

Alchemy of a Rose

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Cynthia Calhoun

1. Miss Proud's Reel 2:04

The Alexander McGlashan Collection (circa 1778)

The last tune in the final volume of the McGlashan Collection begins this recording.

2. Sir John Fenwick is the Flower of Them All 2:28

The Northumbrian Pipers

3. Seaforth Highlanders 5:56

(Hurichum Harichim)

The Gesto Collection of Highland Music compiled by

Keith Norman Macdonald (1895)

Lord Seaforth's Strathspey

("very old")

The Skye Collection compiled by Keith Norman Macdonald (1887)

Lord MacDonald's Reel

Kerr's Collection of Merry Melodies (circa 1870)

When asked if he is English or Scottish, the harper's Northumbrian friend responds, "It depends on which century you're on." For the purpose of this set of Scottish tunes, let us consider him Scottish.

4. Mist Covered Mountains 2:40

as collected from Stuart Slaven Ogilvie (1905-1982)

Long ago, in the mountains of our home, a great battle was fought. It was a battle for the homes and ways of the people who lived there, defending themselves against attack. The battle was long and hard, and night fell as it continued. When the sun rose the next day, the wrong side had won.

But the men who had fought and died could not stop fighting. Their souls could not rest, they had to continue to fight for their rights.

Even today, hundreds of years later, as the mist rises from the earth, one can hear the men's swords and voices in the dark. If the night is very quiet, one can even hear the sound of their struggled breathing.



al-*che-my* (al'kə-mi), *n.* [OFr. *alchimie*; ML. *alchemia*; Ar. *al-kīmiyā*; ? < Gr. *chymeia* < *chein*, to pour], 1. the chemistry of the Middle Ages, the chief aims of which were to change the baser metals into gold and to discover the elixir of perpetual youth: abbreviated *alchem.* 2. a method or power of transmutation; seemingly miraculous change of one thing into another.

5. I Love My Jean 2:55

by Robert Burns (1759-1796)

Miss Admiral Gordon's Strathspey, also known as *Of a' the Airts [directions] the Wind can Blaw*

Robert Burns wrote to a friend that his part in preserving Scotland's music was "sometimes for a fine air to make a stanza, when it has no words." He composed this love poem for his wife, and the air he chose has been immortalized by the association.

6. They Stole My Wife Last Night 3:23

(*Ghoid iad mo bhean uam an réir*)

A Collection of Highland Vocal Airs compiled by Patrick McDonald (1784)

Pease Strae

The Athole Collection of the Dance Music of Scotland, compiled by James Stewart Robertson (circa 1883)

The Prince's Welcome into Inverness

The Alexander McGlashan Collection

The harper performs these tunes together for their common musical theme. Very little else ties together these tunes about an old marriage prank, a type of food, and the probable welcome of Prince Charles Edward Stuart into Inverness before the disaster on nearby Culloden Moor on April 16, 1746.

7. An Elegy on Rob Roy McGregor 2:44

(*Marbhrann air Rob Ruadh MacGhriogair*)

The Angus Fraser Collection of Scottish Gaelic Airs.

(collected before 1874; published 1996)

The full title of the Angus Fraser Collection is, "A Collection of the Vocal Airs of the Highlands of Scotland Communicated as sung by the people, and formerly played on the harp."

In the Highlands of Scotland, that harp would have been strung with wire strings.

Surely no other instrument existing today or in history can give the same pathos to this elegy on the legendary "Robin Hood of Scotland" as can the wire strung harp of the Gaels.

I love My Jean

Of a' the airts the wind can blaw,
I dearly like the west,
For there the bonie lassie lives,
The lassie I lo'e best:
There's wild-woods grow, and rivers row,
And mony a hill between:
But day and night my fancy's flight
Is ever wi' my Jean.

I see her in the dewy flowers,
I see her sweet and fair:
I hear her in the fanesfa' birds,
I hear her charm the air:
There's not a bonie flower that springs,
By fountain, shaw, or green;
There's not a bonie bird that sings,
But minds me o' my Jean.

8. The Chanter's Tune 4:45

as collected by Edward Bunting (1773-1843) from E. Shannon, Esq. 1839

A young Irish organist named Edward Bunting, with the strength of genius, made precious notes on the performance of the wire strung harp from his observations of a few of the very last ancient harpers. The tradition of this noble instrument became extinct during his lifetime. Bunting also wrote down music from the oral tradition of the harpers. Without his work many tunes would have been lost forever.

9. Blair Athole 1:32 / **10. Glenlivet** 2:12

from Kerr's Collection of Merry Melodies (circa 1870)

Both of these reels can be found in the immense collection made by James. S. Kerr. Glenlivet is performed as a wire strung harp duet, with accompaniment of bodhran, alto flute and udu.

11. A Lament for Her Husband and Child 1:49

(Cumh' airson a fir 's a leinibh le Silis Nic Raonail)

by Julia McDonnell from the Angus Fraser Collection

12. Lachlann Dubh 2:07

(Lachlan with the Jet black hair)

The Simon Fraser Collection (1815)

An old graveyard beckons from behind a rusted gate. Shaded by an ancient oak, the crumbling tombstones issue an invitation to the visitor. One stone cries with its epitaph for the young man who perished in 1797. "Here Lies Hammond McLean, who leaves behind a grieving young wife and infant son."

A neighboring stone hides in the disarray of an old rose bush, leaning weary of its burden. Thorny stems are pushed aside, and a related epitaph is revealed. "Here lies Douglas McLean, beloved son of his mother and she a widow." The year was 1798.

Angus Fraser, collector of Julia McDonnell's Lament, was the son of Captain Simon Fraser, also a collector of Highland tunes. The second tune, collected by the elder Fraser, is here performed as close to the captain's arrangement as is possible on wire strings. He published it just a few years after the young Mrs. McLean lost her husband and young son. Perhaps by then she had found joy, for her burial place is not to be found in the old graveyard with her husband and child.



A Note on the Musician:

Cynthia began her harp career by accident. Her dear friend Kenneth played the Highland bagpipes. He became ill and lost the stamina necessary for piping. On a whim he bought a small wire strung harp on which to play his pipe tunes. Sadly, he died soon after. The harp was left alone in the silence of his room.

A year passed. It was decided that, as she was a trained musician, Cynthia should inherit Kenneth's harp. She was entranced by the sound of the instrument and by the lineage of its music, and began to teach herself to play. More to the truth, the harp began to teach Cynthia with that mystical voice an instrument employs when it finds a musician destined to play it.

A Note on the Instrument:

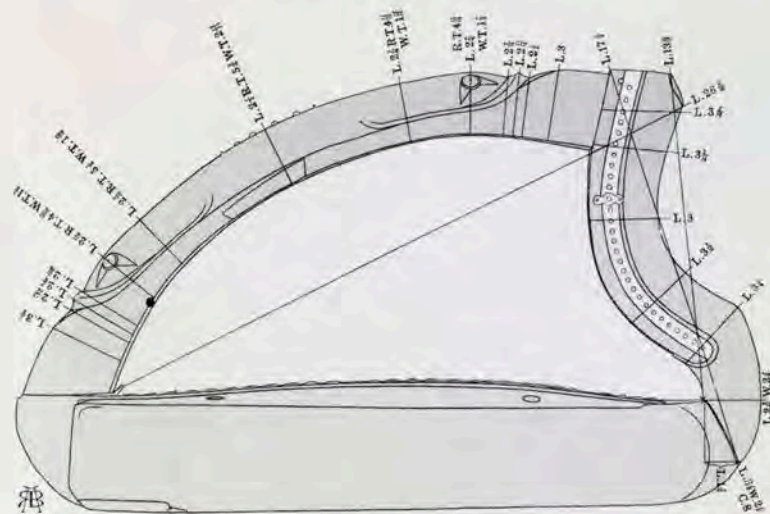
The wire strung harp of the Gaels of Ireland and the Highlands and Islands of Scotland is one of the most ancient harps known, harking back to about the 10th century. In Scots Gaelic, the wire strung harp is called Clarsach. These small harps were played by clarsairs with long fingernails, producing a ringing, bell-like sustain. The metal strings were carefully damped to create harmonies and ornaments.

The tradition of the Clarsach faded in the early years of the 19th century, and for nearly 200 years the wire strings were all but silent. The surviving instruments became museum relics. Over the past quarter century there has been a re-birth of the wire strung harp, as more people discover the delight of its distinctive and beautiful sound.

Why Alchemy of a Rose?

One of the Ardival Harps that Cynthia plays is named "The Rose." In the musician's never-ending search for the perfect sound, experiments were undertaken to find the ideal string material for the harp, with silver emerging as a most promising choice. As Cynthia and her metallurgist friend researched the metals, they found themselves in the study of the ancient science of alchemy.

THE "QUEEN MARY" HARP.



PRESENT FORM OF THE HARP.

The measurements are given in inches. Abbreviations:—L., length; W., width; C., circumference; R. T., round the T formation; W. T., width of the T formation.

13. Ferintosh (An Tòiseachd) 4:44

The Simon Fraser Collection

The Bedding of the Bride (Bean na bàinnse)

The Simon Fraser Collection

Off She Goes

The Skye Collection compiled by Keith Norman Macdonald (1887)

Ferintosh is a district in Scotland once renowned for its whisky production. The second tune refers to an old marriage custom, and the third tune was savvy enough to travel from Ireland to Scotland and wriggle its way into a classic Scottish collection of tunes.

14. The Top of Ben Lomond 3:00

Traditional

When the piper died he left to the harper his collection of music. One march caught the eye and dreams of the harper, who ever thinks of him when she performs it, remembering how he walked his beloved collie every evening.

15. New Claret 3:06

(Supposed Norwegian Air)

The Gesto Collection

The harper performs another duet, played in simple canon form, with her best friend lending his Irish Whistle accompaniment. Truly a most joyful tune!

**16. Doctor Ross's 50th Welcome
to the Argyllshire Gathering 1:55**

by Pipe Major Donald MacLeod, MBE

When the tradition of the wire strung harp died, the pipers and fiddlers were quick to save many of the old harp tunes. As a tribute to them, the harper turns aside and gives the pipers their due, for indeed without their music she would not have met the harp to which she now gives voice.



17. Brian Boru 8:47

Traditional

On a beautiful September morning, a distant country attacked the harper's homeland. The attack was a surprise, it was devastating, and it was deadly. Without delay, the offended country cried war. Strategies were examined, allies sought, preparations for battle made, soldiers moved into position... and the hunger for battle slackened by the passage of time.

In the misty dawn at the encampment, before the drums begin to beat, the harper prepares to perform the brosnachadh, the incitement to battle. The harper tries the metal strings. Veteran soldiers stop to listen as the first notes of the harp carry through the damp air, watching each other's eyes as their hearts leap with the first quiverings of bravery. The battle has been called.

The harper knows time has begun to heal the painful September memories for some. Perhaps the call for courage begins with a reminder of the fire and smoke and death of the distant attacks. It may be that the customary March of the brosnachadh began as a Lament. As memory awakens, and past anger is recalled, the March builds to a frenzy, leaving the harper breathless and the soldiers with hearts inflamed for battle.

18. Edward Corcoran 4:33 **Turlough O'Carolan (1670-1738)** **Mrs. Crawford of Donside** **by John Riddell, the Skye Collection** **19. The Banks o' Clyde 4:07** **Kerr's Collection**

We return to the castle, where the harper gives tribute to bravery. Edward Corcoran distinguished himself during the siege of Limerick in 1691. Turlough O'Carolan, a masterful composer for the wire strings, wrote this tribute to his friend's honor.

The second tune in this set is a dance tune. But the harper, after reflections on war, finds it difficult to play a buoyant dance, and here performs it with introspection. Gradually, the music rekindles the pure joy of being alive, our struggles being a means to life, love and family. Refreshed, the harper cheerfully takes us to the Banks of the River Clyde, where she has sweet memories of friendship and music.





The Clarsach, or Wire Strung Harp - Cynthia Cathcart
 Drums, Udu, Marimba and Percussion - John Emrich
 The Great Highland Bagpipes - Mike Scott
 Didjuridu (Carnyx) - Tim Whittemore
 Bodhrans, Flutes and Whistles - Eric Cathcart
 Children's Laughter - Alex and Brian Cathcart

Peal Bells - Courtesy of the Washington National Cathedral, as rung
 by the Washington Bell Ringing Society.

In Brian Boru, the sound of the ancient Pictish war horn, the Carnyx,
 was emulated on the didjuridu.

The War Drum used in Brian Boru saw service in the American Revolutionary War.

Produced by Eric Cathcart
 Photography & graphic design by Brandon Andrusic
 Recorded and Mixed at Phase Recording Studios, College Park Maryland
 Engineered by Bruce Falkenburg assisted by Drew Doucette
 DAT Field Recording by Eric Cathcart
 Mastered by Bill Wolf, Wolf Productions, Inc.

Artist representation - Potomac Talent, LLC
 Silver Spring, Maryland, USA 20918
 Hair by Legia
 Rosewood Marimba courtesy of Drums Unlimited, College Park Maryland
 All arrangements ©2002 by Cynthia Cathcart.
 Irish Whistle part in New Claret composed by Eric Cathcart.
 All music on this recording is traditional.
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 http://www.CynthiaCathart.com
 Program notes ©2002 by Cynthia Cathcart.



Cynthia plays harps by Ardival Harps of Strathpeffer, Scotland.
 Three Ardival Harps are represented on this recording: The Kilcoy
 (tracks 2, 3, 9, 10, 15), The Kinnellan (11, 12, 17), and The Rose
 (1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 13, 14, 15, 18, 19). Precious metal strings by Ben Zastrow -
 Cynthia's harps are strung with Brass, Silver and Gold strings.

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 experience and technical support in the creation of this project. Thanks to
 Joe Ciaudelli of Sennheiser Electronic Corporation.

Thank you to Deborah Kennedy Coster, Bill Taylor, Jack Campin,

and to Walt Richards for life-long encouragement.

A very special Thank You to Alex and Zan Dunn at Ardival Harps.

A Note on the Recording:

I find myself returning to the analogy of trout fishing when thinking about how this recording
 was made. Trout live in the most beautiful parts of the stream, and will only emerge when
 all conditions are aligned. It is only in that brief and exceptional moment that the
 angler can act. All else is preparation.

Recorded and mixed in pristine 24-bit 96kHz high-resolution audiophile digital with a
 vintage British Trident 80B mixing consol, mastered at 88.2kHz, the harps were
 recorded live without EQ, compression, effects or anything unnatural,
 using only room ambiance and two matched Sennheiser MKH800
 extended frequency response high-definition microphones. The
 astonishing clarity and sparkle is due to this wider frequency response.

The convergence of musicianship, technology and talents for this project was
 a remarkable and rare experience. The recording is a journey of life's
 emotions. Like the trout stream, there are brightly lit pools to
 explore while other areas are cloudy. It is a romantic visit
 to another world, to the beautiful parts of the stream.

- Eric Cathcart



