

Most collectors have to be satisfied with publishing a small fraction of their songs. All those interested in folksong owe a debt of gratitude to the editors and publishers who are making available this remarkably rich treasure. We look forward with happy expectation to the appearance of the succeeding volumes.

Fiddle Music

Scottish Fiddle Music in the 18th Century: A musical collection and historical study by David Johnson

Edinburgh: John Donald, 1984. L25.00. (U.S.A. and Canada: Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands, NJ).

Reviewed by GEORGE A. PROCTOR.

It has oft been stated that interest in fiddle music has greatly increased in recent years in Canada and elsewhere. This is certainly true with regard to one of the more distinctive styles in Canada, the Scottish. Associated mainly with Cape Breton in Nova Scotia but also to be found in other parts of the country where Scots find themselves, such as Glengarry County in eastern Ontario, this style was imported into Canada in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. This interest has been underlined recently with the re-publication of Simon Fraser's *Airs and Melodies peculiar to the Highlands of Scotland and the Isles* (Edinburgh, 1816) by Paul S. Cranford in Sydney, N.S. in 1982. At the performing level the activities of the 'Cape Breton Symphony' and other fiddlers and groups have shown that Scots-style fiddling is as popular as it ever was. On top of this the recent publication of *Scottish Fiddle Music in the 18th Century* by David Johnson indicates that this style remains active in its place of origin.

Johnson is also the author of *Music and Society in Lowland Scotland in the 18th Century* (London, 1972), an informative book which surveys, in the author's words, "a minor tributary of the European mainstream." Included in this survey is a brief treatment of the main theme of the present volume, which is that Scotland maintained in the 18th century both folk and classical fiddling traditions which were often carried on by the same people.

In my opinion *Scottish Fiddle Music in the 18th Century* makes a very important contribution to the literature of instrumental folk music. It is both an anthology of ninety pieces as well as an historical study. As a performing edition it has its drawbacks in that there are some awkward page turns and the accidentals are so small that this pair of middle-aged eyes had trouble telling the difference between the "sharps" and the "naturals." But the volume more than makes up for these shortcomings by including, on the historical side, many references and explanatory notes, all compiled in proper scholarly format. The volume was designed with the intended purpose of reviving the playing of this repertoire, only some of which has survived through oral tradition since the 18th century. Like

broadsides in the vocal repertoire, these works have known composers but because of their passing into the traditional realm, so to speak, they have been thought of as folk music. Johnson makes the point that this music must be considered both from the standpoint of 18th-century art music and fiddle music but I think in his understandable enthusiasm for the literature he has over-estimated the "art" side of these works. Even the best of the ninety examples would not rank with routine works of a composer such as Telemann. The fiddling figurations can be technically demanding (but no more so than any 20th-century fiddler would be expected to handle) but the dependence on strophic variations of rather predictable chord sequences creates a rather unimaginative harmonic dimension to the pieces.

Johnson organizes his commentaries on the basis of historical issues and trends. Thus for a given tune the reader must, through the use of a very good index, piece together all of the commentary from a variety of locations in the book. I like this approach because it attempts to give historical perspective, a much-needed dimension to folklore studies. The book is organized into ten categories, each given a separate chapter: song and dance tunes to 1720; Scot's drawing roomstyle; long variation sets; scordatura; bagpipe pieces; minuets; variation sonatas; sonatas; reels, hornpipes, strathspeys and jigs from 1760; special effects.

Johnson points out that most of the Scottish repertory was in reach of ordinary people, but "nevertheless, its finest pieces made great demands on players' technique and audiences' powers of attention, and can hardly be described as popular music at all." Although I regard this statement as an exaggeration, as stated above, the picture of the amalgamation of Scots' style with the sonata style of Corelli is fascinating. Johnson points out that around 1690 (when Corelli's music was becoming increasingly popular in England and Scotland), there were few points in common between the two schools except that the pieces could all be played on the same instrument. Johnson put forth the idea that the Scots' compositions in the 18th century had the effect of bringing the two styles together. He surmises as a result that "mainstream Scots-fiddle playing and mainstream European-violin playing cannot have differed from each other in the 18th century nearly as much as folk fiddle and classical violin playing do today." He goes on to observe that art-music violin playing has developed while Scots-fiddle playing has stayed largely the same.

In summary, *Scottish Fiddle Music in the 18th Century* is a must for all fiddlers and folk historians with even a casual interest in Cape Breton style.

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