

Manx Notes 74 (2006)

MANX BALLADS AND MUSIC (1898)

A.W. MOORE, "INTRODUCTION TO MUSIC"

[xxxii] It is with a feeling of relief that I turn from the subject of Manx Ballads to that of Manx Melodies,¹ as I am confident that, whatever may be thought of the former, the latter will commend themselves to the musical portion of my readers. There can, at least, be little doubt that, in most cases, they are older than, as well as superior to, the words which are now set to them.² Indeed it is probable that they were for the most part originally composed without words, and it would appear from the evidence of Chaloner and Quayle, given below, that many of them were dance tunes. In the present collection, however, there are only eight tunes which are, or might be, dance tunes,³ and not only these, but all the tunes published, have, or have had, words attached to them.⁴ Before stating the sources from whence they have been derived, I will quote what previous writers have said about Manx music in the past. Chaloner, writing in the middle of the 17th century, remarked that the Manx people were "much addicted to the music of the Violyne⁵; so that there is scarce a Family in the Island, but more or lesse can play upon it; but as they are ill composers, so are they bad Players."⁶ It is probable, however, that his unfavourable judgment was due rather to the strangeness of the music to his English ear than to the want of skill in the players. Eighty years later, another Englishman, Waldron, mentioned the fact of one tune being invariably played at Manx weddings, but this tune, "The Black [xxxiii] and the Grey," was not Manx, being in vogue in England during the reign of Charles

¹ By the term "Manx Melodies" I do not wish it to be understood that I claim them as necessarily of native origin but simply that they are melodies known to the Manx people by oral tradition.

² Some melodies are sung to more than one set of words. Thus the tune of "Mannin Veg Veen" is also applied to "Jiadgyn y Jiase," "Yn Coayl jeh ny Baatyn Skeddan" to "Yn Sterrym ec Port le Moirrey," and "Inneenyn Eirinee" to "Yn Venainshter Devil."

³ i.e., "Roie Ben Sheeen Tammy," "Skeeylley Breeshey," "My Graih nagh baare," "Ushag veg Ruy," "Car-y-Phoosee," "Jemmy as Nancy," "Tuppagyn Jiargey," "Juan y Jaggad Keear."

⁴ Thus the "Lullaby" has English words. Fragments of the words of "Jemmy as Nancy" are in existence, but I have not been able to secure them in an intelligible form. "My Graih nagh baare" and "Sheign dooin," given by Barrow, are clearly the beginning of the Manx words which belonged to these tunes, as they have no connexion with his English words, while "Isabel Foalsey," given by the same writer is the title of a love-song to which there were once words. Indeed, it is probable that it was sung to the ballad (pp. 100-03) so entitled the reason that it is no longer adapted to it being, seemingly that Barrow had it altered to suit his own doggerel.

⁵ This he notes as being strange because of "their neighbours, the northern English, the Scots, the Highlanders, and the Irish, generally, affecting the Bag-pipe." Manx Society, Vol. x, page 11.

⁶ Ibid, Vol. xi, page 134.

II. It would seem, that, at this: period, musical instruments were very scarce, as it is said that the people used flutes made of the elder tree at the time of rejoicing, when Bishop Wilson was released from prison in 1722. The next mention of Manx music is in 1812, when Quayle, in writing about the Harvest festival, or *Mheillea*, said: “English country dances are still unknown to them. Jigs and reels, in which four or five couples join, take their place, the fiddler changing his tune and often playing one of the few national lively airs preserved from early times, resembling strongly in character the Irish.”⁷ It was about this time that four part singing was first introduced into the Island by a man called Shepherd, who wrote down several of the old Manx sacred airs, but he did not publish them,⁸ so that Manx tunes first appeared in print in a book entitled *The Mona Melodies: A Collection of Ancient and Original Airs of the Isle of Man*,⁹ which was published in 1820. It will suffice to say that this book abounds in errors against musical canons, but the worst fault committed by its authors is the distortion of the melodies in the fruitless effort to make them fit the feeble verses which Barrow composed to accompany them. Inferior as are the words, for instance, of “Mylecharaine,” “Kirree fo Niaghtey,” “Berrey Dhone,” and “Caillin veg Dhone”¹⁰ to the music to which they are set, they are, at least, not so inappropriate as the following:

(1) “Mylecharaine”:

“Dear Mona farewell, for why should I stay,
 ’Mid scenes of grief and pain:
 Tho’ sad be the hour and gloomy the day
 I leave my dear Molly Charane
 Oh! bright are thy charms and brilliant shine eyes
 Thine heart without a stain
 And all parting sorrows, fears, and sighs
 Are shine, my sweet Molly Charane.”

My readers will bear in mind that Mylecharaine was a man! [xxxiii]

⁷ *Agriculture of the Isle of Man*, page 10.

⁸ I have not been able to obtain them, but they are, I believe, to be published by Messrs Gill and Clague, in their forthcoming book of Manx music.

⁹ They were “arranged for the voice with a Pianoforte accompaniment by an Amateur.” diligent enquiry has failed to discover who he was. The words were written by Mr J. Barrow, who was organist of St. George’s Church in Douglas. The book was dedicated to the Duchess of Kent and was published “at Mitchell’s Musical Library and Instrument Warehouses, 159 New Hand Street and 13 Southampton Row, Russell Square. Price 8s.” It is now exceedingly scarce.

¹⁰ These songs are headed by the Manx titles as given.

(2) “Kirree fo Niaghtey”:

“At close of day when o’er the ocean gleaming,
The lingering sunbeams kissed each murm’ring billow,
A sea nymph waking from her tranquil dreaming,
Thus sang slow rising from her emerald pillow.”

(3) “Berrey Dhone”:

“Often hath the Poet’s lay,
Delighted sung the praise of beauty
Beauty still hath been the shrine
Where verse hath paid its noblest duty.”

(4) “Caillin Veg Dhone”:

“The storm is up, the howling blast
Is raging o’er the lone bleak hill;
Whereter its angry course bath past
Impatient foams each mountain rill.”

After perusing these effusions no one will be surprised to find that, in their introduction, the authors felicitate themselves on having placed “so wild and unpolished a Muse” in “fetters.” They have certainly done so. Having thus criticised the first collection of Manx music, I will describe the manner in which the present collection has been made, hoping that it, in its turn, may not deserve condemnation. Careful inquiries have been made in every parish in the Island with reference to those who were acquainted with old tunes. Competent musicians have then visited them and have taken down the music from their lips.¹¹ In cases where the versions given have varied slightly, that which appeared to be more correct has been taken. But in the few cases where the tunes of the same song vary considerably, such as in “Yn Bollan Bane,” “Hop-tu-nua,” and “Mylecharane” two versions are given. In the last well-known tune there are numerous slight variations, in addition to the broad distinction between the version in the major key and that in the minor. The version in the major key is the most widely known, but that in the minor key, for which I am indebted to Mr James B. Nicholson, is undoubtedly the older of the two. This process, then, has resulted in the acquisition of the following tunes and versions of tunes:

“Yn Coayl job ny Baatyn-Skeddan” (1st version) and “Yn Bollan Bane” (1st version) (Mr John Cain, Douglas); “Yn Bollan Bane (2nd version), “Thurot as Elliot, “Hop-tu-naa, “Car-y-Phoosee” (1st version), (the late Philip Cain, Baldwin); “Kiark Katreeney” (Mr John Bridson, Colby); “Mannin Veg Veen,” “Marrinys yn Tiger,”

¹¹ Twenty-nine tunes have been obtained by Mr H. Bridson, two by Mr J.E. Kelly of Peel, two by Mrs Ferrier, one each by Mr James B. Nicholson, Miss A. Gell, and Miss Graves.

“Ushtey Millish,” [xxxiv] “Graih my Chree,” “Inneenyn Eirinee,” “Juan y Jaggad Keear,” “Snieu Wheyl Snieu” (Mr Thomas Crellin, Peel), “Ta Mee Nish Keayney,” “Ny Three Eeasteyryn Boghtey,” “Eisht as Nish” (Mr Thos. Wynter Andreas); “Ec ny Fiddleryn” (Mr H. Cregeen, Peel); “Jemmy as Nancy”¹² (1st version) (Mr W. Harrison, Andreas); “Yn Graihder Jouylagh,” “Doooinney Seyr v’ayns Exeter,” “Arrane Sooree” (Mr John Quayle, Glen Meay); “Ushag Veg Ruy,” “Helg yn Dreain,” “Mylecharaine” major, (Mr H. Bridson, Cronkbourne); “Mylecharaine” minor, (Mr Jas. B. Nicholson, Douglas); “Roie Ben Shenn Tammy,” “Hop-tu-naa” (2nd version) (Mrs Ferrier, Castletown); “Lullaby,”¹³ “Yn Coayl jeh ny Baateyn Skeddan” (2nd version), “Mraane Kilkenny,” “Car-y-Phoosee” (2nd version), “Eirey Cronk yn Ollee” (Miss Mary Gawne, Peel); “Yn Shenn Dolphin,” “Jemmy as Nancy,”¹⁴ (2nd version), (Mr James Gawne, Peel.)

Great care has been taken to obtain these tunes in their original form, and no preconception as to the probability of their having been in Celtic or other modes has been suffered to interfere with a faithful reproduction of the melodic phrases as heard from the lips of their singers. Of the remaining ten tunes, the nine which follow are from the “Mona Melodies,”¹⁵ “Tappagyn Jiargey,” “Illiam Dhone,” “CaillinVeg Dhone,” “My Graih Nagh Baare,”¹⁶ “Sheign Dooin,”¹⁷ “My Henn Ghoooinney,” “Berrey Dhone,” “Skeeylley Breeshey,” “Isabel Foalsey,”¹⁸ and one, “Kirree fo Niaghtey,”¹⁹ from Volume xvi of the Manx Society’s publications. As regards the origin of these tunes, I cannot venture to give any opinion, but I would point out that, excepting two, of which variants are found in England, Scotland, and Ireland, two more, one of which bears a strong likeness to an English nursery song and the other to an Irish melody, and three or four others which are dubious,²⁰ the most diligent comparison has failed to find any close likeness between them and the national airs of the adjacent countries, though their general character is decidedly Irish. It is certain, however, that the rigid criticism to which I hope they will be

¹² Without words.

¹³ Sung to English words.

¹⁴ Without words.

¹⁵ There are thirteen melodies altogether in this collection, but of these I have been able to get two orally, and one, “Kirree fo Niaghtey,” is taken from the better version in Vol. xvi of the Manx Society’s publications. Of the remaining ten tunes, all of which are unknown at the present day, I have copied nine unaltered, and have discarded the tenth which does not appear to be of Celtic origin, and bears the distinctly non-Celtic name of “Wandescope.”

¹⁶ See fn 14.

¹⁷ See fn 14.

¹⁸ See fn 14.

¹⁹ This is from a MS. of the late Mr T. Crellin of Orrysdale. In my version, however, the accidentals have been omitted, so as to present the tune in its probably original form.

²⁰ Two bars of another tune resemble those of a well-known Irish air. I have not in any case mentioned the names of the tunes in question, as I think it better that the ingenuity of my critics should be exercised in discovering them.

subjected will result in the discovery of further [xxxv] resemblances. And, indeed, it is probable that Manxmen, living as they do in an island situated between Ireland, Scotland, and the north of England, have appropriated some of the music of these countries.²¹ And now for a few words about the harmonizing of the melodies. They have all, with the exception of the minor version of “Mylecharaine,”²² been admirably arranged by Miss Wood, A.R.C.O., with the assistance of Miss McKnight, F.R.C.O., and their work, as regards the greater number of the tunes, has been submitted to the revision of Mr Colin Brown, the great authority on Celtic music. With reference to the harmonies, it must be remembered that, as they are, of course, not original, they are not supposed to be of any value for historical or scientific purposes, but, as being beautiful in themselves and suggested by the tunes and their development, there is good reason to believe that they will be acceptable to the musical public. I hope that the result of this little book will be to admit the music of the Isle of Man to a distinct, though humble, share in the great body of national music which is now being so generally collected, and that in it may be found, in the striking words of a recent writer, “the national idioms in their simplest and most unsophisticated expression.”²³ For I can state, with confidence, that a “prettified Englished presentation”²⁴ of these old melodies has carefully been avoided, and that every effort has been made to preserve them with all their “strange, outlandish, and unconventional qualities.”²⁵

And now there only remains the pleasant task of thanking those who have so kindly and cordially cooperated with me. To Mr W.J. Cain I have already referred, and so I need only add that his assistance has been invaluable. The enjoyment my readers will derive from Mr J.M. Nicholson’s charming and sympathetic illustrations will enable them to perceive how greatly I am indebted to him, and, in the same way, they will appreciate how much Mr T.E. Brown’s able and [xxxvi] suggestive preface has added to the value of this publication. Coming to the music, I have to acknowledge the skill and perseverance which Mr H. Bridson has shown in obtaining so many of the tunes. His work has been difficult and, indeed, it would have been found impossible by any one who is not only a thorough musician but a good

²¹ There were formerly more Manx tunes in existence than there are now, as is shown by the facts that out of the thirteen melodies published in 1820, only three are known at the present day, and that, as I have been frequently assured many tunes have recently been lost by the death of those who alone were acquainted with them. There are, doubtless, also many tunes now in existence which I have not been able to secure, especially dance tunes, to which I have not particularly directed my attention. I may mention here that I have collected a number of the peculiar sacred tunes which are sung to the Carols, with a view to publication in a separate volume.

²² Harmonised by Mr James B. Nicholson.

²³ *Studies in Modern Music*. 2nd Series (W.H. Hadow), p. 24.

²⁴ Lecture by Sir A. Mackenzie on “National Music,” at the Royal Institution.

²⁵ See fn 24.

Manxman. I need not dwell upon my obligations to Miss Wood and Miss McKnight for their clever and beautiful harmonies, and to Mr Colin Brown for his advice and guidance, as they are self evident. Then there are the many friends who have contributed ballads and tunes, and, finally, there are the printers, Messrs. G. and R. Johnson, who have carried out their part of the work with extreme care.

A.W. MOORE.

Cronkbourne,

September 1896.

Since the above was sent to the press the volume of “Manx National Songs” arranged by Mr W.H. Gill, has been published, and so I have the opportunity of cordially thanking Mr Gill for the kind remarks he has made about me in his able introductory account of “Manx Music,” and of congratulating him and his coadjutors, The Deemster Gill and Dr J. Clague, on having preserved some beautiful melodies.

Source: A.W. Moore, “Introduction to Music,” *Manx Ballads and Music* (Douglas: G. & R. Johnson, 1896) xxxi–xxxvi.

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