

IAIN McLACHLAN

An Island Heritage



Traditional Music
of the
Western Isles

IAIN McLACHLAN, Traditional Musician. Born: 21 October, 1927, in Hacklett, Benbecula. Died: 21 February 1995 in Creagorry, Benbecula, aged 67.

WITH THE death of Iain McLachlan in 1995, Scottish traditional music lost one of its finest exponents. Known particularly for his masterly touch on the three-row Shand Morino button accordion, Iain also played pipes, fiddle and melodeon and had an extensive knowledge of traditional music. For more than 40 years he had travelled by road and ferry to play the accordion at ceilidhs and dances throughout the Highlands and Islands. In the words of his great friend, fellow button-box player and ceilidh-band leader, Fergie MacDonald, of Acharacle: "I've lost a truly great friend, but Iain was also the greatest three-row button-box player in the Highlands and Islands and I doubt if we will ever see his likes again."

Iain never travelled much outside the Highlands, but he achieved worldwide fame as composer of the beautiful melody **The Dark Island**. Originally composed in 1958 as a pipe lament for a local doctor under the title **Dr. Mackay's Farewell to Creagorry**, the tune achieved widespread popularity after it was later used by the BBC as the theme music for the TV series 'The Dark Island' filmed on Uist in 1963. Words were added by the writer and producer David Silver and since then the tune has been recorded by more than a 100 different artistes and bands worldwide. No-one played the tune better than Iain himself, first as a pipe lament and then in waltz time.

Brought up with the Gaelic language, song and Highland music, Iain started playing fiddle and melodeon at the age of six. He picked up all his music by ear and, like many of the older generation of traditional musicians, he never learned to read or write music. There lay his strength, for Iain's music was always 'from the heart' and in his memory he held an enormous wealth of tradition. He had several different versions of many of the old tunes and, when introducing a tune, he would often introduce the music as 'an old melodeon reel' or 'a pipe

setting' or 'a Skye setting' of such and such a reel. His father played melodeon for local dances and Iain learned melodeon from him. While still a boy, Iain used to sit at the knee of a local retired fiddle teacher and dancing master, Donald MacPhee (of Nunton, Benbecula), one of the few Hebridean fiddlers of that era, and from him he learned many old fiddle tunes and the old style of playing them.

I first remember hearing Iain in a broadcast recording made by Fred Macaulay for the Gaelic Department of the BBC. Iain was playing the great pipe tune **The Marchioness of Tullibardine** on accordion in duet with the piper Roddie Macaulay, of the Creagorry Hotel, playing chanter. It was such a remarkable sound I resolved there and then to bring Iain McLachlan to the Kinross Festival, which at that time I was involved in organising. The Lochaber fiddler Aonghas Grant remembers Iain at Kinross: "I recall a wonderful music session with Iain at one of the famous Kinross Festivals (in 1976) where he played about a dozen pipe marches off the cuff with the unbroken link-up that comes from playing at a thousand dances."

All who have met and heard Iain over the years will have their own memories to cherish of a wonderful musician, a friend and a gentleman. My most recent memories are of some marvellous music sessions when he was a guest in August 1994 at the Auchtermuchty Festival — playing most of the day in a small bar in the Forest Hills Hotel and later at a glorious session into the small hours, when he was knocking out some great reels and pipe tunes on the single-row melodeon. Iain's death is a sad loss to his family and friends and a great loss to the world of traditional music. His great music will live on through his recordings and in the repertoire of the many younger musicians influenced by him and for whom he was an inspiration.

Peter Shepherd, Balmaccolm, Fife.

Recording History:

The recordings were made in Bayhead, North Uist during a week in April 1979 at the MacCorquodale household in Paiblesgarry, North Uist and at the McLachlan household in Creagorry, Benbecula except the pieces on melodeon which were recorded at the Kinross Festival in September 1976. Recordings were with a stereo pair of Sony microphones direct to quarter inch tape at 15 ips using a Revox A77 recorder. Edited at Springthyme in Fife, March 1980. Additional post production at GRF, Glasgow, November 1980. The album was cut as a vinyl lp for broadcast use in 1983 but was never issued in that format. Issued on cassette in 1987. Remastered for cd at Thane Multimedia, Cupar and issued in cd format in 1997. Recording and production by Peter Shephard. Additional design: Geyguid Design Associates.

Credits:

With thanks to Flora MacNeil, John MacInnes, Aonghas Grant and Alan Bruford for assistance with tune titles; to Jim Bainbridge for loan of the melodeon, to Archie MacCorquodale and his wife Cathie of Paiblesgarry for their hospitality, and to Donald MacPhee, Calum Iain Campbell and the people of Uist and Benbecula who have passed on to us such a rich musical heritage.

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Other recordings on SPRINGTHYME include:

Scots Songs & Music: Live from the Kinross Festival (Vols. 1 & 2) (1001, 1003). **Tom Hughes:** Border Fiddle (1005). **John Watt & Davey Stewart:** Shores of the Forth (1002). **Ossian:** Ossian (1004). **Foundry Bar Band** (1007), On the Road (1012), Rolling Home (1026). **Bill Black Scottish Dance Band:** Shepherd's Choice (1008), Coast to Coast (1023), A Reel Cracker (1033) & The Dawning (1037). **Mirk:** Tak a Dram (1009). **Sprangean** (1013). **Bothy Greats** (1014). **Jim Reid:** I Saw the Wild Geese Flee (1015). **Savourna Stevenson:** Ticked Pink (1016). **Coorse & Fine:** Songs and Ballads of Dundee (1017). **A Teallach Ceilidh Band:** Plough and the Stars (1018) & Drops of Brandy (1028). **Duncan Williamson:** Mary & the Seal & other Folk Tales (1019). **Jimmy McBeath:** Wild Rover (1020). **Lizzie Higgins:** Princess of the Thistle (1021). **Angus Grant:** Highland Fiddle (1024). **Jeannie Robertson:** The Great Scots Ballad Singer (1025). **Billy Ross & John Martin:** Braes of Lochiel (1029). **Aly Bain & Young Champions** (1032). **Jim Crawford:** On the Melodeon (1034). **The Leda Trio:** Airs for the Seasons (1036). **Jane Turriff:** Singin is Ma Life (1038). **Jock Duncan:** Ye Shine Whar Ye Stan! (1039).

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| 1. Trio: March, Strathspey and Reel 3.00 | DRUMMOND OF PERTH/ TAIL TODDLE |
| DONALD MacLEAN'S FAREWELL TO
OBAN/ DEVIL IN THE KITCHEN
or SIUDAIBH 'BHALACHAIBH (Come Along
Lads)/ MRS MacLEOD OF RAASAY | 11. Accordion & Jaws Harp: Strathspey & Reel
1.35
FEILEADH BEAG A B'FHEARR LEAM
(I Prefer the Kilt) or THE KEEL ROW
CALUM'S UNTITLED REEL
(Righle Gun Ainm) |
| 2. Fiddle solo: Strathspeys 1.39 | 12. Accordion and Goose: 2/4 March
1.51
THE CONUNDRUM |
| CAMERON'S GOT HIS WIFE AGAIN
SIORRAM SIOS SIORRAM SUAS | 13. Fiddle solo: Lament and Strathspey
3.17
HIGHLAND HARRY |
| 3. Accordion and Goose: 2/4 March 1.52 | 14. Melodeon solo: Jigs
2.17
JIG OF SLURS
ROARING JELLY |
| MARCHIONESS OF TULLIBARDINE | 15. Accordion and Goose: Strathspey & Reel
1.47
DEVIL IN THE KITCHEN
or SIUDAIBH 'BHALACHAIBH (Come Along
Lads)/ SANDY DUFF |
| 4. Melodeon solo: Reels 2.11 | 16. Fiddle solo: Hornpipes
2.45
THE NAVVY ON THE LINE
BOYS OF BLUE HILL |
| MRS MacLEOD OF RAASAY
HIGH ROAD TO LINTON | 17. Trio: Strathspey and Reel/ Foursome Reel 2.26
CUTTIE'S WEDDING
MO CHUACHAG LAGHACH THU
(My Gentle Maiden) |
| 5. Fiddle duet: Strathspeys 1.46 | 18. Fiddle duet: Strathspeys/ Puirt a Beul
1.52
THE KISSING REEL |
| SIORRAM SIOS SIORRAM SUAS
FEILEADH BEAG A B'FHEARR LEAM
(I Prefer the Kilt) or THE KEEL ROW | |
| 6. Accordion solo: Air and Waltz 3.46 | |
| THE DARK ISLAND | |
| 7. Accordion and Goose: Strathspeys 2.03 | |
| BALMORAL CASTLE
SOUTH UIST GOLF CLUB | |
| 8. Accordion and Fiddle: Jigs 2.17 | |
| MAID ON THE GREEN/ THE WEE TOT | |
| 9. Fiddle solo: Reels 1.40 | |
| THA LIONN DAOR (The Ale is Dear)
BODACHAN A MHILL ANNA
(The Old Man who ravaged Anna)
or HIGH ROAD TO LINTON | |
| 10. Accordion, Fiddle & Goose: Foursome Reel
2.35
CALUM CRUBACH AS A GHLEANN
(Crooked Calum of the Glen) or MISS | |