinson (who appeared on Topic's *Bonny North Tyne*) demonstrates the influence of the Scottish country dance bands with a set of jigs composed by Angus Fitchit (*A M Shinnie* and *Elizabeth Adair*) and Andrew Rankine (*The Hogmanay Jig*). The Scottish repertoire is also apparent with Jimmy Pallister's strathspey selection - *Laird o' Thrums/Iron Man/Laird o' Drumblair* and the medley of Scott Skinner waltzes from Geoff Purvis and Alan Coulson.

This mixture of tune origins is represented throughout the record - some of the musicians having developed their style locally, whilst others have been affected to a greater or lesser extent by their sources. Geoff Purvis leans towards the style of the Irish fiddler Sean Maguire, whilst Billy Atkinson and Jimmy Pallister are firmly in the local rural style. Both of these musicians would not be stylistically out of place in East Anglia, however, where the same requirements of rhythmic function exist.

Billy Atkinson



Jimmy Pollister



Tommy Edmondson



Geoff Purvis & Alan Coulson

The Musicians

Billy Atkinson. Born in 1908, Billy lives at Broomhill Farm near Alnwick and worked as a shepherd for most of his life. Much of his repertoire has come from his family - his uncles being fiddle players - but he has also learned from records and the radio as well as composing some of his own tunes. Two of his finest compositions can be heard here - *The Glen Aln Hornpipe* and *The Redeside Hornpipe*.

Martin Dunn lives in Ashington and started playing recorder and flute at school. He has played a wide variety of musical styles including a stint with the Northumberland Youth Orchestra. He is currently playing with the Castle Ceilidh Band - a local barn dance group - and is highly recommended by Billy Atkinson. He continues in the tradition of the local whistle player Billy Conroy and the piccolo player Billy Ballantine.

Tommy Edmondson. Tommy was born in 1934 at Well House and moved to Harbottle at the age of 22. He says that his family was not particularly musical but he started playing because an elder brother bought an old German concertina. Tommy and his two elder brothers gradually got keener on playing and purchased a melodeon and then a Hohner double ray Black Dot accordion. After the war Jimmy Shand and his band started to come to the locality and it was through his advice that Tommy's eldest brother bought a five row continental accordion. By 1948 the brothers had a band in which Tommy played drums. He later moved on to the accordion and started winning competitions in 1955.

Jimmy Pallister. A retired blacksmith, living in Cambo, Jimmy Pallister started to learn the fiddle at the age of 21. He says he 'just bred music' and 'played by ear almost everything I had touched'. At school he played mouth-organ and was leader of the Boy Scouts mouth-organ band. He also played bugle, kettle drum, melodeon and mandolin. For many years he played alongside Ned Pearson, reputed to be the best country fiddler in the North. As well as having a wide repertoire of traditional tunes Jimmy plays countless song-tunes and has the ability to remember songs and tunes after one or two hearings. Songs that particularly catch his fancy he records in a note book, which serves as a register of popular songs over the last half century or more.

Geoff Purvis and Alan Coulson. Alan was first taught to read music at the age of five years by his father and at the age of eight was bought a set of drums. He moved on to accordion at the age of ten and won both the open and novice classes at his first competition in Alnwick in 1958. Geoff Purvis joined Alan in 1973 at the age of eighteen - he has been playing since he was eight. Together with a drummer they form the Border Country Dance Band and play regularly on both sides of the border

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