

## READING SCOTTISH CLASSICAL MUSIC:

### A Historiographical Critique

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Establishing discontinuities is not an easy task...  
- Michel Foucault.<sup>[1]</sup>

Our perceptions are being radically altered.  
- Jamie Reid Baxter.<sup>[1]</sup>

#### 1: “punctuated by disasters”

Within both popular and academic readings of the phrase ‘Scottish music’, we find two strata of signification - the one present and the other (strictly speaking) *absent*, deferred outwith its actual lexical structure. The phrase designates at once a national locus, but also a generic specificity - a specificity which remains silent, yet powerfully implicit.

Readings of the phrase ‘Scottish music’ have often exceeded its apparent surface, effecting a silent interpolation in the space between its terms: its meaning, for many, has been not Scottish music as such - Scottish music as a multiplicity of differing genres and discourses - but Scottish *folk* music, a generic reduction to a singularity which serves to encourage the reading of Scottish culture in general as a primarily *popular* culture with few (if any) ‘high’-art pretensions.<sup>[1]</sup>

In assessing the role of classical music within Scottish culture, the normative musicological manoeuvre is to privilege an image of folk music as a fundamentally authentic measure of classical pretensions. Such a position is clear from the early work of the musicologist David Johnson, who, in 1972, claimed that:

Scottish classical music was, even at its best, only a minor tributary of the European mainstream. It is nowadays completely forgotten... It produced no outstanding masterpieces... Scotland’s real music remains her folk music.<sup>[1]</sup>

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<sup>[1]</sup> Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1966; eng.tr. London: Tavistock, 1970), p.50. N.B.: all references to non-English language texts are to their translated editions.

<sup>[2]</sup> Jamie Reid Baxter, ‘Foreword’ to D. James Ross, *Musick Fyne: Robert Carver and the Art of Music in Sixteenth Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 1993), p.xiii.

<sup>[3]</sup> It is not the author’s intention to irritate in his use of terms such as ‘high’-art or ‘classical’, which are used here to signify not a precise period of musical history, style or practice, but simply as an admittedly vexed index for a non-‘popular’ tradition of music specific to Europe. The term is truly inadequate, as are many of the attempts to replace it for a more pragmatic or politically correct alternative.

<sup>[4]</sup> David Johnson, *Music and Society in Lowland Scotland in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p.200. N.B.: The qualifier ‘early’ is pertinent here, since Johnson has subsequently revised and distanced himself from many of his earlier and more negative opinions on the status of Scottish classical musics. See also his excellent (later) book, *Scottish Fiddle Music in the 18th Century: A Musical Collection and Historical Study* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1984).

According to Johnson here, if a Scottish classical music does exist, then it only does so at the extreme margins of the canon. In this, it risks the loss of its status as an object of serious, extensive academic enquiry, and is simultaneously denied any authenticity as a 'real music' which can 'speak' for, represent, its nation.

Further, Johnson locates the reason why Scottish classical music was a 'minor tributary' to the European canon in the socio-economic conditions of Scottish society:

European classical music flourishes in *centres*... Scotland had no suitable centres for classical music to concentrate in. Her court life came to an end in 1603, when James VI went to London... [equally] there were no religious centres in Scotland after the Reformation.<sup>[1]</sup>

So, from this perspective dating from 1972 (which is, as we will see, also a *dated* perspective), Scottish classical music barely exists, and where it does, has no legitimate claim to authenticity - all of this as a result of the lack of centralised political and religious structures following the Reformation and the Union of the Crowns.

This socio-economic explanation of the condition of Scottish classical music fits neatly into a widespread series of historiographical assumptions about Scottish history which is summed up neatly in the words of the historian Cairns Craig:

Scotland's history is often presented as punctuated by disasters which overwhelm the nation, break its continuity and produce a fragmented culture.<sup>[1]</sup>

This particular historiographical position normally concentrates on a standard litany of political events which are said to have interrupted the natural continuity of Scottish history, yet simultaneously constituted its reality. In particular, this litany can be expected to include the two events referred to by David Johnson - the political turmoil caused by the Reformation around 1560, and the loss of an independent Scottish monarchy at the Union of the Crowns in 1603.

However, the over-riding key event of the histories which Cairns Craig refers to, and by which all the other events in Scottish history tend to be measured, is indubitably the loss of the Scottish parliament at the Treaty of Union in 1707. This event in particular has been traditionally central to both Unionist and Nationalist accounts of Scottish history - not surprisingly, as a positive event for Unionists, and a negative event for Nationalists. Yet each of these rival historiographies also view the Treaty of Union as the teleological inevitability of both the Reformation and the Union of the Crowns - both 1560 and 1603 lead ineluctably to their conclusion in 1707.

Further, as what Craig refers to as a 'punctuating break', the 1707 Treaty of Union has been imaged as the key moment of transition from one culture in Scotland to another. Unionist historiography tends to image the pre-Union, politically independent culture as a Dark Age, full of superstition, ignorance, violence, incompetent government, bad economic management, civil strife, and so forth, while the post-Union, sub-British culture is imaged as a peacefully enlightened democracy - a strong, productive, and fully integral part of the British Empire. On the other hand, Nationalist historiography tends to image the pre-Union period as a cosmopolitan Golden Age which the Union terminated in an imperialistic (even colonialistic) fashion, replacing it with the systematic and often brutal suppression of Scotland's indigenous

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<sup>[5]</sup> Johnson, op.cit., pp.7-9.

<sup>[6]</sup> Cairns Craig, 'Series Preface' to the Polygon *Determinations* series of publications (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1989-).

cultures, symbolised by the bloody aftermath of the Jacobite defeat at Culloden in 1746, and the violent ‘ethnic cleansing’ of the Highland Clearances in the C19th (which, for many, is an ongoing economic process today).<sup>[1]</sup>

What both perspectives share, however - despite their opposed ideologies - is the contention that the structure of Scottish history is fragmented, and that this fragmentation is articulated most acutely around a tiny number of key constitutional events.

Musicology has often accepted this particular historiographical trope, and has adapted the Disaster Scenario model to its own ends, channelling its dynamics into a model designed to prove the lack of a classical music tradition in Scotland:

(1) firstly, the 1560 Reformation is imaged as virulently anti-musical in its opposition to the complex and decorative style of Catholic polyphony - in this, Calvinism is seen as tantamount to barbarity and ignorance, a complete lack of aesthetic sophistication;

(2) secondly, the 1603 loss of the court at the Union of the Crowns is seen as the elimination of the conditions of patronage for classical music;

(3) thirdly, the 1707 loss of the Edinburgh Parliament at the Treaty of Union is seen as having moved all political and economic power out of the country, thus having finally compounded the lack of infrastructure achieved in 1560 and 1603, as well as having been a demoralising blow to the nation’s cultural self-esteem and confidence.<sup>[1]</sup>

The corollary of this, of course, is that, in the absence of a centralised indigenous political system, there can be no self-supporting economic substructure. Thus, the litany of political disasters customarily recited by musicologists is intended to strategically demonstrate that the kind of economic sub-structures which are normatively required to allow classical music to flourish in any country were absent within Scottish society - no economic sub-structure of patronage, *ergo*, no classical music.

According to Cedric Thorpe Davie, the ex-Professor at the now closed music department at St. Andrews University, Scotland was a ‘musical Sahara’ as far as classical culture was concerned:<sup>[1]</sup>

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<sup>[7]</sup> For a full documentation and analysis of the Unionist position on the significance of 1707 as a positive watershed, cf. Craig Beveridge & Ronald Turnbull, *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture: Inferiorism and the Intellectuals* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1989).

<sup>[8]</sup> The complexity of the post-Union period in classical historiography should not be underestimated, however. For many music historians, the national identity crisis which it precipitated led to an almost dialectical reaction against it, generating a nationalist positivity of a kind. Normatively, this positivity is said to be expressed through the development of a massive interest in Scottish folk music, poetry, and song. Much of the C18th is described in these terms, but as David Johnson’s later work demonstrates vividly, this ‘folk revival’ is actually couched (almost) entirely within the terms of classical music, intertextually weaving elements of Baroque Italian style and form with melodic elements and performance techniques drawn from Scottish folk. One might argue from this that contrary to the received canonic view that ‘Nationalism’ in classical music began in central Europe in the mid-C19th, it actually began in Scotland in the C18th. In tracing the development of C19th European nationalisms, then, a full account would no doubt have to take account of such C18th Scottish precedents and their international dissemination, not least the widespread vogue for the songs of Robert Burns (many of which were set by Haydn, Beethoven, Hummel and others), as well as the more normatively-cited *literary* models of James MacPherson’s *Poems of Ossian* (Napoleon, for one, was a keen fan), the works of Walter Scott, etc.

<sup>[9]</sup> Cedric Thorpe Davie, *Scotland’s Music* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1980), p.54.

Scotland had not, until near the present century, made any significant *continuing* contribution to music as a conscious and deliberate art... Not until the nineteenth century was past midway did a climate conducive to the sustained development of musical talent begin to appear.<sup>[1]</sup>

Once more, the theme of a lack of continuity, a lack of smooth progression, a lack of logical historical development - an overall historical fragmentarity generated by the lack of a 'conducive climate'.

One barely needs to scratch the surface of Scottish musicology in order to find the endless repetitions of this historiographical trope. What is most indicative, perhaps, is its prevalence within musical pedagogy, at the very core of the academy's thinking. Indeed, in the introduction to the canonically definitive article on Scottish music in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (which music students the world over are encouraged to take as a researcher's bible), the Renaissance specialist Kenneth Elliott writes that:

Any account of music in Scotland must inevitably be halting and fragmentary, not only because of the ravages of time and the lack of sources but also because of powerful and even destructive political, religious and social factors.<sup>[1]</sup>

Once more, an emphasis on the fragmentarity of Scottish classical music as a result of the destruction of its socio-economic base. Once more, Elliott goes on to list the same familiar catalogue of disasters to support his contention that Scottish classical music was historically '*consigned to limbo*' at key points in its history - he reminds the reader that the normal growth of Scottish society was 'disrupted by English aggression' in the C14th, that the Reformation was 'anti-musical',<sup>[1]</sup> that the Union of the Crowns disrupted the patronage of the arts, and so forth. Thus, Elliott's argument - like Johnson's and Davie's - implies that there is a direct, determinist link between such political events and the apparent lack of a Scottish musical culture worthy of the name 'classical'.

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<sup>[10]</sup> Davie, op.cit., p.39.

<sup>[11]</sup> Kenneth Elliott, 'Scotland. I. Art Music.', in ed. Stanley Sadie, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London: Macmillan, 1980), Vol.17, p.68.

<sup>[12]</sup> Even to *tacitly* question this particular orthodoxy is to risk professional disapprobation, so deeply engrained is its mythology. Yet the fact of the matter is that the Reformation was not 'anti-musical' at all - indeed, it took several years for any solid institutional policy to emerge. When the policy did emerge (after a period of stylistic plurality), it was against a *specific form* of music seen as ideologically corrupt and undemocratic (Catholic polyphony), which it aimed to replace with a more spartan and populist style based on the new psalm tunes. For musicologists trained within a blindly classical ideology, no doubt the Reformation does indeed represent a 'lowering' of aesthetic standards in its move towards the 'popular'. However, with the rise in status of popular music studies within musicology, such a narrow ideological perspective is no longer as tenable as it might have been in the '70's, and a more pragmatic approach yields the fact that a great deal of music was indeed used within the post-Reformation Kirk - there *was no* 'musical Sahara'. Indeed, from the 'internal' perspective of Presbyterian historiography, this music represents anything but a fall from Catholic grace. For example, even as early as 1949, the Presbyterian historian, Millar Patrick claims that the need for Reformation was 'nowhere... more imperative than in loosening the tongues of the silenced people by restoring to them the right and the power to use their own understandings and voices in the common praise of God. In words and in music new methods to meet their needs had to be found or created' *Four Centuries of Scottish Psalmody* (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), p.xxiii. Notably, Patrick not only treats the Reformed music as worthy of investigation and praise, but also refuses to condemn Catholic music out of hand. Indeed, he claims that in the pre-Reformation work of Robert Carver (see below), 'polyphony rose to the summit of its unapproachable splendour', op.cit., p.xxii. It seems, then, that even in 1949, a balanced view was possible, which begs numerous questions of the post-'50's musicologists.

Although the musicologists who have deployed this historiographical strategy would no doubt be shocked to discover the fact, it does, of course, depend on a pseudo-Marxist formula which states that culture is determined purely by economic forces (a ‘vulgar Marxism’, as Barthes would say). At this level, Scottish historiography is economic determinism at its most banal and simultaneously, its most persuasive.

In musicological terms, it opens the field in which the phrase ‘Scottish music’ is to be understood restrictively with a silent ‘folk’ interpolated in the space between its terms - ‘Scottish folk music’. Within the structure of this Caledonian economic determinism, political and economic history alone appears to dictate that Scottish music is folk music. Within its terms, there is no escaping the morose inevitability of the fact that there is no Scottish classical music. To repeat David Johnson’s words, ‘Scotland’s real music remains her folk music’ - political tragedy and ethnic authenticity elide seamlessly within this phrase.

## **2: “native retardation”**

There is, however, a certain paradox at work in the fact that the denial of an authentic classical tradition in Scottish music has often been made precisely within the context of *studies* of this allegedly elusive phenomenon. Ironically, the *denial* of such a tradition has been uttered simultaneously with the very realisation its *possibility*.

Both David Johnson and Kenneth Elliott are musicologists whose careers are firmly dependent on their status as scholars of Scottish classical music, gradually and painstakingly constructing a history of it. It is not the contribution of these figures as pioneer manuscript researchers which is in question here - indeed, this contribution is great and undeniable. But what is in question here is the mode of historiographical discourse which their early work brings to bear on the results of that research.<sup>[1]</sup>

Indubitably, one of the roots of the problem lies in the woefully incomplete knowledge which musicology has had about the Scottish classical tradition. As we saw earlier, even as recently as 1980, Elliott complains of a ‘*lack of sources*’ (a phrase which Derrideans will no doubt find amusing...). One can hardly criticise an individual for the ignorance of a whole profession, yet this problem, when we take into account how individual musicologists have dealt with it at certain points in their careers, ineluctably leads to an ideological problematic. On the apparent evidence of a ‘lack of sources’, statements have been roundly made which strongly infer that either there was a dearth of sources in the first place, or that the number of possible sources to be found has already been exhausted, that no further manuscripts are likely to emerge which will cause us to rewrite our histories, and that our current knowledge is complete.

In this, one detects not only a limp echo of the theme of the End of History which aims to close the book on the subject and leave it well at the back of the shelf, but also the possibility of a certain ideologically-motivated view of Scottish culture as a whole.

Coupled with the theme of a destructive political history, this theme of a resultant ‘lack of sources’ engenders an image of Scottish culture as the site of loss, depletion, diminution, negative lack in general - Scottish culture as the site of a series of profound and damaging

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<sup>[13]</sup> Again (particularly in Johnson’s case), the qualifier ‘early’ must be stressed.

lacunae. Rather than taking the concept of the ‘lack of sources’ as the occasion of a *pragmatic undecideability*, Elliott takes it as a *foregone* moment of *pure negativity* and *closure*.

Such tropes in the reading of Scottish history have been acutely analysed by Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull in their book, *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture: Inferiorism and the Intellectuals*. In their debunking of orthodox historiographies which view Scottish culture as a ‘dark continent’ to be brought to enlightenment by anglo-centric values, they write that:

In replicating and enlarging the metropolitan images of native retardation, the Scottish intelligentsia has fulfilled the same historic function as the colonial évolués whose sad condition was analyzed by Frantz Fanon. Inferiorist assumptions are deeply engrained... intellectual discourses which underwrite Scotland’s subordination.<sup>[1]</sup>

Following this line of thought, the musicological trope which establishes a series of classical lacunae in Scottish musical culture can be seen to function not only as an attempt to silence debate on the issue, and of supporting the notion of Scotland as an essentially and authentically folk culture devoid of ‘high’-art relevance, but also - by implication - of subordinating Scottish music to the position of an insignificant footnote to more serious canonic concerns. Since European classical music has always had a certain international, or at least pan-European aspect to it, the clear implication is that any culture which has no serious classical tradition of its own is at once insular, parochial and retarded, incapable of engendering either cosmopolitan or even metropolitan values or practices. In this sense at least, it is a short step from positing a ‘lack of sources’ for Scottish classical music to denying the country the status of national modernity, with all of the profound political resonances which that brings with it. Indeed, David Johnson is explicit about the conclusions to be reached from this position - these conclusions are ‘not’, he claims, ‘for Scottish nationalists, nor for those who, in the words of Samuel Johnson, ‘love Scotland better than truth’.’<sup>[1]</sup>

### **3: “better than truth”**

A certain frustration with this position has led to what we might call the *revisionist* phase of Scottish musicology.<sup>16</sup> This has emerged as a reaction against the orthodox negativity of the ‘70’s and early ‘80’s, and often has a certain nationalist agenda, whether explicitly or implicitly expressed. In line with the increasingly confident cultural and intellectual scene of Scotland in the ‘90’s, the revisionist position effects its reaction both at the level of critique and of discovery. Rather than accepting the ‘lack of sources’ condition as an inevitable finality, it has tended to open the ‘fact’ of this lack as a *question* - a ‘why no sources *found?*’, rather than

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<sup>[14]</sup> Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull, *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture: Inferiorism and the Intellectuals* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1989), pp.112 & 113.

<sup>[15]</sup> Johnson, op.cit., p.200.

<sup>16</sup> This phase has been notably championed and popularised by the work of the freelance music historian John Purser, who in 1991, broadcast a 48-hour history of Scottish music for B.B.C. Radio Scotland, titled *Scotland’s Music: A History of the Traditional and Classical Music of Scotland from Early Times to the Present Day*, which also has an extensive accompanying book (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1992), and a two-C.D. compilation (Linn, 1992) of the same title.

the premature assumption of a ‘no sources *to be found*.’ It is no longer considered acceptable to acquiesce to any inevitability, let alone the predetermined closure of a negative lack. Rather, the question of a ‘lack of sources’ is answered by a search for sources in previously unsuspected places.<sup>[1]</sup>

A potent symbol of the new revisionism was the sudden vogue around 1991-93 for the music of the Renaissance composer Robert Carver, Canon of Scone Abbey and composer to the Chapel Royal at Stirling. Carver’s music had indeed been known to an extent for some time by musicologists such as Kenneth Elliott and Cedric Thorpe Davie. Indeed, Elliott is indisputably responsible in part for some of the most important early work on Carver.<sup>[1]</sup>

Yet although Carver himself has long been acknowledged as a significant figure by writers such as Elliott, the negativity of the ‘lack of sources’ orthodoxy has tended to portray him as an inexplicable *anomaly* - a singularly significant Scottish composer in what we otherwise know to be, in Davie’s words, a ‘musical Sahara’. This orthodoxy on Carver is amply illustrated by Davie’s analysis:

Several sixteenth-century composers followed Carver with compositions for ecclesiastical use which show technical skill and, occasionally, some aesthetic inspiration; but they were big fishes in a little pond. Carver alone among Scottish composers of the Renaissance bears comparison as a creative artist with the giants of the English, Flemish and Italian schools.<sup>[1]</sup>

Here, Davie aggrandises Carver not only by positive comparison with firstly the European tradition, but also by negative comparison with his Scottish contemporaries. We have already seen Davie characterise the Scottish classical tradition as a ‘musical Sahara’, and it seems that even when he comes across a figure such as Carver, he cannot resist contrasting that figure with just such a ground, comprised as it is, of ‘big fishes’ in a dried up ‘little pond’. For Davie, the Scottish Renaissance is a potential oasis, but nevertheless a failed one, springing from and running to nowhere, nourishing nothing.

By contrast, the revisionist attitude towards Carver and his compatriot milieu is simultaneously better researched and less negative, not least since more ‘sources’ and knowledge of sources has emerged since Davie’s unadvisedly premature comments. Indeed, the

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<sup>[17]</sup> Two examples readily spring from the work of Purser, who discovered a C13th Celtic plainchant manuscript, the *Sprouston Breviary*, which had long been known to literary medievalists, but which had never been looked at by musicologists - many of whom have traditionally opined that Celtic plainchant never existed (despite the fact that the entirety of first millennium Western Christianity has its roots in the renaissance effected by the Gaelic monastic tradition). A more striking discovery (at least in terms of disciplinary ideological blindness) was Purser’s deduction that the C17th composer Tobias Hume, traditionally thought of as English, was in fact a Scot. Purser’s initially gallus deduction was based on the circumstantial evidence of Hume’s name, profession (military mercenary), and predilection for wry humour. However, the necessary manuscript evidence subsequently emerged, in the form of an English court document which named him as a Scot: cf. John Purser, op.cit. When such significant cultural figures as Adam Smith, David Hume, and Thomas Carlyle are customarily referred to as English (even the great Nietzsche repeatedly makes this mistake), one cannot help but wonder what further evidence may turn up to dispel the myths surrounding a ‘lack of sources’ for Scottish classical music.

<sup>[18]</sup> Further, the sleeve notes to the C.D. recording of ‘The Complete Carver’, which was one of the main contributions to the ‘Carver Revival’, were written by none other than Elliott; cf. *Robert Carver* Vol.s I-III (London: Gaudeamus, 1991).

<sup>[19]</sup> Davie, op.cit., p.35.

sleevenotes to the first major publication on Carver and the tradition of *musick fyne* in which he worked, states the following:<sup>[1]</sup>

Musick Fyne, the artistic pinnacle of Scotland's Renaissance culture in the sixteenth century, is a body of work that bears comparison with the greatest European music of the period. Robert Carver, its leading exponent, produced choral compositions of dazzling virtuosity and breathtaking beauty. Yet this precious heritage, recorded in a handful of manuscripts, has lain undisturbed and ignored for centuries.<sup>[1]</sup>

Note the subtle shift here from Elliott's phrase 'a lack of sources' to the revised formulation 'a handful of manuscripts'. Evidently, the 'lack of sources' argument has been turned around here to engender an aura of rarity and preciousness stressing, above all, the *value* of the music, rather than the devaluation implied by the negativity of a 'lack' which suggests that there is nothing really worth listening to here.

Equally, a claim is made here which revises Davie's analysis - not only is Carver himself equal to the European canon, but so are his contemporaries so roundly dismissed by Davie. For the revisionist, Carver's significance is as the leading figure in a musical Golden Age, rather than as a present anomaly in a general field of absence.

Indeed, according to the historian Jamie Reid Baxter, the mere sonic *existence* of Carver's music single-handedly counteracts the orthodox historiographical perspective of Scottish culture as the site of absence. According to Baxter:

A single performance of a Carver Mass is enough to demolish the hoary myth about Scotland the barbarous wasteland, that long in darkness mourned, until John Knox came to prepare the way to the Union with England and hence, the dawn of civilization.<sup>[1]</sup>

For Baxter, the revisionist musicological position on Carver is coterminous with the current wave of nationalist historiography which aims to 'demolish the hoary myth' of Scottish culture as a dark continent awaiting enlightenment through assimilation to anglo-centric values. It aims to critically debunk the image of the Caledonian lacuna (never mind the antiszygy), and recover the ground of pre-Union culture which has been described by the Carver specialist James Ross as:

a real Golden Age of music of national and international significance - a treasury of Musick Fyne, ripe for discovery.<sup>[1]</sup>

Herein, of course, lies the problem - the image of a 'Golden Age', with all of its attendant organicist implications. As the great Scottish philosopher David Hume commented, 'the *golden age*... is to be regarded as an idle fiction; but yet deserves our attention, because

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<sup>[20]</sup> 'Musick fyne' is the Renaissance Scots term for 'classical music', or rather, that music which is for court or chapel, as opposed to 'folk music', or rather that music which is for market-place, ale-house, etc. Of course, the terminology of 'classical'-vs-'folk' is very recent, and makes little sense when rigidly applied to Medieval and even Renaissance music.

<sup>[21]</sup> Sleevenotes to D. James Ross, *Musick Fyne* (Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 1993).

<sup>[22]</sup> Baxter, op.cit., p.xv.

<sup>[23]</sup> D. James Ross, *Musick Fyne: Robert Carver and the Art of Music in Sixteenth Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: The Mercat Press, 1993), p.148.



nothing can more evidently shew the origin of those virtues, which are the subjects of our present enquiry.<sup>[1]</sup>

All Golden Ages, of course, require a Fall - in the ineluctable logic of nostalgia, Paradise must be lost. Framing his analysis of the Scottish Golden Age of music, James Ross makes precisely this move, and in it, we can note the almost dialectical return of a theme already touched on. Here, of course, Ross refers to the period following the Golden Age:

In the absence of the focal point of the court, the neglect of the arts in Scotland advocated by the Calvinist Reformers... rapidly gained ground and a treasury of Musick Fyne fell from use, quickly tarnished in the national memory and was forgotten. The die was cast for subsequent centuries when the predominance of a dynamic folk culture seemed to satisfy most Scots that this was the only culture their country had ever possessed. Isolated attempts... to re-introduce Scotland into mainstream European musical culture were doomed to failure.<sup>[1]</sup>

Not only does *orthodox* musicology establish Scottish history as a site of fragmentation, then, but the revisionist strand, as represented by Ross, follows exactly the same logic. The implication of Ross's argument is that the natural organic continuity which one might expect to lead from the Golden Age of Robert Carver towards a bright future for Scottish music is tragically interrupted - punctuated - by the socio-economic disasters of the Reformation and the Union of the Crowns, with their ineluctable *telos* in the Treaty of Union of 1707.

Thus, the argument depends on the implicit establishment of a an *ur-history* at the metaphysical, perhaps even fully *spiritual*, origin of Scottish culture - the history which *should* have happened, but which was tragically *prevented* from happening, and to which we must *return* in order to set the nation on its correct historical trajectory once more.

Yet again, then, we return to the familiar theme of historical fragmentarity, and the resultant effacement of the Scottish classical tradition. The only significant shift from Elliott's early discourse to Ross's is that, since the rejection of the 'lack of sources' argument and the contextualisation of Carver within what we now know to be a fairly thriving musical environment, the tragedy of the termination of this environment becomes even more tragic, even more painful, and the need to ensure that the mistakes of history are never repeated becomes even more pressing.

#### **4: "defiantly ruptured"**

All of this tragic nostalgia presupposes a model of history which is contentious in our contemporary theoretical environment to say the least. Both the negative and the positive discursive strategies which are under analysis here are grounded in the view that history should normatively be continuous rather than fragmentary, and that if a specific history cannot be shown to be continuous - one might even say 'organic' - then it is in some way deficient or even deformed.

Music history, as still taught in English universities at least, buys into precisely this historiographical assumption. No doubt, this stems from the generally Germanic obsessions of European musicology as a whole, which, since the C19th and until very recently, have sought to

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<sup>[24]</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp.493-494.

<sup>[25]</sup> Ross, *op.cit.*, p.xxix.

establish a clearly-defined canon which progresses logically, in crypto-Hegelian fashion, from Bach through Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann, Wagner and Brahms to Schönberg, Webern, and thus possibly to Stockhausen and Boulez. This, of course, is all dependent on a notion of history as an essentially teleological structure which aims to provide a smooth, stable continuity from one event to the next, one piece of music to the next, one composer to the next, one style to the next, one epoch to the next. As Jean-François Lyotard has commented:

The ‘philosophies of history’ that inspired the nineteenth and twentieth centuries claim to assure passages over the abyss of heterogeneity or of the event.<sup>[1]</sup>

What is sorely lacking in Scottish history, according to both camps of musicologists, is precisely this ‘passage over the abyss’ of the historical event. As such, Scottish classical music is, in the words of Kenneth Elliott, ‘consigned to limbo’ - suspended in the abyss of the event.

But with Lyotard, perhaps it is time for us to ask what he calls ‘the preliminary question’:

are ‘we’ today still able to give credence to the concept of a sign of history?<sup>[1]</sup>

If so, then it is unlikely to be a crypto-Hegelian sign of the kind implied as the inverse of historical fragmentarity. Even within canonic musicological perspectives on European music history as a whole, there exist a number of debates which question the very viability of continuity as a historiographical model. Even the often crypto-Hegelian theorist, Carl Dahlhaus has commented:

there is no little arbitrariness to historians’ decisions as to which features are sufficient to establish the historical continuity of a genre...<sup>[1]</sup>

But Dahlhaus’s scepticism about the historiographical criteria upon which the continuity of a genre is established can be applied more generally. For Michel Foucault, for example, discontinuity itself became one of the crucial traces of Western history overall. Significantly, he saw the transition from the C18th to the C19th as a moment of discontinuity, despite the fact that this transition is normatively portrayed by musicology as continuous. More pertinently for our specific example from Scottish history, Foucault compares this break in epistemes with the shift from Renaissance to Baroque:

The last years of the eighteenth century are broken by a discontinuity similar to that which destroyed Renaissance thought at the beginning of the seventeenth<sup>[1]</sup>

So, the discontinuity identified by the Scottish revisionist musicologists between the Renaissance Golden Age of Robert Carver and the era which followed is, for Foucault, a discontinuity which is to be found throughout European culture in general - it is in no way a special case of discontinuity in either a temporal or a geographical sense.

And this contention of Foucault’s has its supporters within other fields of musicology. According to the feminist musicologist, Susan McClary, European culture overall was

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<sup>[26]</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *Le Différend* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1983; eng.tr. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p.179.

<sup>[27]</sup> Lyotard, op.cit., p.179.

<sup>[28]</sup> Carl Dahlhaus, *Grundlagen der Musikgeschichte* (Köln: Musikverlag Hans Gerig, 1967; eng.tr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.46.

<sup>[29]</sup> Michel Foucault, op.cit., p.217.

undergoing a moment of fragmentation as the Renaissance gave way. Significantly, she even links this in with one of the great shibboleths of Scottish historiography which we have already identified:

With the general crisis of the seventeenth century precipitated by - among many other factors - the Reformation... [t]he musical principles responsible for images of Renaissance *harmonia* are defiantly ruptured...<sup>[1]</sup>

Indeed, in studying the work of the Italian C17th composer Claudio Monteverdi - who was born towards the end of Carver's life - McClary goes so far as to claim that his famous work *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (1642) actively *deconstructs* Renaissance humanism, and thus represents a compositional sign of this very historical 'rupture'.

For Foucault and McClary, rupture and discontinuity are traces of a general condition which touches the canonic centres of European culture as much as, by implication, it touches the alleged margins. In this context, it makes little sense to make of Scotland a special case on the grounds that it has a fragmentary history.

Rather, Scottish history - including its musical history - is just as canonically ruptured as the so-called European mainstream.

If Foucault and McClary are right, if there is no normative model of historical continuity which can be provided by the example of the European 'mainstream', then the fragmentarity of the Scottish classical tradition is not an appropriate field in which to locate the discursive tropes of lack and absence defined as negativities.

If there truly is cause for regret - even cause for nostalgia - within the nebulous and shifting structures of Scottish history, then we must locate it elsewhere.

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<sup>[30]</sup> Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p.119.

## SELECT DISCOGRAPHY OF SCOTTISH CLASSICAL MUSIC

The following discography contains only recent or currently available recordings of Scottish classical music, and is in no way to be taken as an exhaustive list (the C20th scene has been omitted for sake of space, since figures such as James MacMillan, James Dillon, etc., are fairly well known and recorded). Rather, it is designed to give the listener an overall introduction, and to dispel, in practical terms, the 'hoary myth' that the Scottish classical tradition is a 'musical Sahara' which can be easily 'consigned to limbo'.

For a decent, historically general compilation across two discs, see *Scotland's Music: Selected Works from the History of Scotland's Music*; ROBERT JOHNSON, ROBERT CARVER, JAMES LAUDER, ALEXANDER MONTGOMERIE, JOHN CLERK, JAMES OSWALD, THOMAS ERSKINE, JOHN THOMSON, HAMISH MacCUNN, ALEXANDER CAMPBELL MacKENZIE & EDWARD McGUIRE (Linn, 1992).

A fuller history was produced by Scottish Records in the '70's under the heading of *A History of Scottish Music*, but is now difficult to find and has slightly dated performance style. The five releases were titled, respectively: (1) *The King's Music* SRSS1 (C13th-C16th); (2) *Songs and Dances of the Scottish Court* 33SR133 (C16th); (3) *Music of Castle, Burgh and Country-side* SRSS3 (C17th); (4) *Baroque and Classical Scotland* SRSS4 (C18th); (5) *The Nineteenth Century Rebirth* SRCM116 (C19th).

### The Medieval Period

Capella Nova: *Columba, Most Holy of Saints: Scottish Medieval Plainchant* (Gaudeamus, 1992).

Many items of plainchant, organum, and anonymous polyphony are available on a number of nationally non-specific recordings, but a useful selection is available on *Scotland's Music*.

### The Renaissance

The Baltimore Consort: *On the Banks of Helicon: Early Music of Scotland* (Dorian, 1990).

Capella Nova: *Sacred Music for Mary Queen of Scots* (Gaudeamus, 1993).

ROBERT CARVER: *The Complete Carver*, Vol.s I-III (Gaudeamus, 1991).

TOBIAS HUME: *Poeticall Musicke* (Harmonia Mundi, 1991).

WILLIAM KINLOCH: *Kinloche His Fantassie: Scottish Keyboard Music* (Gaudeamus, 1993).

Jakob Lindberg: *Lute Music From Scotland and France* (Grammofon, 1987).

Ronn McFarlane: *The Scottish Lute* (Dorian, 1990).

The Scottish Early Music Consort: *Mary's Music: Songs and Dances From the Time of Mary Queen of Scots*; ALEXANDER SCOTT, WILLIAM KINLOCH, ANDREW BLACKHALL, JAMES LAUDER, WILLIAM BYRD, CLAUDIN DE SERMISY, PIERRE CERTON & ORLANDO DE LASSUS (Chandos, 1984).

Note also that Robert Johnson (c1500-c1560), often referred to as English and therefore deemed worthy of being recorded fairly comprehensively, is in fact Scots - his works, both

secular and sacred are available quite easily. However, beware of confusion with Robert Johnson (c1583-1633), who actually was English.<sup>[1]</sup>

### **The Enlightenment**

The Leda Trio: *Airs for the Seasons: Scottish Music of the 1700's*; DAVID FOULIS & JAMES OSWALD (Springthyme, 1994).

The McGibbon Ensemble: *Scots Fiddle - High Style*; CHARLES McCLEAN, DAVID FOULIS & JAMES OSWALD (Scottish Records, 1976).

The McGibbon Ensemble: *Music of Classical Edinburgh*; JOHN CLERK, JAMES OSWALD, WILLIAM McGIBBON, THOMAS ERSKINE & ROBERT BREMNER (Scotland's Cultural Heritage, 1987).

The McGibbon Ensemble: *Fiddle Pibroch and Other Fancies: 18th Century Scottish Violin Music*; CHARLES McLEAN, JOHN REID & WILLIAM McGIBBON (Scotland's Cultural Heritage, 1989).

The Musicians of Edinburgh: *The Art of Robert Burns* (Dorian, 1997).

The Scottish Early Music Consort: *Robert Burns: Songs and Music*; ROBERT BURNS, JAMES OSWALD, NIEL GOW, HAYDN, BEETHOVEN, WEBER, HUMMEL & KOZELUCH (Chandos, 1988).

### **Romanticism**

HAMISH MacCUNN: *Land of the Mountain and the Flood* and other music (Hyperion, 1995).

JOHN BLACKWOOD McEWEN: *Three Border Ballads* for orchestra (Chandos, 1993).

ALEXANDER CAMPBELL MacKENZIE: *Orchestral Music* (Hyperion, 1995).

Murray McLachlan (piano): *The Scottish Romantics*, MacCUNN, McEWEN & MacKENZIE (Divineart, 1996).

WILLIAM WALLACE: *Symphonic Poems* (Hyperion, 1996).

Many C19th items are subsumed under compilations from the so-called 'English Renaissance' (which was actually kick-started by the Irish Stanford, the Welsh Parry, and the Scots Mackenzie - Elgar came later...). However, a useful selection is available on *Scotland's Music*, including pieces by John Thomson and Hamish MacCunn.

Such a populous Sahara...

a desert with tribes inhabiting it, a full body clinging with multiplicities...<sup>[1]</sup>

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<sup>[1]</sup> In *The New Grove*, Lumsden, Spink & Holman suggest that Robert Johnson (ii) is the son of Robert Johnson (i), without explaining how (i) could produce (ii) some 23 years after his death (assuming that Elliott's dates on Johnson (I) are correct).

<sup>[2]</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille Plateaux* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1980; eng.tr. London: Athlone, 1988), p.30.