

A Selection Of Scottish Pieces for Lyra Viol

Edited and arranged by

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Featuring music from the Leyden,
Blaikie, Skene, Straloch, Panmure, Pickering
and Balcarres manuscripts

in Harp Sharp and
Harp Flat tunings

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INTRODUCTION

“Whatever Mr Pleyel does, let him not alter one iota of the original Scots air... But, let our National Music preserve its native features - They are, I believe, frequently wild, & unreduceable to the more modern rule; but on that very eccentricity, perhaps, depends a great part of their effect” Robert Burns, in a letter to his publisher.

The development of the Scottish Sentimental style exemplified by Robert Burns can be traced in the lute, viol, guitar and cittern manuscripts of the 17th century. In 1603, King James travelled south to don the English throne as James I of England and VI of Scotland. The court in Scotland had been a focus for the development of the arts, with Scottish writers and musicians rubbing shoulders with visiting artists from Italy, Germany, Holland, Spain, England and France. In the court’s absence, Scottish musicians started recording arrangements of the popular native song and dance repertoire.

The Scottish 17th-century manuscripts for viol, lute, cittern and violin share a common repertoire of song and dance arrangements, and it is of interest to compare different versions of the same tune as it passed from instrument to instrument over the course of the century. With the growing awareness in Scotland of the Continental practice of developing an independent yet supportive bass line, much consternation was aroused in trying to fit the “wild and unreduceable” native melodies to standard Baroque harmonic practice. Very often it is a case of “less is more”, with many traditional singers even to this day preferring to sing unaccompanied. The viol arrangements in the Leyden and Blaikie manuscripts miss nothing by not having a harpsichord continuo line, as one might expect for the period. The tune is paramount, with just the occasional hint of the underlying harmony. The task of the interpreter is to give as vocal-like a performance as is possible, breathing as a traditional singer, with a healthy disregard for the “tyranny of the bar line”.

The two surviving Scottish viol manuscripts, Leyden and (in a 19th-century copy) Blaikie, share a similar, sometimes identical repertoire of popular song and dance arrangements, the kind of repertoire which would increase in popularity in the following century.

The viol had been played in Scotland since the 1530s, after James V’s return from a visit to the French court, and remained in use until well into the 18th century when it was replaced by the louder cello. But even with a change of

instrument, there are traces of viol bowing technique in use as late as 1780, as depicted in David Allen's portrait of the famous Gow brothers, Neil and Donald, playing for dancing at "A Highland Wedding". The National Library of Scotland houses two of the three manuscript collections of Sainte Colombe the elder (as well as unedited music by Marin Marais) brought back to Scotland by the Maul brothers, young Scottish noblemen. These manuscripts form part of the important Panmure Collection, which also includes music for lute and baroque guitar. Sainte Colombe's son was living and teaching viol in Edinburgh in 1707.

As with the lute, cittern and guitar, the viol manuscripts were written in tablature rather than standard musical notation, and employed a number of different tunings. This "lyra viol" technique combines solo melodies with passing chords and bass notes, resulting in a satisfying solo performance.

[Much of the above was taken from my own booklet notes to the CD, *Love Is The Cause: Scottish Tunes for Viola da Gamba & Baroque Guitar*, by Jonathan Dunford and Rob MacKillop - outhere Alpha 530]

The Present Edition

I have brought together a cross section of works from the Leyden and Blaikie viol manuscripts, supported by concordances and variations from the Balcarres lute manuscript, and arrangements of popular items from the other Scottish lute manuscripts, bearing in mind the shared repertoire between these instruments.

Facsimile copies can be purchased from the holding institutions (Newcastle University Robinson Library for Leyden, and the Wighton Collection, Dundee Public Libraries for Blaikie) but unless you are familiar with the tunes you might well flounder, as there are almost no tablature time signals, wrong notes, and very often the bar lines are misplaced. I present workable versions, with silent edits here and there, as befits a non-academic publication. Those wishing to delve deeper into the Scottish viol manuscripts should approach the aforementioned institutions for copies.

I also highly recommend the 1999 doctoral research paper by Evelyn Stell: *Sources of Scottish Instrumental Music 1603 - 1707* in two volumes, available for free online at <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/76280/1/13834011.pdf>

Tuning

Harp Sharp was a very popular tuning for the viol and lute in the mid to late 17th century, not only in Scotland. It is an open chord tuning, *nominal* G Major, with the following nominal note names from 6th to 1st string: D G d g b d'. To get Harp Flat, all you do is tune the b to b flat, giving a G minor chord.

The reason these pitch names are nominal is that the music could be played on any size of viol, irrespective of pitch, and is therefore notated as follows:

Harp Sharp: defhf

Harp Flat: edfhf

From whatever pitch your first string is at (and I suggest tuning it down a tone from its regular pitch) for harp sharp, the second string at tablature letter d must be tuned to equal the same pitch as the first string open. Then tune the third string so that the tablature letter e now sounds the same as the second string, and so on.

Harp Sharp forms a major chord, as follows from the 6th to 1st strings:

5th, Root, 5th, Root, 3rd, 5th.

For Harp Flat, the 3rd is a minor interval.

For a bass viol normally tuned D G c e a d' Harp Sharp tuning is now:

C F c f a c'

and Harp Flat tuning is now:

C F c f ab c'

For a viol normally tuned G c f a d' g' Harp Sharp is now:

F Bb f bb d' f'

And yet another way to tune is:

Strings 6,5 and 1 go down a tone;
3 is raised a semitone;
4 and 2 stay the same.

N.B. If you decide **not** to tune your first string down a tone, you will have to raise the 2nd string up a tone, 3rd string up a minor third, 4th string up a tone - you might consider that problematic if using gut strings. Hence my advice to play at the lower pitch.

Notation

For the transcription, I have assumed Harp Sharp is tuned to a G Major chord, Harp Flat to a Gm chord. Although you will be able to play a good deal of this music in standard bass viol tuning, it just would not have the wonderful resonance of the open-chord tuning.

Where the original manuscripts use a # sign before a note for an ornament, I have used a comma after the note. Either way, the ornament is never as specific as a trill, back fall, fore fall, upper mordant, lower mordant, chute, etc. It basically signifies, "You could do something here". When the same pieces are found in different manuscripts, the ornaments are not always in the same place, or the same in number, so feel free to add and subtract ornaments of your taste at will. The spirit of the piece should take precedence over the exact notation.

Three dots below a note signify a *Thump*, that is a left-hand pluck of a string - see for example the first full bar of "Ane Ayer".

Sometimes the notes a and b are slurred either on the string (tablature letters c and e on string 3) or across strings (tablature letter c on 3, a on 2). Often the Leyden version will use two strings where Blaikie uses one string in the same position of the same piece, which might well indicate different arrangers. Again, you are encouraged to do what feels right each time.

Manuscripts

Leyden - John Leyden (d.1811) was an antiquarian, who made no contribution to the contents of the manuscript that carries his name. According to Stell (see link above), one Andrew Adam compiled and notated the tablature pieces (there are keyboard pieces in the manuscript too) for his patron, and that Adam also notated viol music in standard notation for the Sinkler manuscript. Three further tablature pieces are in another hand, possibly that of the patron or

another member of the family. Stell assigns a tentative date of 1695-1700 for the tablature parts of the Leyden manuscript, the same period as the Balcarres lute manuscript. The Leyden manuscript was considered lost until it was discovered in a library in Newcastle. A partial copy was made in the 19th century by George Farquhar Graham, currently housed in the national Library of Scotland.

Blaikie - According to Stell, Andrew Blaikie was an engraver living in Paisley in the early 19th century, so as with Leyden, we have a manuscript in the name of a collector rather than the musician responsible for its contents. The manuscript has long been lost, however a surviving copy of 40 of the original 112 (at least) pieces was made by a Dundee greengrocer, Andrew John Wighton (1804 - 66). The manuscript consists of eight foolscap-sized pages. Wighton might or might not have copied from an earlier source (which might not have been the original) accurately, but what he did notate contains many errors and inaccuracies. But quite a few of the piece are intact, accurate and readable, and often fascinating. Stell raises the possibility of the original manuscript belonging to lady Katherine Boyd in 1692, and that her teacher might well have been the afore-mentioned Andrew Adam, “music master” and Burgess of Glasgow in 1732. It is tempting to see Adam as the viol teacher and compiler of both the Leyden and Blaikie manuscripts...though that might be stretching the available facts too far: see the last paragraph in the Notation section above.

Lute Manuscripts

Straloch - c.1627, compiled by Robert Gordon of Straloch (1580 - 1661). 30 pieces.

Balcarres - c. 1695 - 1700, one scribe yet various contributors. Various tunings including versions of Harp Sharp and Flat. 252 pieces.

Pickering - c. 1616. Mainly English pieces, with some Scottish items. 124 pieces.

Panmure 5 - c.1630. Contains French and Scottish lute music in Harp Sharp and Harp Flat tunings. 110 Pieces.

Rowallan - c. 1600 - at least 1616. 38 pieces.

Wemyss - “begun 1643”. Various tunings including versions of Harp Sharp and Flat. 91 pieces.

Commentary

In Harp Sharp Tuning defhf:

01 **Ane Ayer** - watch for the “thumps” in the first measure and elsewhere.

03 **Flowers of the Forest** - arranged for this edition. The flowers were the young men of the forest region of Selkirkshire, who were mown down by the English army. Still performed annually in the area. Sometimes I play the first note of the second bar as an open first string. Please do experiment with fret positions and ornaments.

07 **Lillebolero** - very similar to the Balcarres version, but without the supporting bass line

08 **Meggie I Must Love Thee** - The Balcarres variations might seem too hard for some, but there is no requirement to play them. Many of the settings in Balcarres have a number of variations very much in the style presented here. They are useful to study when it comes to making up your own variations to other tunes.

10 **My Lady Laudian's Lilt** - the Panmure 5 setting on the second page could be studied as an example of improvised variation.

11 **No Charms Above Her** - very similar to the Balcarres version, but without the supporting bass line

13 **Rhona's Tune** - untitled in the original manuscript. But it deserves a name, so I named it after my daughter, as I used to play it slowly and quietly on the lute to put her to sleep...You could give it another name if you so wish.

15 **Sweet Willie** - poor versions of Sweet Willie appear in the viol manuscripts, but the Balcarres version is much better, and fun to play.

16 **The Bonny Brow** - brow would be pronounced broo

19 **Where Helen Lays** - it might help your interpretation to know that poor Helen was lying six feet underground at the time...

...and in Harp Flat tuning edfhf:

20 **Joy To The Person** - despite the title, this is a sad song. The lyric continues, “of my love, though she me disdain”.

21 **What If A Day** - the folk-naïve accompaniment contrasts markedly from the English lute settings, but is all the more charming for it.

21 **Hiland Laddie** - the Balcarres MS variations turn this into a longer concert item. Whether you include them in full, in part, or not at all is up to you.

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