

# Francis George SCOTT

**COMPLETE MUSIC FOR SOLO PIANO**

EIGHT SONGS OF FRANCIS GEORGE SCOTT

TRANSCR. **RONALD STEVENSON**

**Christopher Guild**

INCLUDES FIRST RECORDINGS

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## FRANCIS GEORGE SCOTT Complete Piano Music

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<b><i>Eight Songs of Francis George Scott (transcribed by Ronald Stevenson)*</i></b>	<b>23:22</b>
1 No. 1 Since all thy vows, false maid, are blown to air	3:30
2 No. 2 Wha is that at my bower-door?	2:17
3 No. 3 O were my love yon lilac fair	3:20
4 No. 4 Wee Willy Gray	1:37
5 No. 5 Milk-Wort and Bog-Cotton	3:05
6 No. 6 Crowdieknowe	3:09
7 No. 7 Ay Waulkin, O	3:50
8 No. 8 There's news, lasses, news	2:34
9 <b><i>Urlar</i> (5 October 1948)</b>	<b>3:06</b>
10 <b><i>April Skies</i> (? 1912)</b>	<b>6:19</b>
<b><i>Intuitions</i></b>	<b>37:12</b>
11 No. 1 Lullaby. <i>Grave</i> (undated)	0:41
12 No. 2 Trumpet Tune. <i>Allegro moderato</i> (undated)	0:17
13 No. 3 Lonely Tune. <i>Andantino</i> (undated)	0:48
14 No. 4 Running Tune. <i>Animato</i> (10 May 1943)	0:24
15 No. 5 Lilting Tune. <i>Andante</i> (14 October 1943)	0:35
16 No. 6 National Song. <i>Andante</i> (25 February 1944)	0:42
17 No. 7 An Clarsair. <i>Grave</i> (13 September 1944)	0:56
18 No. 8 Singing Game. <i>Presto</i> (27 September 1944)	0:21
19 No. 9 Strathspey. <i>Moderato</i> (3 October 1944)	0:28
20 No. 10 Processional. <i>Comodo</i> (19 October 1944)	1:10
21 No. 11 Love's Question and Reply (Dialogue). <i>Andantino</i> (28 October 1944)	0:42
22 No. 12 Border Riding-Rhythm. <i>Animato</i> (12 December 1944)	0:37
23 No. 13 Old Irish! <i>Andantino</i> (7 February 1945)	0:44
24 No. 14 Deil's Dance. <i>Prestissimo</i> (February 1945)	0:33
25 No. 15 An Seanachaidh (Am Bàrd – Ossian). <i>Largo</i> (17 March 1945)	2:10
26 No. 16 Benediction. <i>Largo</i> (6 April 1945)	0:34
27 No. 17 Farewell to the Highlands (5 June 1945)	0:50

28	No. 18 [untitled] (15 February 1946)	0:47
29	No. 19 Slow (2 March 1946)	1:11
30	No. 20 Urlar. Very Slow (1 April 1946)	1:04
31	No. 21 [untitled] (2 May 1946)	0:32
32	No. 22 [untitled] (29 July 1946)	0:46
33	No. 23 [untitled] (9 August 1946)	0:14
34	No. 24 Slow (19 August 1946)	0:35
35	No. 25 [untitled] (22 August 1946)	0:35
36	No. 26 [untitled] (25 August 1946)	0:22
37	No. 27 [untitled] (?1933)	0:33
38	No. 28 [untitled] (27 February 1947)	0:26
39	No. 29 [untitled] (16 May 1947)	0:49
40	No. 30 [untitled] (9 July 1947)	1:03
41	No. 31 [untitled] (15 July 1947)	0:29
42	No. 32 <i>Presto</i> (18 July 1947)	0:20
43	No. 33 [untitled] (19 July 1947)	0:27
44	No. 34 [untitled] (5 February 1948)	0:21
45	No. 35 Quick March (8 February 1948)	0:34
46	No. 36 <i>Riddles</i> : No. 1 (5 June 1948)	0:16
47	No. 37 <i>Riddles</i> : No. 2 (7 June 1948)	0:15
48	No. 38 <i>Riddles</i> : No. 3, Gaelic National Anthem (in A major) (10 June 1948)	1:12
49	No. 39 <i>Riddles</i> : No. 4, Question and Answer (4.20 a.m., 21 June 1948)	0:24
50	No. 40 <i>Riddles</i> : No. 5, Very Slow (9.30–10 a.m., 23 June 1948)	0:50
51	No. 41 <i>Riddles</i> : No. 6, Bel-Ami (3 a.m., 25 July 1948)	0:44
52	No. 42 [untitled] (13 September 1948)	1:01
53	No. 43 [untitled] (5 October 1948)	0:16
54	No. 44 Souviens-toi? Very slow and expressive (Thursday, 2 November 1950)	1:14
55	No. 45 Pibroch Urlar (27 May 1950)	1:06
56	No. 46 Very Quick (15 May 1951)	0:30
57	No. 47 Gaily (17 May 1951)	0:12
58	No. 48 <i>Adagio patetico</i> (1 June 1951)	0:44
59	No. 49 Quick and <i>marcato</i> (28 June 1951)	0:16
60	No. 50 Rather Quick (29 January 1952)	0:12

61	No. 50a Very Slow (31 January 1952)	0:28
62	No. 51 Evening on the Loch. Slow (16 April 1952)	0:50
63	No. 52 The Two Neighbours (Campbell Hay) (29 September 1952)	0:28
64	No. 53 Slow (18 November 1952)	0:38
65	No. 54 Slow and <i>legato</i> (26 November 1952)	1:33
66	No. 56 Slow and <i>legato</i> (13 April 1953)	0:28
67	No. 57 Hymn-tune (18 July 1953)	0:30
68	<b><i>The Two Neighbours (Campbell Hay)</i> – alternative setting (1952)</b>	<b>1:00</b>
69	<b>Minuet and Trio (1903)</b>	<b>1:39</b>
70	<b><i>La Joie</i> (c. 1910)</b>	<b>2:07</b>

**Christopher Guild, piano**

**TT 75:22**

ALL EXCEPT \* FIRST RECORDINGS

# FRANCIS GEORGE SCOTT: AN APPRECIATION

by Alan Riach

Born on 25 January 1880 in the Borders town of Hawick, only twenty miles from England, Francis George Scott grew up in a Scots-speaking world where the Border Ballads,<sup>1</sup> the history of the reivers (cross-border raiders), characteristics of defiance and self-determination, were intrinsic, often contested, never to be taken complacently. His blind great-uncle, a renowned fiddler, once ran his fingers over the boy's skull, forehead and 'frontal bones' and delivered his judgement: 'good musical bones!'. Music, song, story-telling and poetry are intertwined in the Ballads. These three qualities are centred in Scott's compositions: they combine not only 'pure music' but also qualities of narrative and the startling turns of lyricism that are shared by poems and songs. They also made Scott a strong, close literary critic, not least of the poetry of the man who had been his school pupil as a boy, and was to be his friend and source of poems for settings as a man, Christopher Grieve, or Hugh MacDiarmid.

Scott's individuality makes a lasting impression, but his cradle was nineteenth-century Scotland and the family he came from. He attributed his love of literature to his mother; and his father would find him studying at 3 a.m. in his schooldays, attempting his first compositions. He was aged fifteen when he composed his first song, in 1895, for the Riding of the Marches, the joyous festival when a vivid assembly of local folk take horse and ride at the gallop around the territorial boundaries of Hawick. With words by a local poet, Robert Hunter (1855–1905), the

<sup>1</sup> The ethnomusicologist A. L. Lloyd wrote of the Border Ballads: "The bare rolling stretch of country from the North Tyne and Cheviots to the Scottish southern uplands was for a long time the territory of men who spoke English but had the outlook of Afghan tribesmen; they prized a poem almost as much as plunder, and produced such an impressive assembly of local narrative songs that some people used to label all our greater folk poems as "Border ballads" (*Folk Song in England*, Faber and Faber, London, 2008, p. 150; first published by Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1967).

schoolboy Scott produced 'Oor Bonnie Border Toun', which Maurice Lindsay describes as 'a roistering ballad in the Scottish Victorian music-hall tradition current at that time'.<sup>2</sup> According to Lindsay, it was published in a collection of Hawick songs and 'gets its quota of performances during each riding of the marches' and 'enthusiastically roared out every year at the well-washed-down dinner with which the festivities conclude'.<sup>3</sup>

Scott moved to Edinburgh in 1897 to be a student teacher at Moray House Training College and attended Edinburgh University, where he was taught English by the writer and literary scholar George Saintsbury. He was an Essay Prizeman in 1901 but never completed his degree, refusing to apologise after offending one of his lecturers. He later took a B.Mus. degree from Durham University in 1909 but essentially he was an intensely committed self-taught musician.

He taught English at various Scottish schools between 1901 and 1925, at Falkirk, and, from 1903 to 1911, at Langholm Academy, in the Borders, where he was in charge of a class which included a boy named Christopher Murray Grieve (1892–1978). The lad caught Scott's attention: here was a young writer with high potential. One day, when he had set an essay-writing exercise on 'How I spent my holidays', Scott noticed that Grieve was sitting immobile, thinking, and loomed over him: 'Don't worry, Christopher,' Scott said as his pupil puzzled over his task, 'there's something in that big head of yours that will come out some day'.<sup>4</sup> It's said that Scott also gave the boy at least one dose of corporal punishment. Recollecting the event later, Grieve commented that he couldn't remember what it was he'd done but he was sure that he'd deserved it: 'We were all juvenile delinquents, and consequently up to pranks which today would condemn us to a remand home or borstal'.<sup>5</sup>

Not long before the outbreak of the First World War, Scott married a fellow teacher at Dunoon Grammar School, Burges Gray, a fine mezzo-soprano. They had four children, Francise (who was born while they were in Paris in the winter of 1914), Lillias, George and

<sup>2</sup> *Francis George Scott and the Scottish Renaissance*, Paul Harris, Edinburgh, 1980, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Alan Bold, *MacDiarmid: Christopher Murray Grieve, A Critical Biography*, Paladin, London, 1990, p. 53.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Lindsay, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

Malcolm. Scott volunteered for military service in the war but was rejected on medical grounds. Through the war years and immediately after, he made firm friendships with a number of writers and artists associated with the Scottish Renaissance of the 1920s: the artist William McCance, the poet and critic Edwin Muir and his wife the novelist Willa Muir, the poet William Soutar and Denis Saurat, an Anglo-French writer, broadcaster and professor of French literature at the University of Glasgow.

Saurat took Scott to Paris, where he was introduced to the composer Jean Roger-Ducasse (1873–1954), who immediately recognised the quality of Scott's compositions and invited him to stay and work with him and the inner circle of the Paris Conservatoire: Fauré (whose student, and good friend, Roger-Ducasse had been), Debussy, Ravel. But Scott pulled back, acknowledging his own family commitments in Glasgow.

In 1925 he became a Lecturer in Music at Jordanhill, Glasgow's Training College for Teachers, and the family moved to 44 Munro Road, a grey-sandstone terrace house, which was to be their home and a central powerhouse of the Scottish Renaissance in the 1920s, what Saurat called the beginning of 'a sort of furious spiritual awakening among some people in Scotland' who 'looked to Scott as their master'.<sup>6</sup>

In 1922 his former pupil Christopher Grieve had started publishing poems under the name Hugh MacDiarmid. He was to become the major Scottish poet of the twentieth century, recognised as such by Yeats, Eliot and Pound. Another old Langholm teacher, William Burt, showed some of MacDiarmid's poems to Scott. They had lost touch and, though Scott immediately saw the quality of the poems, he did not know who their author was. They met again in 1923. Scott recognised in the poems of his former pupil exactly the sort of work that he needed for his song-settings. He set MacDiarmid's poems over the following ten years or so, through a period in which he closely studied the works of Bartók, whom he met in 1932, when Erik Chisholm, fellow Scottish composer, brought him to Glasgow to give performances of his own music. (Bartók visited Glasgow twice, on 29 February 1932 and on 2 November

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

1933.<sup>7</sup>) Beginning in 1923, he attended the series of International Contemporary Music Festivals at Salzburg and absorbed the work not only of Bartók but also of Schoenberg. At home, meanwhile, he was researching the music of the Scottish Border Ballads and the classical music of the Highland bagpipe, pibroch – or *piobaireachd* – which informs the beautifully sustained melodic poise of his setting of MacDiarmid's poem 'Milk-Wort and Bog-Cotton'.

Through the 1920s, the Scott family often holidayed in Montrose (MacDiarmid's home at this time), and Scott and MacDiarmid would get together for Wagnerian conversations about poetry, music and the artistic regeneration they both saw as essential to a revitalised Scotland. The composer's cousin, the artist William Johnstone, described them at this period. Scott, Johnstone said,

became greatly excited by what he saw as the possibility of a splendid revival, a Scottish Renaissance of the arts. We three were to be the core of this Renaissance. He felt that if we all pulled our weight together and tried, Christopher with his poetry, I with my painting and Francis with his music, all having a revolutionary point of view, we could raise the standard of the arts right from the gutter into something that would be really important.

It was to be 'a great resurgence of art in Scotland'.<sup>8</sup>

This vision was fragmented in the 1930s. MacDiarmid, isolated personally and increasingly politically extreme, moved to the Shetland Islands, and Johnstone went to work as a teacher in London. Both kept up a high output of brilliant work, but they were too far apart to combine forces effectively. Moreover, the fourth member of this group of friends, Edwin Muir, asserted in 1936 that the only way forward for Scottish literature was for it to be written exclusively in English. This view led to Muir's bitter alienation from MacDiarmid, and Scott himself saw Muir's statement as a criticism of his own musical idiom – which confirms that he thought of his own compositions as occupying

<sup>7</sup> Cf. John Purser, Erik Chisholm, *Scottish Modernist 1904–1965: Chasing a Restless Muse*, Boydell & Brewer, Woodbridge, 2009, pp. 31–35.

<sup>8</sup> William Johnstone, *Points in Time: An Autobiography*, Barrie and Jenkins, London, 1980, p. 72.



a distinctly Scots musical language, to match the Scots written language employed (indeed, invented from various sources) by MacDiarmid.

By now, moreover, MacDiarmid was writing long poems, and so there were fewer of the intense lyrics in Scots of the previous decade for Scott to set. They kept up their friendship, though, partly through a common meeting ground in St Andrews, from where the sophisticated cultural periodical *The Modern Scot* was being produced, and which published both of them. When, in 1935, after the break-up of his first marriage, MacDiarmid suffered a severe nervous and physical breakdown and was hospitalised, Scott was there to help. And when the poet returned to live in Glasgow, Scott's home was always open to him.

Scott remained at Jordanhill until 1946, when he retired. His duties included lecturing on theory and musical appreciation to students about to begin their careers as schoolteachers, and giving them practice in choral singing and training a small orchestra. He also served as an Inspector of Schools, in central and south-west Scotland. Occasional concerts after the war succeeded in getting Scott's songs heard by a small, appreciative public, but there was very little prospect of seriously establishing them in the British concert repertoire. When Scott's aspirations for a number of concert performances of his work came to nothing, his hopes for a European audience for his work were dimmed.

Scott's disappointments must have been deep. In 1934 he engaged upon a setting for orchestra and baritone of William Dunbar's 'The Ballad of Kynd Kittock', but there seems to be no recording nor even record of performance. A concert overture, *Renaissance* (written in the winter of 1936–37), has similarly been languishing in the archives of the Scottish Music Centre in Glasgow, and deserves fresh performance. Scott revised it twice after he solicited comment from Roger-Ducasse. This work was first performed in St Andrew's Hall in Glasgow in January 1939 and was well received, but it seems not to have been performed since. In 1947 an orchestral ballet to William Dunbar's poem 'The Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins' was considered by Sadler's Wells at Covent Garden and Leonide Massine, but that came to nothing. And there is also a small



*F. G. Scott, photographed at home by Lida Moser in 1949*

manuscript collection in the Scott archive in Glasgow's Mitchell Library. Among these unrecorded works – until now – is the series of piano pieces, *Intuitions*, begun in 1943 and written well into the 1950s. The value of Scott's work demands reappraisal and these neglected works must be part of that reassessment. Glasgow University gave him an honorary doctorate in 1957, noting his characteristics: intensity, humour and exacting fastidiousness – but by then he was an ailing man. He died in 1958 and is buried in the Borders, in the Wellgate Cemetery, overlooking his native Hawick.

The trajectory of F. G. Scott's life suggests some of the composer's essential qualities. His first twenty years were spent in the nineteenth century: he came from an older

Scotland and a specific part of it. As a Borderer, Scots was a language he grew up with and knew in his bones, a language earthed in body and physicality, yet given to song and melody, a language characterised, as it can be, by quickness, vivacity, speed, as much as by stentorian authority, 'the great voice that speaks softly'.<sup>9</sup> Burns and the folk tradition clearly demonstrate these capacities in the language. Scots in this sense is very different from what one hears in the airs of the English choral tradition or the magniloquent tradition of English verse, from Chaucer through Shakespeare to Milton and Wordsworth. The poetry of Dunbar, Burns and MacDiarmid breathes differently.

Scott, moreover, was possessed of a Borderer's sensibility – the sense that just over the border was the enemy, not in terms of military might but in terms of an alien sensibility: over-genteel, crippled by propriety. His compositions – especially some of the songs and these *Intuitions* – animate a very improper sense of the eldritch and eerie, moonlit worlds of liminality and transformation. They never rest complacently – irony keeps them sharp and the humour is sometimes merciless, possessed of what the poet Norman MacCaig once called 'the homicidal hilarity of a laugh in a ballad'.<sup>10</sup>

But the other side of that is a sense of tenderness, a poised sensitivity to the vulnerabilities of childhood and old age which counterpoints the vigorous expressions of force and power. There is something elemental in Scott's compositions that remains deeply memorable. If exaggerated, such qualities might deliver excessive sentimentality or vulgarity, but Scott's compositions never indulge themselves. There is a precisely judged universal quality of sentiment, an adamant strength of character, an absolute trust in self-determination and an exemplary confidence about what is really worthwhile in life. That's what roots them not only in Scotland but in the European tradition and the best that all the arts can do, to help people to live.

The life and influence of F. G. Scott are of lasting significance in the story of modern Scottish music, literature and the arts. And yet he is far less well-known than he should be, even among aficionados of modern Scottish music and literature, and almost

<sup>9</sup> Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Scotland', in *The Complete Poems*, ed. Michael Grieve and W. R. Aitken, Martin Brian & O'Keeffe, London, 1978, p. 652.

<sup>10</sup> Norman MacCaig, 'Space travel', in *The Poems*, ed. Ewen McCaig, Polygon, Edinburgh, 2005, p. 197.

completely unknown internationally beyond a small company of appreciative listeners and readers. But those who do know his work appreciate it keenly and deeply.<sup>11</sup>

The late solo-piano pieces *Intuitions* by Francis George Scott are a crucially important component of the story of the arts of modern Scotland. Like the songs, the pieces recorded here are miniatures. His larger orchestral compositions, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, the concert overture *Renaissance*, the *Cumha nan Laoch* ('Lament for the Heroes') for string orchestra and *The Ballad of Kynd Kittock* for baritone and orchestra are the exceptions that prove the rule.

With this recording of the *Intuitions*, Scott's writing for piano can be closely experienced for the first time. Each one of these pieces gently discloses balances of depth, speed and the highly sensitised character of what one might call 'intimisation'. They touch on tragedy sometimes, and sometimes flirt and fleetly run with high comical spirit. They open the range and deepen the scale of one's appreciation of Scott, and should, I hope, give listeners a different kind of immediately attractive, intriguing introduction to this highly individual and resourceful composer.

In his book *Scottish Eccentrics* Hugh MacDiarmid describes the life of the artist William Berry (1730–83), a professional seal-engraver and portraitist, whose minimal output was entirely characterised by an 'invariable desire of giving perfection to everything he put out of his hand' and maintaining 'the strictest principles of honour and integrity'.<sup>12</sup> Something similar may be said of F. G. Scott. Like Webern's intensely abbreviated compositions, but distinctively earthed in the lyrical imagination of a Scottish borderer, the *Intuitions* are born of the perception that moved William Blake to write the opening lines of *Auguries of Innocence*:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand  
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand  
And eternity in an hour.

<sup>11</sup> Its quality is evident in the songs recorded on the album *Moonstruck: Songs of F. G. Scott* (Signum Classics SIGCD096, 2007) with Lisa Milne (soprano), Roderick Williams (baritone) and Iain Burnside (piano).

<sup>12</sup> Hugh MacDiarmid, 'The Strange Case of William Berry', in *Scottish Eccentrics*, Routledge, London, 1936, pp. 134 and 135.

From the very first sounds, chords, movements, structures, you know they're F. G. Scott, and yet compared to the song-settings, they are each of them more lonely and solitary, sad and yet tough. Each of Scott's settings of short poems, whether by Hugh MacDiarmid or any other, is to an extraordinary degree *with* the text of the poem, accompanying and articulating the words in a way self-evidently different from speech. But these solo *Intuitions* are different. They are not enhancements of the words of others. They are each of them small statements, utterances, iterations: Scott's own word is the best – *Intuitions*.

Hugh MacDiarmid has a wonderfully pertinent poem, 'The Secret Voice', on the subject of how life, the quickening, is beyond words, language, learning, thought, even beyond bodily flesh and what is called 'mind'. He calls it 'music'. Here it is:

My voice is like a bairn  
– O wad that it could tell  
The hauf that's in my brain  
And body to myself!

For Language is a young thing  
But flesh is auld – and mind;  
And words for what we are,  
Or ken, are ill to find.

And fegs! for Life and Lear  
It's hard to thole to hear  
The silly havers Thocht  
At best can mak' o' ocht.

Yet whiles through words can brak'  
A music that can gliff  
Body and brain as if  
Their benmaist secrets spak'.<sup>13</sup>

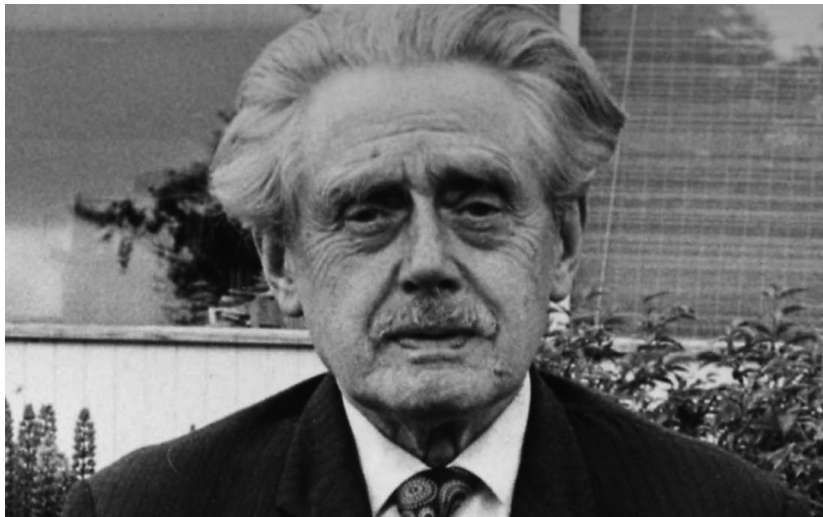
*My voice is like a child  
– O would that it could tell  
The half that's in my brain  
And body to myself!*

*For language is a young thing  
But flesh is old – and mind;  
And words for what we are,  
Or know, are difficult to find.*

*And indeed! For Life and Learning  
It's difficult to endure hearing  
The silly nonsense Thought  
At best can make of anything.*

*Yet sometimes through words can break  
A music that can provide a startling insight  
To body and brain as if  
Their innermost secrets were speaking.*

<sup>13</sup> Hugh MacDiarmid, *The Revolutionary Art of the Future: Rediscovered Poems*, ed. John Manson, Dorian Grieve and Alan Riach, Carcanet, Manchester, in association with the Scottish Poetry Library, Edinburgh, 2003, p. 1.



*Hugh MacDiarmid*

Similarly, in a short sketch of 1927, ‘The Waterside’, MacDiarmid describes ‘the Waterside folk’ of his native town of Langholm, not that far away from Scott’s native Hawick, the people who lived beside the confluence of the three rivers, the Wauchope, the Esk and the Ewes, as ‘brainless’: ‘Brains were nae use there. To dae onything ava they’d to use something faur quicker than thocht – and thocht’s a dryland thing and a gey recent yin at that.’ This is the quickness that animates Scott’s *Intuitions*.

The very word *Intuitions* suggests something moving beyond describable emotion and rationality, each one delivering a meaning that is both quicker and more subtle than categories can permit. The humour and the power at work in them is characteristic of Scott, both the man and the composer: the man, as accounts of him suggest, and the composer, as his song-settings testify. And the wide variety of tone makes the whole collection fresh – there is nothing formulaic and there is no technique that merely repeats itself. There is technique, certainly, but it possesses this quality of starting anew each time. And there is a heartbreak in them too, in their loneliness.

Yet there is strength in this kind of minimalism.

The one thing similar I also love, but from a different world and another national ethos, are the two tiny pieces for piano you can hear from the sketches for Elgar's Third Symphony, which Anthony Payne could not find a way to make use of in his reconstruction of the symphony. He recorded them on the CD of the sketches, NMC DO52, the last track, track 50: 'Unused fragments'. Each of them takes about 15 seconds, but once heard, never forgotten.

These *Intuitions* might have been unremembered, unrecorded, were it not for the efforts of dedicated individuals like Christopher Guild. In the poem addressed to Scott at the start of his epic poem *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*,<sup>14</sup> Hugh MacDiarmid wrote: 'yours was a burstin' kirn tae' – in other words, you, too, Scott, bringing in your harvest after great labour and difficult work, work so hard as almost to make you burst. And yet here we are to imagine Scott through the ten years between 1943 and 1953, this family man, this solitary man, this musical imagination, insomniac, alone at the piano, in the night, his family asleep, and he is simply letting these miniatures out from the cage of his mind, writing them down – finally to be heard over half a century after his death.

<sup>14</sup> Hugh MacDiarmid, 'To F. G. Scott' (dedicatory poem), *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, Blackwoods, Edinburgh, 1926, p. v.

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## **FRANCIS GEORGE SCOTT, A PROPHET FOR SCOTTISH MUSIC**

by Christopher Guild

It was F. G. Scott's mission as a composer to create a style of art-music befitting a new, revitalised Scotland in the 1920s. It was a time when the Scottish people – particularly its artists, thinkers and politicians – were beginning to reconsider Scotland's place in the world; and, ultimately, to begin defining a clearer national identity for the Scottish people through their work. Scotland had, in quick succession, witnessed the Easter Rising (Ireland, 1916), the October Revolution (Russia, 1917) and the end of the most catastrophic episode in western history hitherto known to man, the First World War (1918). Scottish nationalism burgeoned in the following decade: it was during this period that the political grouping now called the Scottish National Party founded; and it was from this point that the other arts – painting, contemporary art-music, etc. – began purposefully to demonstrate



a more explicitly Scottish aesthetic.<sup>1</sup> Because so much of this new sense of national identity was expressed in letters and works of literature – especially in works by Hugh MacDiarmid – it is a movement known as the Scottish Literary Renaissance. The types of artistic innovations being made, however, extend to all the art forms, including the visual arts (such as through the painters William Johnstone and William McCance) and, through F. G. Scott especially, music. Denis Saurat wrote of Scott, his friend and colleague in Glasgow:

What he was looking for was forces, which were perhaps in a Scottish garb and came out of Scottish nature, but which were universal. He felt that in Scottish literature, and in Scottish music, some element of human nature which was universal, and which had never been given a real hearing before, could now be brought to the fore, and be the foundation of a new future for Scotland, because then the separation between Scotland and England would be quite clear, although he wished it to remain friendly, and the originality of Scotland, which was what he felt most deeply, would be brought forth triumphantly.<sup>2</sup>

When one considers British music in the nineteenth century, the word ‘British’ is so often misunderstood as ‘English’, with a few exceptions, but rarely ever Scottish – owing in no small part to the apparent lack of Scottish composers, relative to English ones, active before and around the turn of the twentieth century. Other than by using the composer’s birthplace, domicile or ancestry as evidence, it is not easy to define classical music as Scottish on the basis of simply listening to the music. As an example, music by the likes of Hamish McCunn and Learmont Drysdale certainly had overtones of Scots folksong, if one listens for it. But as Malcolm MacDonald once pointed out, genuine engagement with its folk-sources had largely passed Scotland by.<sup>3</sup>

That engagement finally came with Francis George Scott, as it also did with the work of the Glaswegian composer Erik Chisholm (1904–65) and, later still, the Lancashire-born, Peebleshire-domiciled Ronald Stevenson (1928–2015). Scott was, Edwin Muir

<sup>1</sup> Alan Riach, ‘Modernist Montrose: Scotland’s 1920’s Capital of Culture!’, in Alan Riach and Alexander Moffat (eds.), *Arts and the Nation: A Critical Re-examination of Scottish Literature, Painting, Music and Culture*, Luath Press, Glasgow, 2017, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Lindsay, *Francis George Scott and the Scottish Renaissance*, p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> Malcolm MacDonald, *Ronald Stevenson*, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, 1988, pp. 32–33.

remarked, ‘interested most of all in applying modern techniques to Scottish sentiments and Scottish music’;<sup>4</sup> he was, in Hugh MacDiarmid’s words, was ‘the only composer today who is endeavouring to establish a Scottish national idiom – who, in other words, has got beyond kailyardism’<sup>5</sup> – from which it can be inferred: writing tartanised classical music, or making kitsch settings of folk-melodies.

To achieve this end, Scott closely studied aspects of Scottish folksong and the classical music native mostly to the Western Isles, known as pibroch. He assimilated their various properties in his own music. The aspect of his musical genius which bears the strongest influence of pibroch is, of course, his outstanding gift as a melodist. Two of the song transcriptions on this recording show this inheritance better than anything, namely ‘Since all thy vows, false maid’ [1], and ‘Milk-Wort and Bog-Cotton’ [5].

### Scott’s songs, Stevenson’s transcriptions

When the enthusiasm of the composer Kaikhosru Sorabji (1892–1988) was aroused, he could be effusive and unstinting in his praise:<sup>6</sup>

I have on more than one occasion given it as my considered opinion that in no country in Europe [...] are songs being written remotely comparable in quality with those of Francis George Scott.<sup>7</sup>

Sorabji clearly admired – perhaps, given the tone of his prose, loved – Scott’s music and paid fulsome tribute in a chapter<sup>8</sup> in his collection of essays, *Mi Contra Fa*:

In Scott’s songs one is struck above all by the immense range of poetical topic, so to speak, using the word in a sense at once wider and more precise than usual. From bitter irony and mocking Rabelaisian humour to delicately allusive quasi-medievalism, nothing comes

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Lindsay, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>5</sup> A kailyard is a kitchen garden, typically attached to a rural cottage or similar. Kailyardism is a school of fiction from, and popular in, Scotland in the late Victorian era which reacted against what its exponents criticised as writing which was becoming too coarse, perhaps too realistic. It evoked a more idealised, sentimental version of, in particular, Scottish rural life; and, in some instances, fantasy: J. M. Barrie, the author of *Peter Pan*, was a leading writer in this movement.

<sup>6</sup> By the same token, he could be unremittingly, and shockingly, excoriating in his criticism.

<sup>7</sup> ‘The songs of Francis George Scott’, *Mi Contra Fa*, Porcupine Press, London, 1947, p. 220.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 217–23.

amiss to Scott's mill; and in each and every case his genius finds a clothing of sound for a particular mood or style that seems utterly and inevitably right.<sup>9</sup>

After a brief summary of particularly fine examples of songs in Scott's *œuvre*, Sorabji observes how

Scott's songs are not just *des mélodies, des chansons* with a piano accompaniment, with the pianist a bad (and more than slightly ignominious) poor relation, but they are conceived as *duos* for voice and piano in which neither is in any way subordinated to the other.<sup>10</sup>

It is to Scott's credit and to Stevenson's as a transcriber that the songs presented here lend themselves ideally to the idiom of solo piano: they make wholly convincing piano pieces in their own right. In theory at least, if the two parts in a duo are conceived on such equal footing as Sorabji rightly discerns, then they must, albeit still with considerable skill on the transcriber's part, lend themselves well to the format of a single, polyphonic instrument.

Ronald Stevenson (1928–2015) was a Lancashire-born composer-pianist, in the manner of, for example, Liszt, Busoni and Paderewski, who identified strongly with his dual Scottish-Welsh heritage. He moved to, and permanently settled in, Scotland in the 1950s and, in a career of colourful and endlessly varied creativity, sought to create an enhanced classical music for the modern Scotland which derived from its heritage of folksong and pibroch.<sup>11</sup> Stevenson saw F. G. Scott as being prophetic of the kind of Scottish music he himself wanted to write. (It was devastating for him to read, in 1958, of Scott's death, before the two men ever had a chance to meet.) Stevenson regularly transcribed other composers' work for solo piano, for two reasons. One is that it was Stevenson's way of paying homage to another composer, his gesture of artistic comradeship. The other reason is, quite simply, that he wanted to hear so much music which was never being performed. It remains astonishing that so few of Scott's songs,

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> He achieved his goal with astonishing skill and conviction. It can be heard, and read about, in the first two albums in the Toccata Classics series of Stevenson's piano music, TOCC 0272 and TOCC 0388.

and little else of his instrumental and orchestral music, were performed throughout the twentieth century, and even more incredible that the musical public had to wait until the early years of the 21st century for the first recording to be made.<sup>12</sup>

The first of the songs featured here, ‘Since all thy vows, false maid, are blown to air’ [1], was transcribed on 28 September 1982 after Stevenson returned home after a three-month concert tour of Australia. He found a copy of Busoni’s *Von der Einheit der Musik* waiting for him. It was Scott’s own copy, sent to Stevenson by Scott’s son, George. For Stevenson, it was ‘a symbolic gift of the communion of minds’.<sup>13</sup>

Maurice Lindsay, the poet and broadcaster who was well connected within the Scottish Literary Renaissance circle, and who knew Scott personally, writes in his biography of the composer: ‘the setting of an anonymous lyric by [a] 17th century “silver” poet, ‘Since all thy vows, false maid’, is one of Scott’s finest melodic triumphs. The beautifully flowing vocal line has hardly a break’.<sup>14</sup> It is a classic example of Scott assimilating the musical language of pibroch: indeed, each verse is notated with the (idealistic) implication that it be sung in a single breath.<sup>15</sup> ‘Though the melody is

<sup>12</sup> *Moonstruck: Songs by F. G. Scott*, recorded by Lisa Milne, Roderick Williams and Iain Burnside, on the Signum Classics label (SIGCD096) – the reader is very strongly encouraged to hear this outstanding album.

<sup>13</sup> Ronald Stevenson, *Eight Songs of Francis George Scott*, Robertson, Aylesbury, 2004, p. 2. Stevenson was among the foremost Busoni scholars of his day.

<sup>14</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 100.

<sup>15</sup> Pibroch is music particular to the Great Highland Bagpipe, and is called *ceòl mòr* in Gaelic – the ‘big music’. Its nearest analogue in western art-music is theme-and-variation form, for that is essentially what pibroch is. *Ùrlar* literally means ‘floor’ or ‘ground’, and so functions similarly to the underpinning theme in a classical set of variations in which it is heard throughout. The musical material of pibroch is defined, perhaps more stringently than that of other instruments, by the limitations of its instrument. Bagpipes have exactly nine notes: G, A, B, C sharp, D, E, F sharp, G and A. These days the instrument is tuned one semitone higher as standard, but the pitches are always notated as above. Scott’s melodic lines with pibroch influence rarely exceed this range of nine notes; and stick to the Mixolydian mode of the pipes. The structure of pibroch is informed by the physical aspects – some might initially say limitations – of the bagpipes. A few more words on this aspect are required here. To play the bagpipes, the player blows into a bag to fill it with air, and then squeezes it to force the air through the chanter and over the reed to make the distinctive, piercing sound. The air flow cannot be stopped mid-phrase as it would be if one were playing, say, the clarinet (by means of tonguing): the sound, by dint of the design of the instrument, has to remain constant until the end of the piece (with the player constantly refilling the bag during performance). The melodic line of pibroch is therefore constant and unbroken, and that is what Scott has transliterated to his songwriting here.

strophic, the accompaniment varies the lover's mood, the prospect of his ghostly return being written in the higher register of the keyboard.<sup>16</sup>

'Since all thy vows' opens with a melody in the tenor register of the piano, which soars up an octave. Such ascending sweeps are a characteristic of Scottish vocal music.<sup>17</sup> Again, one can hear those big leaps in the melody, with characteristic pentatonic overtones, from 0:05. At 2:10 a third verse is cast with different pianistic orchestration in a much higher register to illustrate the 'ghostliness', before ending, as the transcriber writes in the score, 'simply; with Wordsworthian plain elegance', with the words of the original song: 'And never can desert / From loving thee'.<sup>18</sup>

That propensity for leaping, angular melody is arguably even more obvious at the beginning of the *recitando* 'Wha is that at my bower-door?' (Burns) [2], transcribed on 2 February 1963.<sup>19</sup> After some impetuous rapping at the door, an insistent lover tries to woo his love-object, eventually having his way on the condition he keeps their liaison secret. The dialogue is portrayed with the woman being given the more forthright music, such as that angular, unaccompanied melody at the beginning. Every alternate phrase, in the music, is the man's response.

'O were my love yon lilac fair' [3] is a particularly sensuous poem, where its author (Burns) likens himself to a bird and a dewdrop in turn:

O were my Love yon Lilack fair,  
Wi' purple blossoms to the Spring;  
And I, a bird to shelter there,  
When wearied on my little wing.

<sup>16</sup> Lindsay, *op. cit.*, p. 100. The poem itself can be found at The LiederNet Archive, [https://www.lieder.net/lieder/get\\_text.html?TextId=26318](https://www.lieder.net/lieder/get_text.html?TextId=26318), accessed 14 April 2020. Scott set only stanzas 1, 2 and 5.

<sup>17</sup> Cf., for example, 'Ne'er Day Sang', from the William Sterling Cantus Part Book of 1639. The interested reader can hear Stevenson's transcription of this, the last of his *Scottish Folk Music Settings for Piano*, on Toccata Classics TOCC 0272.

<sup>18</sup> The LiederNet Archive, [www.lieder.net/lieder/get\\_text.html?TextId=26318](http://www.lieder.net/lieder/get_text.html?TextId=26318), accessed 14 April 2020.

<sup>19</sup> The text can be found at Andrew Noble and Patrick Scott Hogg (eds.), *The Canongate Burns: The Complete Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, Canongate, Edinburgh, 2003, p. 373; or at [www.lieder.net/get\\_text.html?TextId=19566&RF=1](http://www.lieder.net/get_text.html?TextId=19566&RF=1).

Scott's sound-world is, for this opening stanza, suitably hazy, conveying a sense of the air heavily perfumed with the scent of these flowers on a spring morning. The music takes a darker turn in the second half, with *tremolando* low in the register and based in the dark-sounding key of B flat minor:

How I wad mourn, when it was torn  
By Autumn wild and Winter rude!

Then a lighter, reflective mood prevails with a shift to the relative major key (D flat):

But I wad sing on wanton wing,  
When youthfu' May its bloom renew'd.

Scott sets this text strophically. The second stanza, not originally by Burns, likens the narrator's love-object to a red rose, 'that grows upon the castle wa'; and himself, 'a drap o'dew / Into her bonie breast to fa'!. Texturally, the music differs the second time: cascading harmonies envelop the melodic line, as if to illustrate the dew falling into the flower. But then the music becomes more impassioned and yearning for the stanza that follows:

Oh, there beyond expression blesst  
I'd Feast on beauty a' the night

– before the music becomes much stiller, for the words:

Seal'd on her silk-saft faulds to rest,

Finally, the music, adapted from the harmonies and figuration of the opening, ascends to ethereal heights:

Till fley'd awa by Phoebus' light!<sup>20</sup>

This song, too, was transcribed on 2 February 1963.

'Wee Willie Gray' [4] is another setting of Burns, and was, in Scott's lifetime, always one of the composer's most popular songs.<sup>21</sup> The poem is a rare example of Burns writing

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 787–88.

<sup>21</sup> Lindsay, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

a nursery-rhyme lyric to what was, in eighteenth-century lowland Scotland, a popular nursery tune: 'Wee Totum Fogg'. There is no 'story' in the poem, but simply a portrait of, as Scott reputedly said, 'a veritable Lilliputian'.<sup>22</sup> Lisa Harrison writes: 'the original verse [from which Burns derived his lyric] depicts the homely figure of Totum Fogg, sitting on a low stool [Burns uses 'creepie', the Scots word for stool] with a length of cheap cloth for his clothing; Burns' version clothes Willie Grey [*sic*] almost in a faerie guise, with the provisions of nature – willow, rose, lily-flower and feathers'.<sup>23</sup>

It is an easygoing, playful poem, and the music is similarly characterised. Stevenson, as is his custom when transcribing others, peppers the song with his own, apt embellishments. With 'Hey presto! – Swippert (hasty, nimble, tart)' as the performance direction,<sup>24</sup> this cheeky piece conjures up images of 'the horns of Elfland' (at 0:04), and makes an apt gesture to Papageno from Mozart's *Magic Flute* (at 0:33). Stevenson's transcription was made on 6 July 1989.

'Milk-Wort and Bog-Cotton' [5] is a poem by Hugh MacDiarmid, and is essentially an Blakean love-song addressed to the whole living Earth: 'Cwa' een like milk-wort and bog-cotton hair! / I love you, earth, in this mood best o' a'.<sup>25</sup> Both milkwort and bog-cotton are prolific in boggy ground, the latter being particularly common in the Western Isles of Scotland. It is therefore no surprise that one can hear, more than in nearly anything else Scott wrote, the very direct influence of pibroch in the melodic writing: Lindsay relates how Scott was emphatic about 'Milk-Wort and Bog-Cotton' being consciously influenced by pibroch, saying how the vocal line resembles an *ùrlar*. Lindsay rightly notes how the necessary rhythmic flexibility particular to the *ùrlar* is not unlike that of an eighteenth-century *recitativo*, 'defined', he writes, 'by Eric Blom

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>23</sup> Lisa Harrison, 'Burns: Wee Willy Gray', *BBC Arts*, [www.bbc.co.uk/arts/robertburns/works/wee\\_willie\\_gray/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/robertburns/works/wee_willie_gray/) (accessed 14 April 2020).

<sup>24</sup> In his transcriptions, Stevenson often gave performance directions in the language of the original composer of the piece, that of the country of origin of the music in question, or that of the musician to whom he is paying homage, the better to capture the exact nuance of expression he seeks, as well as to pay homage. 'Swippert' is a Scots word. References to 'the Scots language' most often mean Lowland Scots (Lallans), which was the spoken and written language of, most famously, Robert Burns. It is not too big a conjecture to make in saying that Scott would have been brought up with Lallans as his mother tongue.

<sup>25</sup> Taken from <https://allpoetry.com/Milk-Wort-And-Bog-Cotton> (accessed 21 April 2020).

as “declamation in singing with fixed notes, but without definite metre or time”.<sup>26</sup> This observation is pertinent because ‘Milk-Wort and Bog-Cotton’ is notated with neither a time-signature nor (save one instance, at 1:20, dividing the two halves of the song) barlines. Of Scott’s song, Sorabji wrote: ‘[Scott’s] expression of the ‘tender’ passion is white hot, like molten steel, in the concentrated almost vitriolic intensity of Hugh MacDiarmid’s [poem].’<sup>27</sup> Stevenson’s transcription is not dated in the published score.

Another well-known poem of MacDiarmid is ‘Crowdieknowe’, which is, as Sorabji put it so marvellously, full of ‘bitter gargoyle-like sardonic savagery[,] a macabre picture of the resentment of the dead at being disturbed at their rest by the Trump of the Last Judgement, a conception as audacious and original as its musical setting is masterly and convincing.’<sup>28</sup> The poem is set in the cemetery of Crowdie Knowe (between Langholm and Lockerbie), where MacDiarmid’s grandfather was buried. Stevenson’s transcription of ‘Crowdieknowe’ [6] was made on 3 February 1963, revised in 1971 and further revised with an extended coda in early July 1989.

After a brief introduction, the melody line enters originally with the words

Oh to be at Crowdieknowe  
When the last trumpet blows

The melody revolves heavily around an augmented fourth, also called a tritone – an interval long associated, particularly in sacred music, with the devil, because it has a dark, sinister, unstable sound about it. It suits the overall terrifying imagery of the remainder of the first stanza:

An see the deid come loupin [jumping] owre  
The auld grey wa’s [walls]

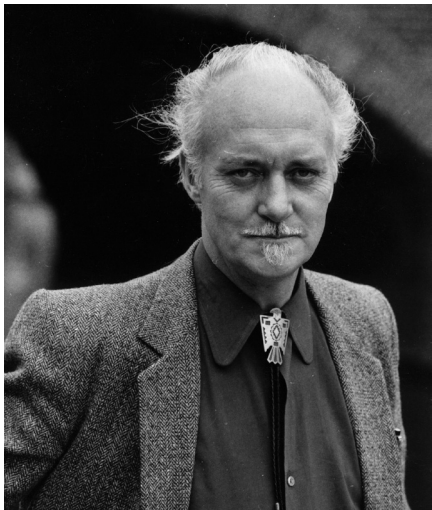
From 0:25 one can easily imagine the ‘muckle [many] men wi tousled beards’ of whom the poet is frightened: ‘I grat [cried] at as a bairn [child]’ is illustrated by a wailing descending figure quite high in the piano before he resolves to ‘scramble frae the croodit

<sup>26</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>27</sup> *Loc. cit.*, p. 221.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*





*Ronald Stevenson, around the time  
he transcribed the Eight Songs  
of Francis George Scott*

[crowded] clay / Wi feck [lots] o swearin' (0:29). The music, ascending a chromatic scale which outlines the aforementioned tritone, then becomes stuck, almost desperately trying to pull itself away from the bottom, the upper part being closely chased by the lower.

Here Stevenson deviates from Scott, and repeats the first verse, but with further (fairly virtuosic) pianistic elaborations. He rejoins the original form, if only temporarily, when the 'muckle-men' glower 'at God an aa his gang / O angels in the lift [heavens]'. The music here is slower, and there is that feeling of lifting one's head and gazing at a vast expanse of sky, before it becomes embittered again at the words "Thae trashy bleezin [blazing] French-like folk / Wha gar'd [made] them shift' – 'them' being the aforementioned dead. After MacDiarmid's tongue-in-cheek stanza –

Fain [keenly] the weemun-folk'll seek  
To mak them haud their row [keep quiet]  
– Fegs [gosh], God's no blate [scared] gin [if] he stirs up  
The men o Crowdieknowe!

– Stevenson adds an extended coda.<sup>29</sup> He quotes from the *Dies Irae* plainchant (the Day of Wrath), and the movement of the same name from Giuseppe Verdi's *Requiem*.

'Crowdieknowe' is, by far, the most pianistically 'virtuosic' of the *Eight Songs* transcriptions, which Stevenson has turned into something even more cataclysmic than the original. 'Dedicated by the transcriber to Murray MacLachlan,'<sup>30</sup> it represents 'twenty-six years of devotion to a masterpiece of Mephistophelian balladry, worthy of Busoni's *Doktor Faust* and linking the eldritch Scottish borders with the Faust legend'.<sup>31</sup>

'Ay waukin, O' [7] ('Ever waking, O') (Burns, 1790) tells of insomnia from love, and tormented loss. With the melody based very audibly in the Lydian mode of the bagpipes, but with its sound-world very clearly taking its leave from the French late-Romantics, it is the song which sealed Scott's high reputation among Europe's musical luminaries. Denis Saurat told Maurice Lindsay a story of the hot summer of 1921, when Scott was introduced to Jean Roger-Ducasse at his home in the south of France. This man, Saurat observes,

was considered the most acute critic of French music [and who lived] in a small village which might be considered a suburb of Bordeaux [...] Scott and I went, and we took to him some music of Scott's being very keen to get his opinion. Particularly, we took 'Ay Waukin, O' and – well – he began making some remarks, after he played perhaps two or three minutes of it. Then gradually, as he went on playing, his remarks became softer and softer in tone, and before the end he had given up. He had given up the position of being a teacher, and he became a friend and colleague.

Being myself an impartial spectator, I was very impressed by the effect of a single piece of music on a great critic, and it gave me a high opinion of Scott as a composer and Ducasse

<sup>29</sup> Stevenson typically added newly composed music to his transcriptions, in keeping with his desire to pay homage; and his philosophy, akin to that of Busoni, that composition and transcription are, by definition, intertwined.

<sup>30</sup> Stevenson, *loc. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

as a critic. Later on, when Scott was out of the way, Ducasse – and this was, mind you, about 1921 – Ducasse said to me that here we had found the Scottish Mussorgsky.<sup>32</sup>

At 3:01 one can hear how Stevenson has, in the ingenious way he so often does, found an ideal opportunity to set a fragment of Scott's melody in canon. It seems apt, because for two voices to 'sing' the same line of music ('Waulkin *still* and weary' – my italics) in conjunction in this way brings out the sense of sheer, unbearable yearning in the song. The added voice (in the tenor register) may represent the absent lover. This transcription dates from 19 January 1963.

In 'There's news, lasses, news' [8] (*Thirty-Five Scottish Lyrics*, 1949), Burns presents his own version of a popular traditional song of his era. Here, a woman anticipates the arrival into her town of potential suitors. It is a strophic song, with a first verse which Scott treats musically as an introduction:

There's news, lasses, news  
Gude news I've to tell,  
There's a boatfu' o' lads  
Come to our town to sell.

Scott, interestingly, sets the following chorus in the rhythmic style of a west-coast march,<sup>33</sup> which seems fitting given that the protagonist is probably in a coastal town either on an island or the mainland, accessible by boat (perhaps with fishermen); there are no inhabitable islands off the east coast of Scotland. The upbeat chorus is:

The wean wants a cradle,  
An' the cradle wants a cod,

<sup>32</sup> Lindsay, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

<sup>33</sup> Marches, particularly those of the Scottish West Coast, are in either  $\frac{6}{8}$  or  $\frac{2}{4}$  time. There are several regional differences in playing styles, on the pipes and the fiddle, across Scotland. One of the characteristics of West Coast marches is that they are played in a more lively, vigorous style – but still at a very steady tempo. In the case of  $\frac{2}{4}$  marches (which is what Scott is emulating here), when written down, the time signature is  $\frac{2}{4}$ , but the 'dotted rhythms' (including the Scotch snap short-long figuration, 'DA-daa, DA-daa', and its reverse, 'DAA-da, DAA-da') become twice as fast. Theoretically, that means that what would normally be, say, a dotted quaver followed by a semiquaver becomes a dotted semiquaver followed by a demisemiquaver (long-short). The sprightliness that comes from this feature is very noticeable, and suddenly marches do not seem quite so serious! A good example of a West Coast  $\frac{2}{4}$  march is 'Father John Macmillan of Barra'.

An' I'll no gang to my bed,  
Until I get a nod.

This transcription, as with that of 'Milk-Wort and Bog-Cotton', is not dated in the published score.

### Scott's original piano music

What follows is at once a listening guide and an editorial preface. It aims to lead the listener through the pieces, and explain the editing undertaken to turn this obscure piano music – it has lain in archives for seven decades – into a cohesive collection suitable for public dissemination. Editorial attention was indeed necessary, although the form it took is the fruit of my own judgement: I make no claim to have produced a definitive 'edition' of Scott's work. What the listener will experience, however, is what I believed Scott would have wanted, had he made a final version of these pieces. Around the *Intuitions* in Scott's manuscript are short pieces from much earlier in his life: simple, well-crafted album leaves which, save for stylistically similar examples by Helen Hopekirk (1856–1945),<sup>34</sup> are unique in the collective output of Scottish composers of that period. Not many Scottish composers wrote for the piano in the first half of the twentieth century.

This recording of *Intuitions* follows the order given in the manuscript, but with some minor changes in their ordering. The fact that the manuscript is so neat, well-ordered, and has most of the pieces numbered, suggests that Scott intended these pieces to stand as a collection, perhaps giving pianists the option to play them as a whole (his sequencing works well) or dip into at will. But the collection was clearly not quite finished, which perhaps makes it even more exciting and tantalising. No. 24 (untitled) [34], for example, trails off mid-bar, Scott having written 'etc' at the end. And there are several pieces which last, literally, not much more than ten seconds. One might imagine how these might have been the seeds of larger works, had Scott chosen to develop them.

There are a few instances where Scott wrote pieces with fountain pen and then crossed them out later in crayon. It seems fair to respect his wishes and discount these

<sup>34</sup> Gary Steigerwalt's recording of a selection of Hopekirk's piano music can be found on Toccata Classics TOCC 0430.

fragments, and so they have not been included on this recording. One unnumbered four-bar fragment, though, has been included [61]. It has Scott's decisive blue crayon going through it, but this time very faintly, as though he thought better and tried to rub it out. The decision to include it in this recording is a subjective, artistic one, rather than one based on academic propriety. Its inclusion does, happily, enable a smoother transition from the 'Rather Quick' No. 50 [60] in to the much longer 'Evening on the Loch' No. 51 [62].<sup>35</sup>

As suggested above, the set can work as one multi-faced recital piece in its own right. Another approach might be to use these pieces as preludes, in the original meaning of the word. 'Preluding' as one of many standard aspects of a pianist's art began largely to die out in the early twentieth century, but pianists are beginning to explore how many pieces called 'Prelude' (those of Chopin, for example) can be presented, or used, in what is, arguably, the way they were intended. Any of Scott's *Intuitions* would lend themselves brilliantly to such use, and I recommend to all of my pianist colleagues, particularly those wishing to explore and perform Scottish repertoire, seriously to consider doing so as part of their work.

'Lullaby' [11] opens the set. Like many of the following, slower and particularly lyrical pieces, it is written in four parts. This one is constructed in a pattern of short phrases, either one or two bars in length at a time, which conveys that sense of rocking a child to sleep. It is followed by 'Trumpet Tune' [12], with a fanfare-like melody above a mostly sustained accompaniment. In 'Lonely Tune' [13] four-part writing returns, and Scott's signature characteristic of melody spanning a wide range, and with large leaps, can be heard here. 'Running Tune' [14] is the first of a number of these pieces in which it is possible to detect the essence of a Scottish reel. A calm 'Lilting Tune' [15] follows, and then comes 'National Song' [16], which certainly has an anthemic quality about it. 'An Clarsair' [17] is Gaelic for 'The Clarsair',<sup>36</sup> although, curiously, there is no clear allusion to

<sup>35</sup> There is no *Intuition* No. 55: no piece has that number attached to it, and so I decided simply to follow Scott's numbering as found in his manuscript.

<sup>36</sup> The clarsach is the Gaelic harp, and is considerably smaller than the concert, pedal harp. The clarsach has been a mainstay of Scottish Highland music for centuries. A clarsach player is called a clarsair.

the sound of that instrument here: the music is broad and bardic in character without any use of rolled chords that are often used to represent a harp on a piano. The sprightly ‘Singing Game’ [18] is followed by ‘Strathspey’ [19]. A strathspey is a traditional dance – usually slow – originating from Speyside in the eighteenth century, and is characterised by dotted rhythms, notably the ‘Scotch snap’ rhythm ubiquitous in traditional Scottish music – a rapid ‘short-long’ figure which can be heard at the very start of this piece. ‘Processional’ [20], after a brief introduction, is in ternary form (ABA) and is the first of the slightly longer pieces encountered in *Intuitions*. Although it is not notated as such, one can certainly detect that aspect of pibroch discussed above: that sense of each section being conceived as one long phrase.

Scott characterised ‘Love’s Question and Reply – Dialogue’ [21] in a literal sense: he marked ‘Woman’ at the top of the first phrase and ‘Man’ at the second, continuing this pattern throughout the piece, constantly alternating. Something of the ‘knight errant’ is easily heard in ‘Border Riding-Rhythm’ [22] – indeed, one might compare it to Schumann’s ‘Wilder Reiter’ in his *Album for the Young* (Op. 68, No. 8). ‘Old Irish!’ [23] follows – written, one assumes, in the style of an old Irish folksong Scott might have known. In ‘Deil’s Dance’<sup>37</sup> [24] Scott becomes a little more adventurous with his harmony: one might detect a kinship with Khachaturian here in the urgent, savage rhythmic drive of the piece.

The epic ‘An Seanachaidh’ [25] is one of the longest of the *Intuitions*: it could easily stand as a piece in its own right, more so than many of the others. In this instance, a *sennachie* is a bard: long ago, these were people who kept the traditions and the stories of the old clans alive, passing them on from generation to generation. Bards were regarded with deep respect and held in high esteem by clan chiefs throughout the Scottish Highlands. The following ‘Benediction’ [26] moves calmly between quintuple and triple metre.

At this point Scott stopped giving titles to the *Intuitions*. No. 17 [27] is a setting of Burns’ ‘My heart’s in the Highlands’, although there is no separate vocal part. Scott writes

<sup>37</sup> Deil: devil.

the text above the right-hand part of the piano as if he had indeed scored the piece for voice. He appends a footnote: 'Slightly altered to suit the Burns poem, which would be sung in the following order: Verse/Solo/Chorus/Verse/Solo/Chorus.' This qualification implies he may have composed the piece without the intention of setting the text, and later brought the two ideas together.

No. 18 [28] is a three-part chorus-verse-chorus song, and is followed by another lyrical piece [29], a melody with 'harped' chordal accompaniment in which one might imagine a singer accompanying him- or herself on the clarsach. It flows naturally in to 'Urlar' [30], a resplendent setting of an original, imagined theme for a pibroch. The gentle No. 21 [31] ends with the feeling of a question mark, inconclusive: it is one of several pieces which Scott appears to leave open-ended (although completed). The plaintive No. 22 [32] feels very much like a slower, more wistful and remote companion to 'Border Riding-Rhythm' [22], being in the same key and the same lilting metre. In a similar way, No. 23 [33] hearkens back to 'Singing Game' [18], in its short, repetitive, somehow 'chatterly' phrases. There is something nobly heroic about No. 24 [34], which is unfinished: it stops after modulating to the dominant key, and without providing a final barline, Scott writes 'etc', followed by the date. No. 25 [35] is not dissimilar: beginning with music in D major, which suggests the entire brass section of a symphony orchestra, it winds down to a reduced texture, and a quieter dynamic moves into the relative minor key (B minor). No. 26 [36] has the sound of horns in its opening phrase, but continues gently and lyrically.

With the following piece, No. 27 [37], comes evidence that, technically, the composition of *Intuitions* had begun earlier than Lindsay states – he posits 1943.<sup>38</sup> Scott has written '?1933' at the end of the score. If that is true then this is one case of the composer remembering a tune he had thought up years before, and which came back to him suddenly. It is written in a ternary 'chorus-verse-chorus'.

No. 28 [38] is, again, childlike and playful. The serene, gently undulating No. 29 [39] is among the few *Intuitions* explicitly conceived for the piano (as it features pencilled-in pedal markings). No. 30 [40] is broadly singing, and one might indeed imagine it

<sup>38</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 141.

becoming a song; similarly, No. 31 [41] feels much like the first verse of a song. In No. 32 [42] one can hear fragments of something like a reel amidst what is, again, not unlike a child's song. No. 33 [43] is one of the smaller fragments of the set, reminiscent of No. 26 [36]; and No. 34 [44] is a dialogue piece with a questioning first section and a quicker, 'resolved' section following it. No. 35 [45] is a jaunty minor-key march in alternating triple and duple metre.

At this point in the manuscript Scott subsumed into his *Intuitions* another set of his piano pieces, the *Riddles*, written in the summer of 1948 at Taynuilt (a village in Argyll and Bute, western Scotland, where the Scott family had holidayed from 1937).<sup>39</sup> *Riddle* No. 1/*Intuition* No. 36 [46] could almost be a piece for a bass instrument alone, but here it has a gentle harmonisation floating lightly above it. The texture is reversed for the almost breathless *Riddle* No. 2/*Intuition* No. 37 [47], dated 7 June, where the tune in the upper part is punctuated and supported by short, *secco*, often offbeat chords. *Riddle* No. 3, 'Gaelic National Anthem' [48], perhaps intended as the title indicates (although there is no text in the score, just as 'My heart's in the Highlands', No. 17 [27]), is composed in a verse-chorus form: the first half has 'solo voice' written at the top, the second half with 'chorus' at its beginning. Like 'National Song' (*Intuition* No. 6 [16]) it conveys a proud and patriotic feeling, and was no doubt inspired by Scott's location at the time (the western Scottish mainland is still, besides the Hebrides, where Gaelic is most spoken as a first language). In the *Riddles* manuscript it is in sketch form, with the inner parts not inked in, and is in A flat major; as an *Intuition*, it is in A major, but with a footnote allowing the performer the option for playing it a semitone lower (here it is recorded in A major).

Scott pencilled in 'Question and Answer' at the head of No. 39 [49]: the music is indeed a dialogue between bass voice and treble, and is written entirely monophonically until the last bar, which concludes with a D major chord. Evidently this piece was written in the grip of insomnia: it is dated and timed at '4.20am, 21st June 1948'. The

<sup>39</sup> The *Riddles* exist as a separate manuscript. The versions found embedded in *Intuitions* and the separate manuscript are identical. It is not clear why Scott gave this title to the pieces, although one can assume that it is because it suits their epigrammatic nature.



performance direction for *Riddle* No. 5 is ‘Very Slow’ [50]. It conveys a sense of stillness comparable to some of the more serene moments in, say, a Beethoven slow movement. Scott wrote on the score ‘Song-cycle – the phrase that woke me/23rd June 9.30–10am’. That serenity flows into *Riddle* No. 6/*Intuition* No. 41 [51],<sup>40</sup> a more extended piece, which is chorale-like, with some interesting turns in harmony. Scott wrote ‘Maupassant “Bel-Ami”’ in the *Riddles* version of the manuscript of this piece. This final *Riddle* is timed and dated ‘25th July 1948, 3am’.

A gentle lullaby, No. 42 [52], leads to a swinging, childlike tune, No. 43 [53]. No. 44 [54] is also written out as a separate piece among Scott’s manuscripts. It is called *Souviens-toi?* and bears the subtitle – possibly a dedication? – ‘Pa to Lovey!’. Although Scott himself did not recall the date on which he composed the piece, it seems fair to assume that it was composed much earlier than the beginning of the *Intuitions*.

No. 45, ‘Pibroch Urlar’ [55], is a second setting of an imagined theme for a pibroch, similar to No. 20 [30] in mood and key, but with more rhythmic movement and complexity. No. 46, ‘Very Quick’ [56], is an initially joyous, jaunty piece, but it ends mysteriously. The gently lilting No. 47, ‘Gaily’ [57], ends abruptly, before the following ‘*Adagio patetico*’ (No. 48) [58]. No. 49, ‘Quick and *marcato*’ [59], hearkens back to the *Riddles* earlier in the set, but with a fuller, always homophonic texture. An upbeat, jig-like No. 50 [60] follows, over as suddenly as it begins, before the unnumbered *Intuition* briefly discussed above, which here I have numbered No. 50a [61]. It works well as a transition in to the next ‘album leaf’ of the set, ‘Evening on the Loch’, No. 51 [62].

The following piece is a tune – and one of two possible arrangements, both of which are presented on this recording – where Scott was inspired by the Gaelic poet George Campbell Hay’s poem ‘The Two Neighbours’ (about two fishing partners and their lifelong friendship), which lends its title to the piece (No. 52) [63]. It is not clear whether Scott ever intended it to be sung, or whether he actually set it to text: the music does not have the text written in. What follows in the particularly polyphonic No. 53 [64] is some of the darkest music in the *Intuitions*. Scott writes an expansive melody in the Dorian

<sup>40</sup> Unnumbered in the *Riddles* manuscript, but found at the end of that collection. The numbering here is editorial.

mode on B, with wide intervals, underpinned by fluid, always moving, lower parts. Nos. 54 [65] and 56 [66] are similar in their gently singing sentiments, and lead to a ‘Hymn-tune,’ No. 57 [67], which concludes this long set of miniature piano pieces.

### Omissions

Some of the material in the *Intuitions* manuscript has been omitted, on various grounds. Some is incomplete sketching; and the remainder is for instruments other than the piano or voices.<sup>41</sup> Two examples are worth briefly discussing. The first is a hymn-tune setting originally appearing as No. 36. Bearing the title ‘Jesus, thou joy of loving hearts,’ it is harmonised in four parts, laid out in short score (SATB being marked at the top). Scott later rejected it for inclusion in the final version of *Intuitions*, evidenced by his crossing-out ‘No. 36’ in red pencil. At the foot of the same page is found a four-part harmonisation (for tenors and basses only) of ‘O Salutaris hostia,’ written to words by Thomas Aquinas, but it is unnumbered. (Choirs and choral directors might usefully be made aware of these choral miniatures hidden among Scott’s piano manuscripts.)

There are further instances of unnumbered pieces in the *Intuitions* manuscript. They were either not affirmed as an *Intuition* by being written out in ink; or left unnumbered – although the unnumbered piece immediately following *Intuition* 50 [60] was included in the sequence presented in this recording. Where these unnumbered pieces were determined to be piano pieces, they have been included here. One such example is *Urlar* [9], written lightly in pencil and coming at the end of the *Intuitions* folio. Cast in unadorned ternary form, it begins with a bar of the gently lilting syncopated accompaniment that continues, underpinning the first section, which is appropriately written in the A Dorian/Mixolydian mode.<sup>42</sup> Then, for the middle section, a more resplendent version of this music, transposed to the E pentatonic mode, suggests the clarsach before returning to the opening section.

<sup>41</sup> These snippets include a melody in E major, hymn-like in style, pencilled in at the foot of the penultimate page.

<sup>42</sup> The Great Highland Bagpipe is tuned to the Greek A Mixolydian mode. Translated into western tonality, it is the equivalent of playing an A major scale, but with the seventh note lowered by a semitone.

Appended to the end of these pieces is Scott's alternative setting of 'The Two Neighbours' [68], written a semitone higher and with different harmonisation.

### Early piano pieces (1903–12)

*April Skies* [10] is one of Scott's earliest surviving pieces, apparently written when he was a young man: although Lindsay implies that the manuscript is dated 1912,<sup>43</sup> that was not visible on the facsimile I used for this recording. Lindsay hails *April Skies*, which is set in rondo form with an introduction, as Scott's best piece written before the First World War; he describes it as being in 'the Viennese style' by virtue of the fact it is really an extended waltz-sequence.<sup>44</sup> Dating from such an early stage of Scott's musical evolution, *April Skies* does not show signs of assimilation of Scottish folk-music or pibroch.

There are two further individual piano pieces. The Minuet and Trio [69] of 1903 is Scott's earliest piano piece to bear a date and doubtless among his earliest surviving compositions. Concluding this recording is his gavotte *La Joie* (with a central trio section) [70], undated, but written during his days as a schoolmaster in Langholm.<sup>45</sup>

**Christopher Guild** is becoming increasingly well known for his work on the piano music of Scotland and the rest of the British Isles. Hailing from the Speyside region of Moray, he has performed as soloist and chamber musician at some of the most prestigious concert venues in the UK, including the Wigmore Hall, St John's, Smith Square, the Purcell Room and the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse.

Following studies at St Mary's Music School, Edinburgh, and with Andrew Ball at the Royal College of Music, London, his career was launched with invitations to tour the UK under the auspices of the Countess of Munster Musical Trust Recital Scheme; and to perform on the South Bank in London as a Park Lane Group Young Artist. While still a student, he performed as an orchestral keyboardist with the London Philharmonic Orchestra and City of London Sinfonia.

<sup>43</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>45</sup> At the top of the first page is written: 'Francis George Scott. MusB. The Academy, Langholm.'

He has worked with numerous composers, among them Judith Weir, and co-founded the Edison Ensemble, a contemporary-music group based in London. Following a year's tenure as the Richard Carne Junior Fellow in Performance at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, he went on to become Head of Instrumental Music at the Godolphin School in Wiltshire. Now based in the south of England, he is a visiting teacher at several schools, including Salisbury Cathedral School, Reigate Grammar and Graveney School, and is on the permanent staff at Junior Trinity (Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance) in London, teaching Musicianship, Advanced Theory and Piano. He lectured on Francis George Scott and Ronald Stevenson at the Musica Scotica Annual Conference in 2019, and has written articles on Scottish classical music for *iScot* magazine.



This is his seventh album for Toccata Classics, and he has recorded also for Champs Hill Records. Writing in *International Record Review* Calum MacDonald was unstinting in his praise of *Ronald Center: Instrumental and Chamber Music, Volume One* (Toccata Classics TOCC 0179): 'The rhythmic vivacity and crispness of his delivery, the subtlety of his pedalling, the incisiveness of attack with never a hint of heaviness, and his range of keyboard colour are such that I'm sure the composer himself would have applauded'.  
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