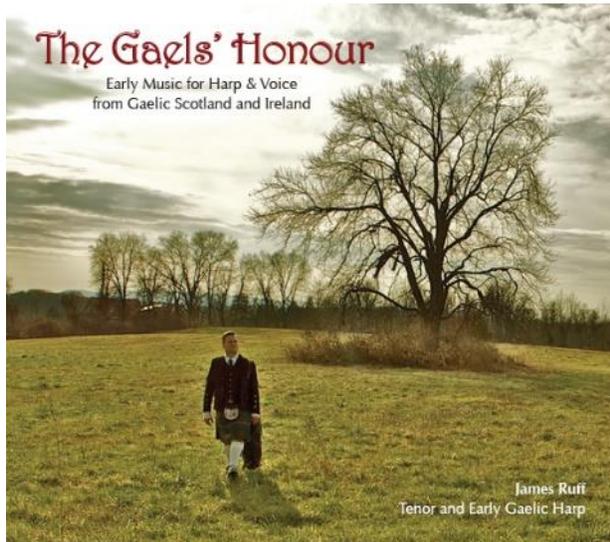


The Gaels' Honour:

Early Music for Harp & Voice from Gaelic Scotland and Ireland
James Ruff, Tenor and Early Gaelic Harp

Recorded by Sean Boyd at ARTFARM in Accord, New York: June-August 2018



1. MacGregor's Search

From the 1895 *Gesto Collection of Highland Music*, as well as Daniel Dow's 1776 publication: *A Collection of Ancient Scots Music*. This pipe piece refers to the MacGregors, whose family name was 'altogether abolished' by King James VI/I. Until the law was finally repealed in 1774, anyone bearing the name MacGregor was to be put to death. Many were hunted like animals, flushed out of the heather with bloodhounds, and killed. The pipes and the Clarsach have an ancient partnership and it makes sense that some of the ancient harp music was inherited by the younger instrument, the pipes. This piece is also closely related to the Gaelic songs: Tha Gruagach san Aodan, and Bothan Àiridh 'm Bràighe Raineach.

2. O Chraobh nan Ubhal – The Apple Tree

This Scottish Gaelic prayer to and about the apple tree is found inserted in an early 15th century poem "The Yew Tree," though it is probably much older. The tune is traditional from the isle of Barra, heard through the singing of Flora MacNeill and Calum Johnson. The apple tree is the supreme symbol of wisdom in old Celtic lore: apple trees bearing both flowers and fruit appear in the Celtic Otherworld, and an apple branch is handed to Gaelic heroes by female members of the Sith – fairy women – as an invitation to a spiritual journey or quest.

3. A Chailini an bhfaca sibh Seoirse? – Girls Have You Seen George? - song & variations

This set of Baroque variations on a traditional Irish song is attributed to Cornelius Lyons (c. 1700) by Dennis O'Hampsey, from whom Edward Bunting transcribed it in 1792 for his *Ancient Music of Ireland*. Mr. Lyons was harper to the Earl of Antrim, and appears quite frequently in the harper Arthur O'Neill's memoirs. This is one of a handful of intricate Clarsach variations attributed to him, including variations on Eileen a Rùn and Lady of the Desert, all played by Mr. O'Hampsey. Many Old Gaelic harpers sang to their own playing,

utilizing ornamented harp versions of a tune accompanying a simpler sung version of the tune. This method appears in Bunting's field notebooks, possibly partially notated for this song.

4. **Molly MacAlpin**

A very popular Irish song by William Connellan (1645-1710), the somewhat less prolific of the two harping Connellan brothers – Thomas is his brother. The famed Turlough O'Carolan said he “wished he had composed” this song! Its evocative and sensuous melody perfectly mirrors the beauty of this Irish woman, though the poetry is maybe a bit on the conventional side. This tune was collected in 1792 by Edward Bunting at the Belfast Harpers' Meeting.

5. **Tá mé ‘mo chodhladh – I Am Asleep**

Another song captured by Mr. Bunting from harpers at the Belfast Harpers Meeting. Though a very similar version was transcribed from the playing of Dennis O'Hampsey, this elegant version was taken down from the playing of Hugh Higgins. It appears to be a variant of a Jacobite song popular in both Ireland and Scotland. I arranged this from notation in Bunting's field notebook MS 29 from Belfast.

6. **Mr. O'Connor**

Turlough O'Carolan (1670-1738) is of course the most well-known of the Irish Harper-Bards. As many of these early harpers, he contracted smallpox at a young age and lost his sight. He was then brought to a harper to apprentice – harping being a possible means of making a living for the blind at this time. He is largely known as a composer, and for combining traditional Irish music and song with the modern Baroque musical idiom of his time – in fact, he knew Italian musicians in Dublin, including the violinist and composer Francesco Geminiani. His many wonderful harp tunes have been collected and well documented. This long tune with its handsome jig appears only in the *Carolan fragment* dated from c.1742, which is possibly a section of the 18th c. Delaney publication of Carolan tunes. It is not found elsewhere.

7. **Supair Thighear Leoid – Lude's Supper**

A Scottish port appearing in Daniel Dow's publication, *A Collection of Ancient Scots Music* (1776). It is attributed here to Rorie Dall – Blind Rorie, the famed harper composer revered by so many traditional musicians. This is possibly Ruairidh Dall Ó Catháin (c.1580-1653), the famed blind Irish harper who spent much time touring in Scotland. This seems a strong, formal occasional piece, to be played for the dining of the Lord of Lude, the melody marked by repeated rhythmic melodic cells that appear in many of the pieces attributed to Rorie Dall.

8. **Port Atholl**

Another beautiful Scottish Port taken from Daniel Dow's publication, it also appears in the 1789 *Collection of Strathspey Reels and Country Dances* by John Bowie where it is attributed to Rory Dall. Its earliest appearance is in the Balcarres Lute Book MS (c. 1700). This haunting tune honors the Dukes of Atholl, and the support they gave to this great center of early Scottish harping.

9. **Is eagal leam am bàs – The Fear of Death is Upon Me**

A particularly intimate Scottish Port attributed to Rory Dall in Daniel Dow's 1776 publication, expressing in a very spare manner the love, fear and longing surrounding one's own death. It

also shows up as *Port 7th* in a set of Puirt – old Gaelic Harp tunes - in the *MacLean-Clephane Harp Manuscript* (1815) from the isle of Mull.

10. Alasdair à gleanna garradh – Alasdair of Glengarry

Probably the most famous poem of the Scottish Gaelic Poet Sileas na Ceapach, (c. 1660-1729). Daughter of the Chief of the MacDonalds, Sileas married Alexander Gordon of Camdell, and moved from Invernesshire in the Western Highlands to Banffshire in the East. She was the Gaelic poet of the 1715 Jacobite rising, and writes here with heartfelt elegance of her kinsman Alexander, Chief of the MacDonalds of Glengarry, following his death in 1721. Famous for its large number of nature comparisons, the poem's pathos probably stems from the loss of Sileas' husband and daughter prior to this period. The tune comes from the singing of William Matheson, but also appears in the Angus Fraser MS (1816). According to Mr. Matheson, this tune was a popular mold for Gaelic poetry from the 18th century, being the only extant tune that fits poems of this meter. This is probably the oldest poem to use the tune. Mr. Fraser asserts "other bards both before and after Sileas day used the air exclusively in heroic or battle songs."

11. Da mihi manum – Give Me Your Hand

The Harper Arthur O'Neill attests in his memoirs that the composer of this lovely Old Gaelic harp tune was Ruaraidh Dall Ó Catháin (c.1580-1653), and that he composed it for Lady Eglinton, a patron while he was in Scotland. This tune appears in many early Scottish sources, beginning with the Wemys lute book, where it was written down in simple form during Ruaraidh's lifetime. I've chosen to play the version from *A Collection of Ancient Scots Music* (1776) by Daniel Dow, fiddler and music teacher in Edinburgh, which includes lovely variants and baroque embellishments to the melody that would be expected from an 18th c. fiddler. The high point, however, still seems to be the surprising and emotional introduction of an F natural late in the tune. With time, this tune became more popular in Irish sources and tradition, and less so in Scotland.

12. Feaghan Geleash/Scott's Lamentation/Lament for MacLeod of Raasay

Both *Feaghan Geleash* and *Scott's Lamentation for the Baron of Loughmoe* were taken down from the playing of Denis O'Hampsey by Edward Bunting at the Belfast Harp Meeting in 1792. These pieces show the important formal face of the poet and harper in the clan courts, who were required to mark formal occasions with a poem or piece of music. *Scott's Lamentation* was composed for the Baron of Loughmore in 1599, a good six years before the Baron's death. A harp lament like this was meant to show the cream of a harper's craft, and it was customary to have one at the ready in this fashion. They were always preceded by a prelude – and here I have chosen to use the famed "*Feaghann Geleash*" the only tuning prelude (though it is only partial) in existence. It is notable that it does not embody the expected tragic sadness, but instead seems to celebrate the life and personal qualities of the deceased.

The Lament for MacLeod of Raasay comes from the work of 17th century Scottish Gaelic poet Mary MacLeod (c.1615-1707). The tune is printed in the Angus Fraser MS. This formal lament was written for Iaian Garbh Mac Gille Chaluim (John MacLeod), 7th of Raasay, Chieftain from 1648 until his untimely death: he was drowned along with some 20 of his clansmen when his ship capsized during a trip to a christening in Lewis on Easter Monday, 1671. Greatly mourned by his kinsmen, his own sister composed a lament for him every

Friday for a year after his death, some of which are still sung today. MacLeod was known for his great courage and strength, and Mary uses her strong gifts of rhythm and rhyme to emulate his admired qualities in this moving elegy.

13. ***Jacobite Set: Òran eile air Latha Chùil-Lodair/'S e 'n rìgh a th' againn is feàrr leinn/An Suaithneas Bàn - Song on the Battle of Culloden/We Prefer the King We've Got/The White Cockade***

The Battle of Culloden marked the end of the 1745 Jacobite rebellion, and for all intents and purposes, the end of the ancient Highland way of life. It is quite moving to see the volume of talisman-like memorabilia in existence in Scottish museums, both in the Highlands and large cities, attesting to the love and hope the people invested in the person of Prince Charles – Bonnie Prince Charlie – to regain the rightful throne of the Scottish Stewarts. The Jacobite songs in English can be rather sentimental, but the Gaelic ones show great strength: hence the vehemence of emotion expressed by John Roy Stewart (1700-1752), in ***Òran eile air Latha Chùil-Lodair***. He was the only Gaelic poet who actually fought for Prince Charles at Culloden, traveled with him as he left Scotland, and finally died in exile in France. It is thanks to this song-poem that many of the details of the battle are known at all. This is sung to a traditional tune, learned from the singing of Kenna Campbell and Allan MacDonald.

'S e 'n rìgh a th'againn is feàrr leinn is a Jacobite march taken from the ***Simon Fraser Collection*** of airs and melodies peculiar to the Highlands of Scotland and the Isles from 1715-1745. I have woven this traditional Jacobite march, used to incite rebellion and probably brought over to Scotland by Irish mercenary soldiers, in with the following lament.

An Suaithneas Bàn - Though born many years after Culloden, the great Scottish Gaelic poet Uilleam Ross (1762-1790) laments here in beautiful language the passing of hope for Scotland upon hearing of Prince Charles' death in Rome in 1788. The White Cockade represents the white Jacobite Rose, worn as a symbol of the Jacobite cause as well as for Charlie himself. Sung to a traditional tune learned from the singing of Kenna Campbell and William Matheson.

14. ***Carolan Set: Sir Arthur Shaen/Planxty Burke/Carolan's Favorite Jig (Planxty Mary O'Neill)***

I found both the first two tunes here in the ***Carolan Fragment***, published c.1742, and thought to be part of the Delaney Carolan collection, though Planxty Burke was also collected by Bunting in 1802 from harper Patrick Byrne. Carolan's Favorite Jig is found in the Petrie MS. It is such a pleasure to arrange these Carolan tunes for Clarsach in the old manner, as their structure and slow-moving harmony fit perfectly with the long resonance of the instrument. I find the haunting melodies, the infectious rhythms of Irish dance and the baroque phrasing here to be irresistible.

15. ***King of the Blind***

This piece, attributed to Carolan, comes from ***The Most Celebrated Irish Tunes*** (1724) published by the Neal brothers in Dublin. This marks the first publication of Irish music and includes a large number of harp tunes. Some believe this may actually be another piece by Rory Dall, and it's familiar melodic and rhythmic repetitions seem to support this. I find this a wonderful tribute to the early blind harpers, full of a lively Irish energy.

This CD consists of courtly music and poetry that might have been heard in the 17th and 18th century Gaelic world – by the clan chiefs of the Highlands & Islands of Scotland and the earls of Ireland. Gaelic nobles were

great patrons of the arts, and typically employed a Poet, a Harper, a Piper and a Fool. The wire harp in particular was the premier instrument of art music for the Gaelic peoples, always linked with poetry, first used by professional court harpers, then by traveling harpers after the fall of the Gaelic Order – in the late 17th century in Ireland, and the mid-18th century in Scotland. The wire harp passed out of fashion by about 1800, after some 1000 years of use.

Stemming from the Gaelic culture's non-literate (as opposed to illiterate!) transmission of information, art and wisdom, much of the repertoire, poetry and technique for the Clarsach was passed on orally, with music and song poetry often recorded in manuscript form long after their composition. Thankfully due to the work of 19-year-old organist Edward Bunting, hired to write down the music was played by the wire harpers competing at the 1792 Belfast Harpers' Meeting, we do have much repertoire for the Clarsach, both instrumental and song, as well as some idea about the tuning and elaborate ornamentation employed by these artists. Bunting largely recorded the melodies these harpers were playing, though in about ten pieces, he included either partial or complete harp bass material. It is in studying these remnants, as well as the *Pòrts* - old harp tunes found in 17th and 18th century Scottish lute manuscripts - that we are able to reconstruct what these harpers may have been playing. I have transcribed much of the repertoire I am playing here from manuscript or early publication, and have worked to arrange it as closely as possible in the style of the old Gaelic harpers.