

NATHANIEL GOW'S DANCE BAND

By
CONCERTO CALEDONIA

*Fiddle music from
Scottish printed sources 1761-1823*



M. Murray
①

A Collection
OF
Strathspey Reels.

With a Bass for the
Violoncello or Harpsichord

BY
Alexander M. Glashan

EDINBURGH Printed for A. M^cGLASHAN and Sold by NEIL STEWART at his
Music Shop Parliament Square.

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Traditions of fiddle music in Scotland have always been literate as well as oral, and a wealth of printed fiddle books exists, going back to the middle of the 18th century.

Many of the earliest collections were compiled by working musicians to show off the repertoire of their dance bands, and we named our band after Nathaniel Gow (1763-1831), son of the more famous Niel. Nathaniel's dance band was the most successful in Edinburgh from the 1790s into the 1820s, and we've taken our repertoire from a small selection of the printed sources that were available in Gow's Scotland: there are details of many more at www.hms.scot.

The basslines in these old books are often written off either as drawing room music, or as too rudimentary to be worth playing. But if you look at them carefully, you can see evidence for a clear dance band style of cello (or bass fiddle) playing that was particularly associated with strathspeys and reels. All of the basslines played here are taken directly from the books.

In this period, the strathspey and the reel were still developing their distinct identities: some strathspeys have no dotted or back-dotted rhythms at all, and some reels are in jig time. We based our playing on the rhythms and the slurs in the sources without being too strict: the printed versions certainly don't represent the only way to play each tune, but they do show one of the possible ways, and they are evidence of the variations in playing style that existed even then.

Our sources:

John Anderson - A Selection of the most Approved Highland Strathspeys (1789)

Anderson was probably a Highlander himself, but his first book was dedicated to the Greenock Musical Society. Mary Anne Alburger has suggested that Anderson was caricatured as the dancing master Mr Macskipnish in John Galt's *Annals of the Parish* as 'a great curiosity, with long spindle legs', and that he was the same John Anderson who later ran a music shop in Perth.

John Bowie - A Collection of Strathspey Reels & Country Dances (1789)

Bowie's first book has many Perthshire musicians on its subscriber list: both Niel and Nathaniel Gow ordered copies in advance, as did Robert Mackintosh. Besides the reels and dances promised on the titlepage, it includes a selection of Irish tunes, and a sequence of 'Ancient Music' passed down from the playing of the harper Ruaidhrí Dall Ó Catháin (the Irish Rory Dall).

Robert Bremner - A Second Collection of Scots Reels or Country Dances (1761)

The publisher Robert Bremner's second collection of reels follows on directly from his first, which appeared in a series of twelve eight-page numbers from 1757. This was one of the first books to collect reels and to present them with simple four-beat basslines, rather than the more flowing Italianate basses familiar from earlier books of airs. The second collection also adds dance figures for every tune; rather than making up sets of tunes, musicians would repeat a single tune until the dancers had completed their figure.

Thomas Calvert - A Collection of Marches & Quicksteps, Strathspeys & Reels (1799)

Calvert ran a music shop in Kelso where he sold, repaired and lent instruments, and his book contains a miscellany of local tunes, country dances, and marches: it even begins with a simple violin fingering chart, and a piano arrangement of 'God save the King'!

Nathaniel Gow - Largo's Fairy Dance (1802)

'Composed (by the desire) & Dedicated to the Members of the Fife Hunt', Gow's well-known Fairy Dance is a popular example of a single sheet publication, comprising two pages of music, and sold for a shilling. As the equivalent of a hit single rather than a whole album, the most famous tune usually comes at the beginning, and the rest of the pages are filled up with dance tunes, like a B-side.

Nathaniel Gow - The Ancient Curious Collection of Scotland (1823)

Dedicated to Sir Walter Scott, and featuring the newly-recovered Regalia of Scotland on the titlepage, Nathaniel's handsomely-produced collection of piano variations is based on many earlier sources. One of these was Robert Bremner's *A Curious Collection of Scots Tunes* of 1759, which itself drew some of its repertoire from 17th-century English music; as a result, 'John come kiss me now' and 'Auld Sir Simon the King' appear here as 'Genuine Scotch Tunes'.

Niel Gow - A Collection of Strathspey Reels (1784)

Niel's first collection was phenomenally successful: the print quality in later copies dropped markedly as the plates began to wear out from overuse, and several pirated editions are known from before 1801, when the second official edition appeared. At this point, much of the music was altered, presumably by Nathaniel, to make it more suitable for the piano, which had only begun to appear in Edinburgh music shops in the year that the first edition went on sale.

Alexander McGlashan - A Collection of Strathspey Reels (1778)

James Scott Skinner was not the first Scottish fiddler to call himself 'King': the flamboyant 'King' McGlashan taught Nathaniel Gow and gave him his first professional gigs, playing bass fiddle in his dance band for the Edinburgh Assemblies.

Alexander McGlashan - A Collection of Scots Measures (1781)

McGlashan's second collection contains a different kind of dance repertoire from his first book of Strathspey Reels: it includes Scots airs, many of them taken from William McGibbon's earlier publications, and tunes from England and France. The book's full title, with 'Scots Measures, Hornpipes, Jigs, Allemands, Cotillons, and the fashionable Country Dances', gives some idea of the diversity of a Scottish dance band's repertoire in the 1780s.

Abraham Macintosh - A Collection of New Strathspey Reels (1796)

Abraham was the son of Robert 'Red Rob' Mackintosh, and he moved from Edinburgh to Newcastle in 1797. He did his own very elegant music engraving, and this book is an expanded version of his *Thirty New Strathspey Reels* of around 1792.

The publishers Urbani & Liston filled it out with more tunes from other books, and made a few small modifications to Macintosh's music to justify their massive inflation of the cover price from the original 2s. 6d. to 6 shillings.

John Morison - The Marquis of Huntly's Welcome to Peterhead (1805)

This is another single-sheet publication, from an excellent example of a musician with a portfolio career. Morison played the organ at St Peter's chapel, had a small fiddle band for playing at dances, tuned organs and pianos, copied out music, and even at one point ran a ship's chandlery in Peterhead. Despite all of this, or perhaps because of it, he was bankrupted at least once.

Robert Petrie - A Second Collection of Strathspey Reels (1796)

Petrie's day job was gardener to the Garden family of Troup, and he was one of several successful Perthshire fiddlers. His second collection includes music by another, Robert Mackintosh, who probably had a hand in the book's preparation. Nathaniel Gow later added to the team effort, by issuing his 'carefully corrected' edition in 1808.

You can compare the original and Gow's corrected versions at www.hms.scot

The Sailor Laisie

107



Cast of one Cu: hands round 4 with the 3^d Cu: ♩ cast up and hands round with the Top ♩
 crofs over one Cu: lead up to the Top and cast of and turn your Partner ♩

Invercaul's Reel



Set across to the 2^d Man and turn ♩ your Partner do the same ♩ gallop down
 the Middle up again and cast off ♩ right and left at Top ♩

1 Mrs Rutherford of Egerston *Calvert 1799, 8*

We kick things off with a 12/8 jig, dedicated by Thomas Calvert to Mary Anne Leslie, the lady of the house at Edgerston, just a few miles from the English border.

2 The New Town of Edinburgh *Bremner 1761, 97*

This tune appears as a highly decorated slow strathspey in Joshua Campbell's *A Collection of New Reels & Highland Strathspeys* around 1780, but this early version as a reel is much simpler. We slowed it down a little from dancing tempo, and tuned the fiddles in AEAE scordatura.

3 Kheellum khallum taa fein *Bremner 1761, 108*

'Ghillie Callum' appears in Bremner's second book of reels not as a sword dance, but as a country dance, and as a result it has to go pretty fast. From the evidence of contemporary paintings, pipes and fiddles didn't play together for dancing, as one group of musicians is usually depicted drinking while the others play. But our fiddlers joined in with the pipes anyway.

Largo's Fairy Dance

4 The Fairies Advancing, A Slow March *by Nathaniel Gow*

cello - Alison

5 The Fairy Dance *by Nathaniel Gow*

intro - Aaron

Nathaniel Gow's Fairy Dance has an introductory slow march, marked 'Dolce Piano', presumably because fairies even march with delicacy. The sprightly dotted rhythm at the beginning of the fairy dance itself, to be played 'with spirit', had already been evened out into straight quavers by the time the tune appeared again in the Gows' fifth collection of strathspeys & reels in 1809.

6 The Marquis of Huntly's Welcome to Peterhead *by the Revd. Dr. Laing*

violins - Lauren & Aaron

The Marquis of Huntly's Welcome to Peterhead Strathspey *by John Morison*

7 The Marquis of Huntly's Recovery *by John Morison*

intro - Aaron

Rev Dr William Laing was minister of the episcopal church in Peterhead, and also a physician who published his own analysis of the health-giving qualities of the town's spa water. His tune is marked 'Andantino', and John Morison follows it with his own faster version: 'another sett taken from the foregoing Tune alter'd for Dancing'. It's quite rare to see second violin parts for strathspeys, but in 1805 Morison advertised that he 'plays the Violin to Balls and Assemblies, and other public Dances, and takes with him an accompanying Violin and Violoncello, when desired'.

8 Niel Gows Lamentation for Abercarney *Gow 1784, 3*

solo - Lauren

The later, more piano-friendly version of this tune as 'Niel Gow's Lamentation for Jas. Moray Esqr. of Abercarney' (now Abercairny, in Perthshire) is the one that has become generally familiar, but Niel's original from the first edition of his first book is a more desolate, unsentimental lament, with a stark bassline and G drones on the fiddle.

9 Stumpie Strathspey *Gow 1784, 35*

solos - Lauren, Mairi, Shona, Aaron

10 Flee Over the Water *Gow 1784, 35*

intro - Aaron

Niel's first book contains some sets of variations: the 'Duncan Davidson' set is downright virtuosic, but here 'The Reel of Stumpie' gets a less lavish treatment. Gow left just enough room at the bottom of the page to fit in another tune, an unusual one of six-bar phrases.

11 Vertigo *McGlashan 1781, 1*

intro - Shona

'King' McGlashan may well have taken a young Nathaniel Gow under his wing by the time he published his second collection, which opens with this English-sounding tune. Richard Bride's London dance compendium from around the same time calls it 'Le Vertigo', perhaps hinting at a French origin, and Bride's version also includes the dance figures.

12 Invercauld's Strathspey *Anderson 1789, 29*

violins - Marie & Lauren

13 Invercauld's Reel *Bremner 1761, 107*

violins - Shona & Aaron

Invercauld's is a great example of a strong tune that isn't based on an obvious sequence of chords or tonal centres. Even in the 18th century, musicians had trouble working out how to play a bassline under it, and we couldn't decide whether John Anderson really meant what he printed here. Robert Bremner's bassline simply follows the conventional patterns that appear throughout his books of reels, and it works well.

14 Port Gordon *Bowie 1789, 34*

This is one of two ports with this title, and an example of what John Bowie described as 'Ancient Music ... composed originally for the Harp and ... handed down to [a gentleman] by his Ancestors who learned the same of the famous Rory Daul'. The music had been transmitted via two fiddlers from the Robertson family by the time Bowie heard it, and he then arranged it for treble and bass. Simon Chadwick has suggested that Bowie's version preserves some 'plausible fragments of Gaelic harp idiom', but even if it doesn't, anyone playing this from Bowie's book in 1789 would have felt that they were experiencing music from a distant Highland past.

15 Spring Field, A Strathspey; Kelo House, A Reel *Macintosh 1796, 9*

violins - Lauren & Shona, plus Aaron in the reel

This is a very early example of a strathspey-reel pair. Before his move to Newcastle, Abraham Macintosh was clearly already spending time in the borders, as Kelloe House was by the side of Blackadder Water near Duns. We chose to play the version with 'the Bass's Corrected by Pietro Urbani', even though all Urbani did was add a couple of fashionably chromatic F sharps to the strathspey, and tidy up the consecutive octaves in the second part of the reel.

16 The Downshire Camperdown Quick Step *Calvert 1799, 20*

A simpler version of this tune appears in Irish sources a little later both as 'The Ulster Rondo' and 'The Downshire March', and it crops up in a Northumbrian piper's book as 'Downshire Quickstep'. Downshire was County Down in the north of Ireland, but the tune seems just as much at home in the Borders. Thomas Calvert may have added to its title to celebrate Admiral Adam Duncan's success at the Battle of Camperdown in 1797, and his unlikely-looking piano accompaniment is surprisingly effective.

17 The Honourable Miss Rollo's Reel *Bowie 1789, 10*

violins - Lauren & Shona

This reel has an unusually active bassline, and its dedicatee could have been any one of five daughters of James, 7th Lord Rollo of Duncrub, Perthshire.

18 The Wives of Kilwinnon *Bremner 1761, III*

intro - Aaron

By around 1770 this satisfyingly edgy tune had already appeared as 'The Lads of Kilwinning' in William Vickers' Northumbrian fiddle notebook, so it's hard to be sure exactly which section of the north Ayrshire community it celebrates, or describes.

19 The Lea Rig (My ain kind dearie) *Gow 1823, 16*

variations by Domenico Corri, edited by Nathaniel Gow

Nathaniel Gow took this arrangement uncredited from a very popular three-page sheet first published in the 1790s by Domenico Corri. The original ran to several editions in Edinburgh and London, and many surviving copies have piano fingerings pencilled in, so they were clearly well used. In Nova Scotia a few decades later, James Barry even carefully copied Corri's variations into his collection of over 2000 fiddle tunes. Gow removed the coda and the concluding jig, and changed the title, but otherwise he preserved Corri's work intact.

20 Invercauld's Rant *McGlashan 1778, 26*

solo - Shona

21 Invercauld's Reel *Petrie 1796, 24*

These two basslines for Invercauld's take very different approaches. McGlashan's is simple but also subtle: sometimes it's in unison with the tune, and at other moments it harmonises it. By the time of Petrie's (or perhaps it was Robert Mackintosh's) version, the influence of the piano has resulted in a more chordal approach, and somehow the tune has found its way from the key of A minor into G major: this seems to suit (or provide) its new identity as a driving reel.

22 Miss Murray Ochtertyre *Bowie 1789, 3*

intro - Aaron

Not to be confused with John Bowie's later 'Miss (Augusta) Murray of Auchtertyre's Strathspey', this is from a sequence of tunes in flat keys with dance figures, which opens his book in a quite different musical style from what comes after. If this Miss Murray was Euphemia Murray of Lintrose, she was also a composer herself: one of her tunes appears in the Gows' fifth collection, and Robert Burns wrote the song 'Blythe was she' in her honour.

23 The Sailor Lassie *Bremner 1761, 107*

intro - Mairi

The first part of this 9/8 jig from Robert Bremner's second book of reels is also the first part of the slip jig 'Polly the Lass'. He printed it with very simple dance figures, so that as many as possible could join in.

front row:
Marie Fielding, Lauren MacColl, Alison McGillivray,
Shona Mooney, Mairi Campbell

back row:
David McGuinness, Callum Armstrong, Aaron McGregor





NATHANIEL GOW'S DANCE BAND

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The Downshire, Camperdown, Quick Step.

Square piano by Muir, Wood & Co, Edinburgh c.1815

Fortepiano by Paul McNulty after Walter (tracks 4, 14, 19)



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Fine

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Concerto Caledonia

Lauren MacColl *violin*

Shona Mooney *violin*

Aaron McGregor *violin*

Marie Fielding *violin*

Mairi Campbell *viola, violin*

Alison McGillivray *cello*

Callum Armstrong *smallpipes, recorder*

David McGuinness *fortepiano, square piano*

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at the University of Glasgow

Mixed by Matt Parkin at the Royal College of Music

Mastered by Denis Blackham at Skye Mastering

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