

Dance to the Piper: A Musical Anthology

Editor's note:

The selections featured on the accompanying CD have been collected as part of the author's research. We are grateful to the performers, composers and their heirs, and to those who hold the original recordings, for allowing their inclusion here. The CD is included with the book for the purposes expressed and not for commercial use—it is not to be sold or copied.

The user agrees that they have purchased *Dance to the Piper: The Highland Bagpipe in Nova Scotia*, by Barry W. Shears, and further agrees that the files will not be shared, sold or copied. All rights reserved.

Track Listing:

1. Pipe Major Kenneth MacKenzie Baillie / Marches
2. Pipe Major Fraser Holmes / March, Strathspey and Reel
3. Pipe Major Roderick Nicholson / March
4. Alex Sutherland / March
5. Peter Morrison / Slow March and March
6. Sandy Boyd / March, Strathspey and Reels
7. Duncan MacIntyre / March and Strathspey
8. Duncan MacIntyre / Strathspey and Reels
9. Joe Hughie MacIntyre and Marie MacLellan / March
10. "Big" Donald MacLellan and Marie MacLellan / March
11. John Willie Campbell and Kevin MacCormack / March
12. Alex Currie / A Visit with Alex Currie (1996)
13. Alex Currie / Reels
14. Jimmy MacArthur / Home Recording (c. 1971)
15. Joe Hughie MacIntyre and Marie MacLellan / Reel
16. Buddy MacMaster and Joan MacDonald Boes / Reel
17. Rory MacKinnon / Reels
18. Barry Shears, Tracey Dares-MacNeil, Patrick Gillis, and the Young Mabou Dancers / Scotch Four Dance, Strathpey and Reels

Liner Notes:

1. Pipe Major Kenneth MacKenzie Baillie

"PM George Ross' Farewell to the Black Watch" (Wm. Lawrie), "Miss Elspeth Campbell" (T. Douglas). Pictou County. Studio recording 1923, Victor 19107.

Baillie was a multi-instrumentalist who played violin, Highland bagpipes and uilleann pipes. He learned to play the bagpipes while serving with the Royal Marine Artillery and while stationed in Glasgow during the 1880s. The major influence on his piping was his wife, Catherine and father-in-law, Pipe Major Sandy MacLennan, Inverness, Scotland. Features of his playing include a much rounder presentation of two classic bagpipe marches, modern playing of the birl at the end of each eight-bar measure of the tune. Baillie had lung cancer when this recording was made and was prevented from playing a full set of bagpipes opting instead for a set of bellow-blown pipes. He died the following year.

2. Pipe Major Fraser Holmes, Highland bagpipes

“Miss Elspeth Campbell” (T. Douglas), “Money Musk,” “Lord MacDonald.” New Glasgow. Studio recording ca. 1956, courtesy of the Holmes family.

Fraser Holmes and his father learned to play the bagpipes at the same time. They were inspired to learn to pipe from a relative, James Holmes Cameron. Fraser Holmes had some instruction from MacKenzie Baillie and over his lifetime he taught hundreds of pipers in the Pictou County area. What is presented here is the classic “March, Strathspey, Reel” (MSR) format.

3. Pipe Major Roderick Nicholson (1891-1979), Highland bagpipes

“Millbank Cottage” (W.D. Dumbreck). Sydney. Studio recording ca. 1949, courtesy of the Patterson family.

Roddie was originally from Gillander’s Mountain, Victoria County. He learned to play the bagpipes as a youth, receiving instruction from MacKenzie Baillie and several army pipers in Scotland during the First World War. He was the first piping instructor at the Gaelic College in St. Ann’s, Victoria County, and taught several pipers in the Sydney area. This recording was one of several made for a short film on Scottish culture in Nova Scotia by the National Film Board of Canada in 1949 and presented to Pipe Major Nicholson.

4. Alex Sutherland, Highland bagpipes

“Leaving Glenurquhart” (Wm. MacDonald). Dartmouth. Home recording ca. 1980, courtesy of the late Alex Sutherland.

Alex Sutherland was inspired to learn the bagpipes as a boy after hearing a local piper, John Sutherland, playing the bagpipes in the back of a wagon in Earltown, Colchester County, just before the First World War. In order to learn the bagpipe Alex Sutherland moved in with the Baillie’s over the winter months and performed farm chores in exchange for piping lessons. Alex’s son, Gordon, was the founder of the Dartmouth Boy’s Pipe Band.

5. Peter Morrison, Highland bagpipes

“Loch Rannoch” (John Wilson), “The Day We Crossed the Ferry” (A. Cameron). Sydney. Recording courtesy of Theresa Morrison.

Peter Morrison was a fluent Gaelic-speaker whose ancestors came from South Uist in the 1830s and settled at an area known as Glen Morrison. Peter was a piping student of PM Roddie Nicholson and several of Peter’s relatives played the bagpipe.

6. Sandy Boyd (1907-1982), Highland bagpipes

“Colonel Stockwell,” “Tulloch Gorum,” “The Grey Bob” (trad.), “Malcolm the Tailor” (trad.), “Mrs. Macleod of Raasay” (trad.). Sydney. Home recording 1972.

Sandy was piping student of John MaColl and Duncan Grant and he had additional lessons in piobaireachd from Robert Reid. He left an indelible mark on Nova Scotia’s piping traditions in the second half of the 20th century and a few of his students went on to teach piping and adjudicate competitions across the province.

7. Duncan MacIntyre

“The 71st Highlanders Quickstep” (H. MacKay), “The Pipers Bonnet” (trad.). Sydney. Home recording ca. 1970.

Duncan MacIntyre was Joe Hughie MacIntyre’s younger brother but, as can be heard, his playing is quite different. This recording shows significant 20th-century influences represented by a competition style march and strathspey. Duncan was a member of the North Nova Scotia Highlanders during the Second World War and attended piping courses in Scotland with Pipe Major Willie Ross, one of the most influential Scottish pipers of the 20th century.

8. Duncan MacIntyre

Unknown strathspey, “Reel of Tulloch,” “Bessie MacIntyre” (W. MacLean), “The Bridge of Bogie” (R. Meldrum). Home recording ca. 1972.

On this track Duncan plays a strathspey and group of lively reels. Notice the use of the Crunluath movement in the “Reel of Tulloch.”

9. Joe Hughie MacIntyre, Highland bagpipes, Marie MacLellan, piano

“Donald MacLean’s Farewell to Oban (A. MacNeill).” Recording courtesy of the MacIntyre family.

10. “Big” Donald MacLellan, violin, Marie MacLellan piano

“Donald MacLean’s Farewell to Oban” (A. MacNeill). Recording courtesy of Theresa MacLellan and Dave MacIsaac.

Donald and Marie MacLellan belonged to a family of musicians which included their father Ranald MacLellan, and sister and brother, Theresa and Joe MacLellan.

11. John Willie Campbell, violin, Kevin MacCormack, piano

“Donald MacLean’s Farewell to Oban” (A. MacNeill). Recording courtesy of Tony Engle, Topic Records, U.K.

Campbell was from Glencoe, Inverness County and he had a large repertoire of tunes played in a style known as “High Bass”. The ‘High Bass’ or Scordatura tuning of a violin (which normally tunes G/D/A/E) is achieved by

tuning the G string to A and the D string to E resulting in A/E/A/E configuration. This tuning technique allows the player to use open strings to produce a “droning” sound on tunes played in the key of A. The effect, as can be heard on Track 10, is quite dramatic and the overall sound is reminiscent of a set of bagpipes.

12. Alex Currie (1910-1997)

Discussing the tune “Sid Mar Chaidh an Càl a Dholaid” (That’s How the Cabbage was Boiled). Frenchvale.

Alex’s forbears were from South Uist. Alex learned to play the bagpipe as a youth from his father and mother. Alex Currie had a very unique style of playing and sadly no one today plays this particular style. He didn’t play grips or leumluaths and sometimes substituted G,D,E gracenotes on three Low A notes in succession by playing a very open birl or double strike with the bottom finger of the bottom hand. He, like several other pipers in Cape Breton, did play the piobaireachd embellishment known as the ‘Dre’ in his light music. My visits with Alex usually started with me playing one or two tunes on the chanter and this would stimulate his memory and result in a cascade of tunes and stories.

13. Alex Currie, Highland bagpipes

“Am Muilean Dubh” (The Black Mill), “Buntata Charach” (The Gnarly Potato), “An Oidche bha na Gobhair Again” (The Night We had the Goats). Home recording 1973, courtesy of Alex Currie.

14. Jimmy MacArthur, Highland bagpipes

“Tulloch Gorum,” “Reel of Tulloch.” Cornerbrook, Newfoundland. Recording courtesy of Margaret Bennett and the MacArthur family.

This selection was originally collected by Scottish folklorist, Margaret Bennett, during her field work on the west coast of Newfoundland in the 1970s. Jimmy learned piping from his father, Allan MacArthur, who in turn learned from his uncle Dan MacIsaac. Both of these families were late immigrants from Scotland, the MacArthurs coming from the isle of Canna and the MacIsaacs from Moidart. These families left Cape Breton in the 1860s and settled in the Codroy River area of Newfoundland. “Tulloch Gorum” and the “Reel of Tulloch” are both very old tunes. Notice the use of gracenotes and the absence of taorluaths or grips.

15. Joe Hughie MacIntyre, Highland bagpipes, Marie MacLellan, piano

“Miss Proud.” Grand Mira. Recording courtesy of the MacIntyre family.

Joe Hughie MacIntyre was descended from Scottish immigrants from South Uist who settled at French Road around 1828.

16. Buddy MacMaster, violin, Joan MacDonald Boes, piano. (Toronto)

“Miss Proud.” Recording courtesy of Buddy MacMaster and Dave MacIsaac.

Buddy MacMaster is one of the most respected violinists in the Cape Breton fiddling tradition. This short recording is presented with the performance of the same tune played by Joe Hughie MacIntyre to illustrate the close relationship between Gaelic-influenced bagpipe and violin dance music.

17. Rory MacKinnon, Highland bagpipes

“A Cape North Reel,” “The Reel of Tulloch.” Sugarloaf, Cape Breton, ca. 1959. Recording courtesy of Helen Creighton.

Rory was descended from Skye pioneers who settled first at Inverness but later moved to the Meat Cove / Bay St. Lawrence area of Cape Breton. His father, Sandy, and three brothers were pipers and another brother, Angus “Mossy” MacKinnon, was an exceptional step-dancer.

18. Barry Shears, Highland bagpipes, Tracey Dares-MacNeil, piano, Patrick Gillis, guitar, The Young Mabou Dancers

“Devil in the Kitchen” (trad.), “Am Muilean Dubh” (The Black Mill. Trad. Arr. B. Shears), “Ruidhle Nan Innseanach” (The Mi’kmaq Reel. Trad. Arr. B. Shears). Recorded live, Strathspey Place, Mabou, Cape Breton, October 7, 2007. Recording courtesy of Linda Rankin, Strathspey Place, Mabou.

One of the many immigrant dances brought from Scotland to Nova Scotia was the “Scotch Four.” It is performed by two couples, dancing to a strathspey and several reels, and was often used as a wedding dance. During the early 20th century the performance of this dance declined in many areas of Cape Breton but in the last few decades it has seen a revival.