

## THE GAUGERS BEWARE OF THE ABERDONIAN

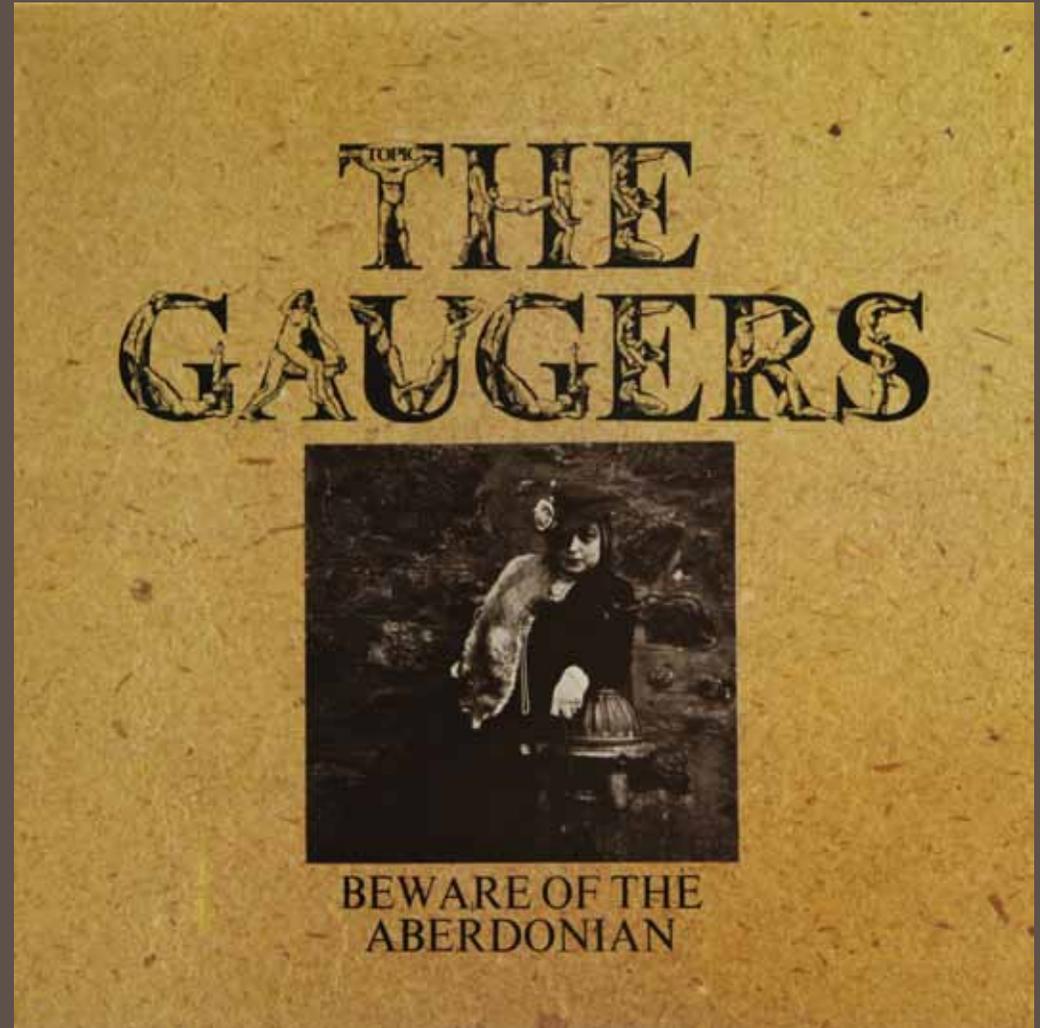
Peter Hall vocal/English concertina/baritone concertina

Tom Spiers vocal/fiddle

Arthur Watson vocal/whistle/dulcimer/bodhran

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1. **Young Jackie**  
Peter vocal/concertina, Tom fiddle, Arthur whistle
2. **The Cruel Brother**  
Tom vocal/fiddle, Arthur dulcimer, Peter vocal
3. **Monymusk Lads**  
Arthur vocal, Tom fiddle, Peter concertina
4. **The Keys to the Cellar/Go to Berwick, Johnnie**  
Tom fiddle, Arthur whistle/dulcimer, Peter concertina
5. **The Lass o' the Moorland Hills**  
Peter vocal, Tom fiddle
6. **The Bonny Lass o' Anglesey**  
Arthur vocal, Tom fiddle, Peter concertina
7. **Sleep Sound in the Morning/Donald Blue**  
Tom fiddle, Peter concertina, Arthur dulcimer/bodhran
8. **The Aberdonian**  
Tom vocal, Peter vocal/baritone concertina, Arthur vocal/whistle
9. **Lochaber No More**  
Tom fiddle, Arthur whistle, Peter concertina
10. **The Minister's Sheep**  
Peter vocal, Arthur and Tom chorus
11. **Bogie's Bonnie Belle**  
Tom vocal, Peter concertina, Arthur whistle
12. **The Ewie wi' the Crookit Horn/The Jolly Shepherd/Polly Stewart**  
Tom fiddle, Arthur whistle, Peter concertina
13. **The Scranky Black Farmer**  
Arthur vocal, Tom fiddle, Peter concertina



## TSDL284

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The North-East of Scotland, and the Buchan area in particular, has for long been acknowledged as probably the richest source of traditional song in the British Isles. It is rich not only in the amount of material collected in that area but in the quality of ballad and song versions found there, a fact surely bound up with the landscape, the history, the nature of the communities, and the highly expressive speech forms. The area has, fortunately, been well served in the past by collectors such as Greig, Buchan and Ord, and in more recent times the work of those who have followed in their footsteps has unearthed not only fresh material but also more traditional singers of stature than any other part of the country. In spite of this, the area has produced surprisingly few revival singers who have made a real impact. Perhaps they have been daunted by the very health and wealth of their tradition, for certainly those who have sampled the 'real stuff of local music' would expect high standards. In The Gaugers, however, we have a group who can meet those standards.

The Gaugers comprise Peter Hall, Tom Spiers and Arthur Watson. From an early interest in jazz trumpet, Peter Hall moved through the skiffle phase to become one of the leading figures of the folk music revival in Scotland. In 1964 he began to play the concertina and this, along with his singing, is his main musical contribution to the group. His involvement

in other directions includes being joint editor with Norman Buchan of 'The Scottish Folksinger', and also being a very active collector with around 700 songs to his credit.

Tom Spiers learned the fiddle at school but his involvement with the revival stems from the early days of the Aberdeen Folk Club – he is, in fact, the longest serving organiser of that club. By the mid 'sixties he was the resident singer on a radio series, and since then has mastered the technique of singing to his own fiddle accompaniment, to the detriment of neither skill. He has been influenced by many local traditional singers, including Jeannie Robertson and Norman Kennedy – his fiddle was, in fact, bought from Isaac Higgins, a member of Jeannie's household.

Arthur Watson's whistle has no such impressive origin, but from an early influence by Irish traditional players he has developed an individual style which is an integral part of The Gaugers sound. His robust yet genial singing gives no indication of his early experience with cathedral choirs, and today his favourite singers are, almost predictably, Jeannie Robertson and Lizzie Higgins.

After involvement with various other combinations, the present group was formed on New Year's morn, 1974, and as such received its first booking at the Inverness Festival, Easter 1974.

## TSDL284

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### YOUNG JACKIE

Peter Hall is the singer in this tale of the ploughboy's seduction of the girl gathering nuts – one of the most widely used and long lasting of vernacular images. It is known more generally, in its English forms at any rate, as **The Nutting Girl** or **Nutting Time**, titles which suggest more obviously the Rabelaisian nature of the text. The chorus here, however, is much shorter than usual, reflecting perhaps the North-Easter's urge to be on with things. The overall mood is one of jauntiness, but there is, nevertheless, a typical harshness in the ending – the narrative comes to a rapid conclusion when the fruits of the encounter are borne.

This version is from the singing of Bill Rhynd, Cove, Kincardineshire, with additions from Greig.

### THE CRUEL BROTHER

In ballad times, vague as that term may be, it was apparently regarded as unpardonable not to ask a brother's assent to his sister's marriage. The story here revolves round such a failure on the part of the suitor. The brother's consequent murder of his sister seems to be a somewhat extreme reaction, but perhaps becomes credible when we consider that in a patriarchal society he would naturally have a vested interest in who became part of the family. The ballad does not make this point – but then to contemporaries it wouldn't need to. In archetypal

fashion, the murderer is revealed in the heroine's testament.

The text here is a collation of various versions in Child (No. 11) where the tune is also to be found. Tom Spiers is the singer.

### MONYMUSK LADS

Arthur Watson sings this spirited tale from the bothy community. This version is taken from Ord's "Bothy Songs and Ballads" where it is called **Rural Courtship**, a title which hardly indicates the determination with which the lad pursues his romantic quest. Rural courtship was, indeed, a popular theme with the bothy singers. Here, however, we have more than just a tale, but also subtle delineation of character along with sharp comment on the attitude towards the serving classes, as when the guidwife says:

'Providence has acted wrang,  
Sic pleasures for tae gie,  
Tae only servant lad or lass,  
Just working for a fee.'

### THE KEYS TO THE CELLAR/GO TO BERWICK JOHNNIE

These two tunes are a good example of The Gaugers' sympathetic use of instruments and rhythmic changes (listen also to **The Bonnie Lass o' Anglesey**). The Keys to the Cellar is played firstly as a slip jig and then as a single hornpipe. In this second rhythm it is used for the

## TSDL284

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Jacobite song, **Cam ye ower frae France?** The second tune is also a single hornpipe taken from “The Scots Musical Museum”.

### THE LASS O’ THE MOORLAND HILLS

This fetching tale of naivete being triumphant over hardened experience is taken from the Gavin Greig manuscripts, the source singer being Miss Annie Shirer of Kininmonth, Aberdeenshire. Traditional songs abound with stories of lost maidenheads; this one is rare in dealing with the technique for regaining them!

It is perhaps more generally known in English versions as **The Widow of Westmoreland’s Daughter**, or in Ireland simply as **The Widow’s Daughter of the west moor lands**.

### THE BONNY LASS O’ ANGLESEY

This song, as much as any other, illustrates The Gaugers’ sympathetic reaction to texts and to the words and music of the tradition in general. The text is from Peter Buchan’s “Ballads of the North of Scotland” and is to be found in Child (No. 220). The narrative is somewhat fragmented but revolves round a dance competition in which the Scots heroine tires out fifteen English partners in pursuit of a prize of property and her choice of the King’s knights for husband. There may well be an underlying symbolism! With tongue in cheek, Child quotes Buchan’s note: “It is altogether a political piece and I

do not wish to interfere much with it!” Appropriately, the Gaugers have set it to a sword dance tune, **Gille Calum**, which is used widely in the Gaelic tradition for ‘port a beul’ (‘mouth music’ for dancing).

### SLEEP SOUND IN THE MORNING/DONALD BLUE

A Shetland reel medley which The Gaugers have taken from the playing of David Robb, Carsie, Perthshire.

### THE ABERDONIAN

Here we have the classic clash of the country lad and the lady of the town, in this case, Dundee, a favourite battleground. The hero is one of a long line of victims to be found in such cautionary tales as **Jock Hawk’s Adventures in Glasgow**, **The Overgate** and **The Beef Can Close**. The reactions vary from a fatalistic acceptance to, as here, a vehement denial of future involvement and a stern admonition to the listener: “Beware o’ an Aberdonian!” In this rendering, the dry humour of the North-East is brought to the fore, not least by the pawkiness of Peter’s baritone concertina. This version is taken from the singing of the late Jake Mitchell of Peterhead, collated with a version from Danny Couper, Aberdeen.

### LOCHABER NO MORE

This magnificent tune vies in popularity with **The Floo’ers o’ the Forest** as a pipe lament at funerals. The noted Gaelic collector, Calum MacLean, has said: “Without Lochaber there would be no Highlands” and

## TSDL284

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this is true, for historically and geographically, it is the very heart of the area. The Gaugers do tune and background full justice with a beautiful arrangement. It is taken from John Glen's "Ancient Music of Scotland", and is based on an old Gaelic tune that became well known after Alan Ramsay set his "Lochaber" poem to it, c. 1726.

### **THE MINISTER'S SHEEP**

The history of Scotland is inextricably bound up with the Church – John Knox, the Covenanters, the Jacobite rebellions and so on. In particular, the heavy hand of Calvinism has fallen upon all our institutions, and upon our traditional culture. William MacKay in "Urquhart and Glenmoriston" says: "It has to a great extent destroyed the songs and tales which were the wonderfully pure intellectual pastimes of our fathers." He was aware of the suppression, but not, perhaps, of the resilience of the folk heritage. The humorous tale given here displays a refreshing lack of awe and reverence for the religious institutions. It is taken from the singing of the late Robin Hutchinson of Aberdeen and was collected by both Peter Buchan and Gavin Greig.

### **BOGIE'S BONNIE BELLE**

This is probably one of the best known and certainly one of the loveliest songs to come out of the bothy tradition. It stands out from the rest of the genre as a completely rounded, beautifully and concisely

expressed love story whose impact does not depend to the usual extent on the bothy context. It is widely sung in the revival, but the tune variation used here has more minor elements than in the more common versions, and this added to the 'rightness' of Tom Spiers's North-East voice, gives the song a new dimension. The tune is, in fact, based on a version in the Greig manuscripts and the text is a collation from the same source.

### **THE EWIE WI' THE CROOKIT HORN/THE JOLLY SHEPHERD/POLLY STEWART**

The first tune is a pipe strathspey remembered from Jeannie Robertson's singing of the song. The 'ewie' was the illicit whisky still. **The Jolly Shepherd** is from James Kerr's "Second Collection of Merry Melodies" (No. 216).

### **THE SCRANKY BLACK FARMER**

On the coast of the West Highlands, the people have drawn a living from both sea and land, and the crofter-fisherman was common. Likewise, in East Anglia, the year was often divided between work on sea and land. In the North-East of Scotland, however, the fishing and farming communities were much more sharply divided. It is unusual, therefore, to find that in this bothy song the narrator appears to be of a seafaring background, possibly drafted in initially for the seasonal work of harvest. Whatever his background, however, his opinion of the farmer is little different from that expressed by most bothy singers.

## TSDL284

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The text here is taken from Ord's "Bothy Songs and Ballads".

Duncan MacLennan, Inverness

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Beware of the  
Aberdonian

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