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Hebridean song and the  
laws of interpretation

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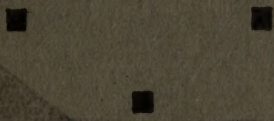
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## HEBRIDEAN SONG AND THE LAWS OF INTERPRETATION

Marjory  
Kennedy-Fraser

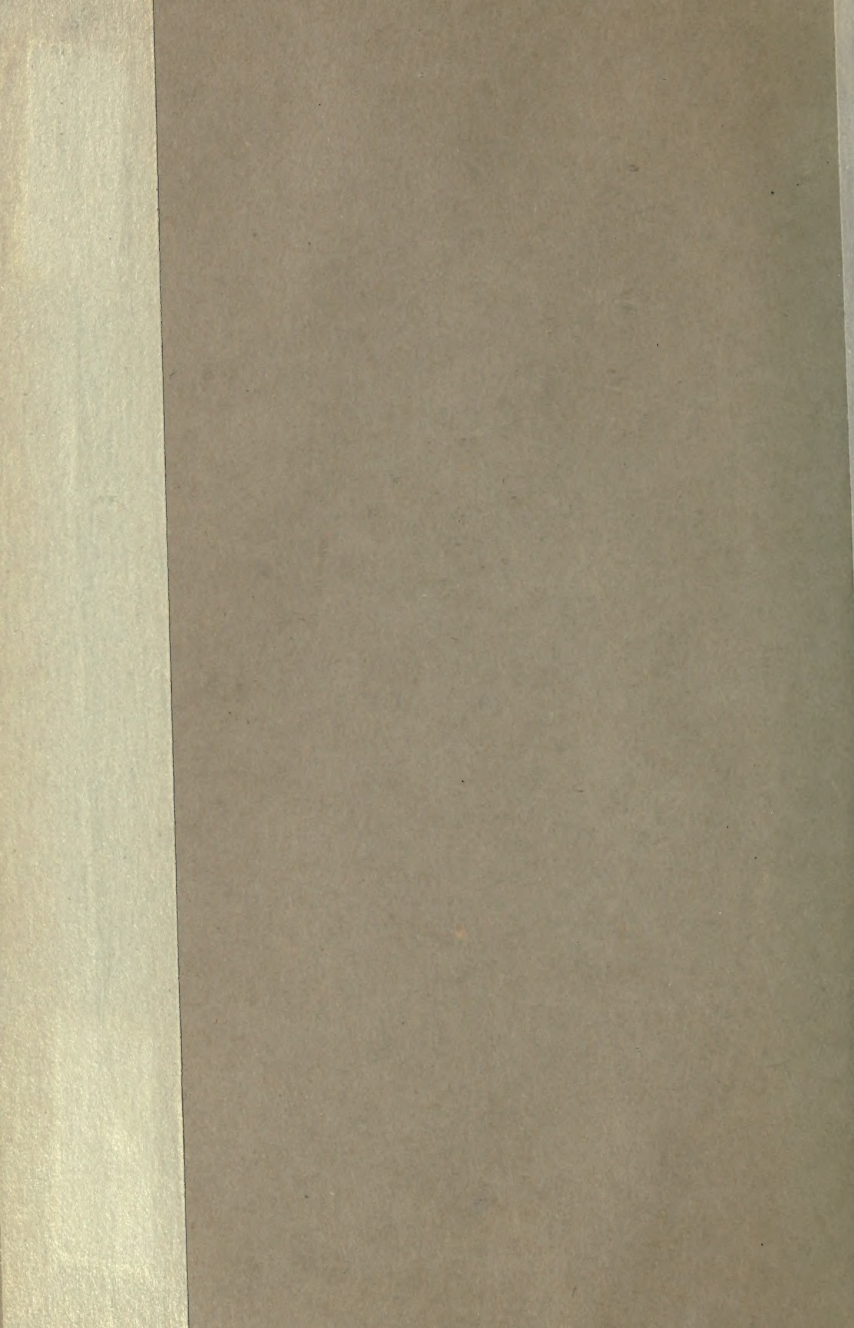


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# Hebridean Song

and the

## Laws of Interpretation

*By Marjory Kennedy-Fraser*

If the highest art be that which conceals art, we must aim at nothing less for an adequate rendering of Scots Songs—Lowland, Highland, or Hebridean. For, in addition to their purely musical exactions, Scots songs call for a psychologically true and seemingly perfectly natural rendering of all their varying moods.

In Scotland we have two tongues—in addition to the English which we keep for polite use—Gaelic and Lowland Scots. The Gaelic is much the more ancient and has little affinity with the Lowland Scots. Gaelic calls for oral instruction, but a page of helpful hints on its pronunciation will be found in our first volume of “Songs of the Hebrides” and also in one of our smaller albums, that entitled “Sea Tangle.” These hints may suffice in cases where only a few Gaelic words have been retained in our translations, either for the sake of their beauty of vowel colour or their rhythmic value.

But for singers who “have” Gaelic, or who may be studying to sing in the ancient tongue, I would call attention to an important matter affecting the fitting of the word as spoken to the word as sung.

In adapting Gaelic words to the pace of the song—for, be it noted, the rhythmical pace of melody demands concessions on the part of language; prolongations

these, mostly of vowels but at times of consonants also—in adapting Gaelic words to song, there must be certain agreed-upon and accepted conventions, as in all other languages. For instance, in singing the English word “ I ” (first person singular), one must prolong, if musically necessary, the *first* of the two vowels forming the diphthong, thus—AAAAAee, and not sing it thus—A ee ee ee. In Gaelic, like conventions must be agreed upon and accepted by judges of Gaelic, judges who may not be experts in vocal music. Take the word *athair* in “ Kishmul’s Galley ” (verse 3, line 1). It occurs on a sustained note—broad, exultant. The natural closing-in of the word (which sounds very like the English word *ire*, meaning *rage*) must here be postponed until such time as we mean *musically* to finish. Otherwise the breadth of the tone and exultancy of the mood are lost.

But I cannot here treat at length of this matter which is of far-reaching importance to *Gaelic* singers. I am writing here mainly for non-Gaelic speakers, who will use the English words provided, with occasional interpolated Gaelic refrains and names and terms of endearment. Speaking generally of the interpretation of the songs of the Western Highlands, *i.e.*, of all the West Coast and the Inner and Outer Hebrides, I have said in the introduction of our third and latest volume of “ Songs of the Hebrides ” :—

As to the performance of Hebridean songs, one cannot generalise, they are so varied. They simply must always obey the laws of musical interpretation, applicable alike to them and to the songs of a Schubert and a Schumann. I stress Schubert, because in him most often a rigorously driving rhythm is exacted (as in so much of the best Hebridean song), and Schumann, because in



him a broad rhapsodical *tempo rubato* is essential (as in another type of Hebridean air).

Both classes are to be found in plenty in Celtic music. Of the latter class, the rhapsodical, Patrick Macdonald, in his eighteenth-century collection of "Highland and Island Vocal Airs," writes: "Chiefly occupied with the sentiment and expression of the music, the singers dwell upon the long and pathetic notes, while they hurry over the inferior and connecting notes in such a manner as to render it exceedingly difficult for a hearer to trace the measure of them." How applicable this to the works of the nineteenth-century-Romantic-School! Of Brahms, even, it is said that he played his own compositions so erratically, shall we say, at least so differently from the rigid formalism of his own notation, that Clara Schumann, looking over his shoulder when he was playing his new compositions, could not follow him. And yet Patrick Macdonald, accustomed only to the classical school of his time, apologises for this romantic tendency in the music of the Gael!

In many of the lighter lilt of the Isles there is a subtlety of rhythmic feeling, a subtlety which throws the accents at times out of their regularly recurring places; and the irregularity of barring which one has to adopt occasionally in noting the airs arises from the greater melodic freedom of a time when barring was not used in notation—a state of matters which some devoutly hope may yet return.

In the light rapid rhythm of such songs as "The Cockle Gatherer," "Dance to your Shadow," or "People who have Gardens," the most exquisite discrimination of musical accents is called for,\*

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\* This light accentuation (in high relief) is made effective more by cutting away tone on the weak beats than by adding it on the strong beats. For instance, in the "Peat-Fire Flame," the word *lad* which recurrently finishes off the line on a weak beat must be sung very lightly as to tone and short as to duration and impersonally as to colour—as though it were a mere rhythm-padding "O," in short—else you will fail to achieve an easy leaning accent on *weave* and a fine crisp explosion on *by*.

together with a perfect unforced articulation of the words; all underlining of individual words or use of emotional and characteristic colouring being achieved without sensibly breaking the intoxicating onward flow or dance of the rhythm. In rhapsodical or passionate songs, on the other hand, such as "The Bens of Jura," "Seagull of the Land-under-Waves," "Mull Fisher's Love Song," "Love Wandering," from our first volume; "Sea Longing," "The Wild Swan," "Heart of Fire-Love," "Caristiona," and "Sea Tangle," from vol. 2; and "Aignish on the Machair" and "The Harper" in the third volume, a broader *tempo rubato* is required. Here also the law of rhythm, however, must be obeyed. What is elastically taken must, over the whole, be elastically repaid. A song like "The Wind on the Moor" again, while it would seem to drive piteously onward, is yet subject to a fairly broad *tempo rubato*. Its very ruthless sweep is the outcome of a fairly considerable elasticity applied mainly in the form of a *leaning* on the initial "null," and a consequent driving acceleration in order to pay back when due the time robbed by the *leaning* note. The elasticity thus obtained, together with the prolonged moaning sounds of the intoning consonants (the n's, l's, and v's of the original Gaelic), and a steady crescendo (or, if preferred, a *cres.*, *dim.*, and *cres.* again) from the pianissimo opening to the climax, are all-important factors in the interpretation of the piece.

Vocal control again, in slow sustained singing, has always been held the test of the singer. Ossian's Day-Dream "Sleeps the Noon in the deep blue Sky," like "Land of Heart's Desire," must be sung with ecstatic serenity, the serenity of desire *realised*, and to express this only the most perfectly free tone-production suffices, a perfection of tone mastery, an ease and transparency of production, to attain which is the life-long aim of the singer.

Indeed, for the adequate interpretation of these songs, taking all three volumes, the singer will find use

for the vocal studies of a lifetime, with the sole exception of *fioriture*.

Like Schubert's songs, as already implied, they are rigorously musical, first and last musical, and piteously exacting as to rhythm. They offer also great variety of mood. The mood and the form, these we must keep ever before us in our quest after true interpretation.

Now, as an instance of how to deal with a particular song, first realising what it means to convey, let us take "Kishmul's Galley" ("Songs of the Hebrides," volume 1). The singer is standing on a high promontory in the Isle of Barra gazing out to sea. A great storm is raging. From a high rock of vantage he watches M'Neil's galley which in a totally disabled condition is trying to "make" the safe waters of Castle Bay. The rock commands a view alike of the straining galley and of the safe anchorage of Kishmul Castle, the ancient stronghold of the M'Neils, rising sheer out of the waters of the bay.

During the opening tremolo (of two or four bars—I myself prefer four), which by the way should be played with a steady rhythm with one great swell and diminish of storm and of anxiety, the singer stands gazing anxiously seaward. The voice joins the accompaniment strictly in time, letting the words come clear over the tremolo and taking care to give the syncopation in "Seaward I gaz'd" its exact value. Then comes the refrain "O hi O hu O," taking on the colour alike of the strained excitement of the watcher and (since tone-painting can have both an outer and an inner significance) the voice of the wind. And please note that although such *refrain* syllables may seem (as printed) individual

and detached, they are to be sung with the vowel sounds flowing one into the other, *i.e.*, *strisciato*.

The second verse continues the emotional and scenic content of the first. Again give heed here to the syncopated “Nor hoop nor yards.” But with the third verse we arrive at a fresh stage of the emotional and scenic happenings. The linking pianoforte chords between the second and third verses indeed sound the clanking of the vessel as she is being “brought to”; even the last chord here should have a metallic sound. Then comes the opportunity for the dramatic singer. “Now at last”—note the decisive short long of the rhythm here, which again is of the utmost importance and significance. It must not be diluted nor reversed as might seem to be required by the natural relative importance of the two words. The value of the direct *musical* expression in exultant syncopation should here overrule the otherwise commonsense delivery of the words. In the words that follow (“’gainst wind and tide”) stress by *duration* the two warring elements, and make them more outstanding by reducing the connecting “and” to a mere slightly intoned “n.” In singing the word “wind” keep the sound of the wind in the mind, and for the word “tide” let the exultancy of victory, victory over great odds, be the key to the situation; and on the open vowel *ah* of the diphthong *ah-ee* in “tide” let this exultancy *come through*.

The fourth verse voices inevitable relaxation after tremendous effort and achievement. The hypnotic descending harp figure in the accompaniment, which must be played with a curving *tempo rubato*, but not too slowly, gradually induces dreaminess in the exhausted






seafarers, but ere the song closes the exultant memory of the achievement leaps again into flame and flashes out ere it expires.

In notation I avoid compound bars as a rule, and the barring must be regarded as a mere help to the sensing of time-divisions, not as dictating a regularly recurring equally strong accent at the beginning of each bar. Indeed, except for the time-division, try, in reading *all* notation, to *forget the bars*. They as a rule are entirely misleading as to the all-important matter of phrasing.





Now, although for the sake of a certain simplicity in the reading of time-division groups, I have barred this fourth verse in 6-8 time, it is better to read it as a 12-8 bar divided into two, the voice part joining the harping at a half-bar, the stronger accent being given to the word "wine." This entry of the voice *in the middle* of the harping figure is done in the spirit of the old Celtic *penillion* singing, in which the singer, by way of improvisation, was expected to enter at an unpremeditated point after the harpist was fully under way. In the words "Here's red wine and feast for heroes" I would have the singer fully conscious of the recurring "ee" vowel, which dominates the sound-colour scheme in this phrase. Conscious vowel repetition plays an important part in Celtic poetry, and we use it consciously in our English translations and lyrics founded on the Gaelic. The singer would do well to study this and to realise the extraordinary value of vowel-colour, alike emotionally and artistically. In the words "sweet harping too," with the refrain "o-ee-o-oo," we have intentionally used the wonderfully beautiful contrasting vowels *ee* and *oo* in alternation.

Now to follow up with a few hints derived from personal experience of the mistakes likely to be made in the study of the songs contained in our three volumes of Hebridean Song. Old Garcia (he began to teach singing at seventeen and lived till over a hundred) once said to my sister that it was not his seventh, nor his seventeenth, nor his seven-hundredth pupil who ceased to surprise him. We never know where or when students may go wrong, and know not quite what to warn them against. But again we never know what new illuminating vision they may at some time bring to bear upon a song.

Well—(1) See to it in your first study of the melody that you get the right intervals in mind. Many of these are unexpected, and singers will give a leap of a fifth instead of a third in the opening of “ In Hebrid Seas ” (vol. 1), or a leap of a third instead of a fifth in the second bar of “ The Cockle Gatherer ” (vol. 3). I myself have heard an accompanist give the queer major scale with the *whole* tone below the tonic (in the introduction to the “ Thirteenth Century Love Lilt,” vol. 1) as an ordinary major scale !

(2) Note the rhythms, and never destroy the characteristic mediaeval division of triple time into short long thus :— or  It occurs in “ Fairy Plaint ” (vol. 1), “ Sea Longing ” (vol. 2), and others. In “ To the Lord of the Isles ” (vol. 2) the  is of the utmost importance, giving a tension to the melody that is completely lost when singers carelessly sing  or .

The short long rhythm — — — — occurs also in divisions into four. Thus, in the "Skye Fisher's Song" (vol. 1) I have with great care chosen words that should help singers to a clean execution of this passionate rhythmic device—such are *rugged, jagged, cutting, glimmer, blackest, travels*. And yet they neglect it! In "Sea Sounds" (vol. 1) I would have you note a fine syncopation in the refrain. The Isle-folk, in labour songs, revel in syncopation. Let the singer see to it, then, that in singing this refrain all the *inner* beats are felt and realised, much as though the throb of an oar accompanied the song all through.

There is a characteristic pattern of four notes, thus  or  in some of the labour lilt (see "Two Milking Croons" and the "Churning Lilt," vol. 1). Give these four (quavers or crotchets) equal value and equal stress. And note that in a song dominated by that pattern, as in the "Handsome lad frae Skye" ("Milking Croon"), the effect of the throbbing *even* quavers must be felt all through the melody and must throb in the , which must be thought  and given strictly in time. I have heard this murdered time and again.

Rhythm is an extraordinarily sensitive means of expression. The syncopated exultation of the recurring leap-up in "Kishmul's Galley" has been already alluded to. Indeed, the syncopated leap of a short accented note to a long one which borrows part of its accent is an invaluable means of emphasis and must never be

shirked or half-done, but must be fully grasped and carried through. In "Land of Heart's Desire" (vol. 2), on the other hand, the ecstatic quiet *realisation* of desire (which is the keynote to the emotional content of the song) is achieved by taking the first syllable of "desire" as I have noted it, *i.e.*, Heart's De-sire, ♪ ♪ | ♪, and not as some teachers have altered it ♪ ♪ | ♪ This because they have not grasped the mood of the whole song, and are aiming at the expression of the nervous restlessness of desire unattained.

TEMPO.—As for the tempo of a song—the rate of speed at which it is taken—this may vary to a certain extent according to the voice of the singer. Songs like "Hebridean Mother's Song" (vol. 1), "The Dowerless Maiden," and "The Aspen Tree" (vol. 3), having a forward moving swing, should be taken *tempo giusto* and never dragged. "Sea Tangle" (vol. 2), which as I have put it together is not a strophic but a "through-composed" song, varies much in the tempi of the different sections. Songs like "Dance to your Shadow" and "Sea Reivers' Mouth Music" (vol. 3) are taken as fast as you can clearly articulate them. "Sleeps the Noon in the deep blue Sky"—the Ossianic midsummer day-dream—must not be taken too fast. Get the leisurely timeless feeling of non-movement that characterises mid-day in midsummer, a feeling as though the seasons for the time being had ceased to roll.

Something of the same feeling finds expression in the "Uist Cattle Croon" (vol. 3), with its great stretches of silent moor and sand and sea, breathless under the blue



vault of heaven. Let this hang over the song from the first note of the accompaniment to the last. "The Bens of Jura" (vol. 1) broadly and rhapsodically; "The Clydeside Love Lilt" (vol. 3) liltily but without hurry. Never force the pace indeed of any air after you have thoroughly absorbed it and learnt *from itself* its mood and musical nature.

PHRASING.—The arresting delivery of all really great singers owes as much to their phrasing as to their beauty of voice. The study of the subtleties of phrasing is not something peculiarly Hebridean. But Hebridean music, having a real *musical* basis and not having been framed to make things easy for the singer, calls for much study and skill for its adequate performance. Remember this is not an elementary study. More frankly objective music, such as say the florid airs of Handel (which yet are expressive in a jubilant fashion), are better for early studies, and the Italian language is the easiest, the least complex, of all.

In studying phrasing, get rid of the picture of the notation as soon as possible, re-creating the melodic line mentally. So many fail to realise that music is born as a mental concept, and that notation, valuable as it has proved for the preservation of musical thought, can yet only to a limited extent convey the music-maker's original idea. Most of the finer shades of dynamic variation, of time-curves, of significant stresses, of suggestive tone-colour, are quite beyond the power of notation to convey, and yet these flesh tints, so to speak, are as essential to the whole as the bony structure which alone can be definitely noted by pen or pencil. To sing, groping only from bar to bar, without a wider grasp of the

phrase and phrase-groups, is a hand-to-mouth proceeding that will never arrive at a reproduction of the original concept, while again a too slavish obedience to such marks of nuance, emphasis, and time-deviation as may be conveyed on paper produces only a caricature.

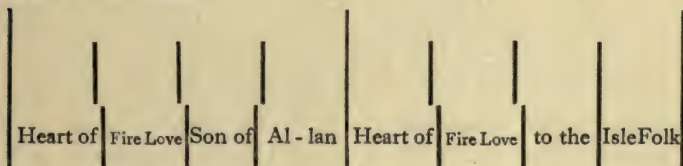
It is a difficult matter in noting melody to decide how to bar it. For myself, I have avoided as much as possible compound bars, *i.e.*, 6-8, 9-8, 12-8, and the like. Beethoven in his scherzi frequently uses 3-4 with the | ♩. | denoting only one beat! So do not take bars as indicating an important accent at the beginning of each. The bars show only the time-divisions, and must be grouped together to form the phrase. As an instance of what might be a usual compound-time barring of certain tunes, see the "Sealwoman's Croon" and the "Love Wandering" (vol. 1) and the alternative notation given.

Do not slavishly take the line of poetry as the limit of the musical phrase. Do not breathe at every comma—as a singer told me he had been instructed by his teacher to do! At times the line of poetry runs on—the musical phrase tends *naturally* to do so. Indeed the musical rule is that when you are singing without words you breathe immediately *after* the strong beat. This can easily be done for instance with the words written by me for the tune "The Skye Fisher's Song" at "Purple water troughs swift cutting/Clean my boat cleaves through"—*clean* being the first word of its line is spelt with a capital, but it nevertheless is the last word of the preceding phrase. In the above case, breath might be taken after *troughs* if necessary, in order to carry the phrase on later. But breath may be taken by

a skilful artist without breaking the phrase, phrase-continuity depending as much on relative stresses and *rubato* as on continuity of breath. There are phrase-waves that rise to a crest and fall over—for instance, in “The Birlinn of the White Shoulders” (vol. 2), “Out at sea, Fair is she, Fairer e’en than Dame Clanranald,” *e’en* here being on the crest of the wave. And again, in “Heart of Fire-Love, Son of Allan, Heart of Fire-Love” (vol. 2), even should you breathe between *Allan* and *heart*, you must convey the impression of *heart* being on the crest of an unbroken wave. And although there is an acceleration over “of Fire-Love, Son of,” it is not a case of a steady acceleration up to the climax. There is a hold-back again—repaying the acceleration in the *tempo rubato*—before going on to the accent on *heart* exactly when it is due, *i.e.*, exactly when it would have been due had we gone on at an even jog-trot pace all through the line.

The following diagram will help to make clearer the method of redistribution of the available durations in a phrase working to a climax and yet keeping strictly within bounds :—

Strict bar time.



Rubato redistribution.

The *rubato* here helps the expression of passionate love and also helps to point to the wave-crest that shapes the phrase.

TEMPO RUBATO.—*Tempo rubato* is a very subtle means of expression and of grouping. There may even be an alternating faster and slower of two measures or two halves of the same measure, as in “The Cradle Spell of Dunvegan” (vol. 2). This form of time-swing I remember to have seen noted with metronome speed of each indicated, in one of Rhené Baton’s Breton Sketches for Piano.

In the “Lord of the Isles” Processional (vol. 2) the *tempo rubato* is very powerful. It should be used always to make the return to the exclamation “Naile bho hi” more emphatic. Such time-swerves serve to emphasise the strong beat on which they arrive *just* in time, neither too late nor too soon. A word of warning! Only those who can sing strictly in time can be trusted with *tempo rubato* deviation and return. We must live under the law before we can live under grace!

Never try to *make* rubato effects—a good rubato is never in evidence. It must curve so naturally from slow into faster and *vice versa* that only an expert watching for it is aware that it has been used. Then why tell you about it at all? That you may *know* that this element, which does not appear in notation, is yet vital to music, and that, if you free yourself from inanimate notation, you will use it—if you cultivate your rhythmic sense—with good effect. And the public which does not know anything about it (and we do not want them to know) will appreciate it highly.

But, be it noted, if *tempo rubato* is a powerful means of expression, so is the absence of *tempo rubato*! We do not use it at all in “The Handsome Lad frae Skye,”

practically not at all in "The Aspen Tree" or the "Death Croon." In the "Coll Nurse's Lilt" it takes the form of a *leaning* only on the arresting two crotchets wherever they occur. Thus, the absence of the time-swerve may express the inevitableness of Fate, or again a certain naivety, or again a mere rocking hypnotic indulgence in impersonal rhythm.

ACCENTS.—Studies in very long-breathed phrasing, such as "Dance to your Shadow," call for a very careful restraint in the matter of accent. I myself sing the eight lines of the verse here in one breath, and breathe on the first note of the refrain, letting the piano give the missing accent. Accents let you down. On a long throw like this the fiercest economy must be practised, only a slight leaning being given to the determining words *good, fine, hard, sore*. And of course here is essential a perfected art of articulation.

ARTICULATION.—First, study your words. What do they mean? What is the atmosphere, the mood, that gave them birth? Next, what are they made of? What the vowel sounds, the consonants, used by the maker of them to call up the mood, the atmosphere, or to depict a scene, a happening? Look at Kenneth Macleod's English lyric, "The Reiving Ship" (vol. 2), founded on an ancient Hebridean rune. In the lines "*Grinds beneath her gray-blue limpets, Crunches curving whelks to sand-drift,*" with his *grs* and *crs* he makes us feel the ecstatically hurrying vessel *scrape* her way out through the narrows to the sea. With his "*sweeps she gaily Moola's water, Kyles, and Moyles,*" etc., with its liquid flowing *ls* and its beautiful vowels, the vessel is floating out beyond all friction.

Apropos this "Reiving Ship," which is a pirates' song, a baritone asked me if Kenneth Macleod in the line "gleaming isles of blades and laughter" meant grass blades! The line evidently did not bring up to *his* mind the white teeth of the cruel reivers and the glitter of their weapons. The same singer, by the way, said to me that he was temperamental, that he did not "go in for" rhythm! Oh, all ye singers that think that your temperament, whatever that may be, can dispense with rhythm—the eternal motive-power of the universe—leave severely alone the art of song.

In Agnes Mure Mackenzie's "Coastwise Song" (vol. 1, new edition, also published separately), what a picture the words "tumbling seas" give us of the easy might of the sea; and her "drifting rain" in the last verse competes with Shakespeare's "leave not a wrack behind" as depicting the gossamer nothingness of man's inventions. Now you must be alive to the expressional possibilities of such consonantal media, and in the case of *tumbling* and *drifting* I would recommend a slight *leaning* on the resonant *m* and a prolongation, a filling-up of the time-duration, with the breath-escape *f* instead of (in orthodox fashion) with the vowel sound.

Apropos the giving duration occasionally to the consonant instead of the vowel, I recommend in "Kirsteen" (vol. 2) that the first syllable of the name *Kirsteen* (which I have marked staccato) should again fill in the space between it and the second syllable with a soft hiss of the *s*. We have no notation for such effects—staccato so far as the vowel is concerned while the consonant "carries on."

Make a close study and earnest practice of consonants, and, in so doing, by repetition, take them as you find

them functioning in speech and song, not as you would name them.

Another case of tone-painting by means of consonantal prolongation is found in "The Blessing of the Road" (vol. 3). This song is reminiscent in some way of the jingle-jangle of harness on a trotting horse and of the throb of its hoofs on the hard road. To get the full effect here, the *n* of *hin*, *din*, *dan* must usurp more space than is generally accorded it. Also, give each of the three syllables an equal stress.

These of course are deviations from the normal for the sake of tone-painting. Normally, it is the vowel that is stretched out to meet the needs of melodic tone-duration. Learn to be keenly alive to the beauty and characteristic emotional and artistic values of the vowels which are quite independent of the dictionary meaning of the words that contain them. The vowel refrains of some of the old songs are extraordinary examples of this. For instance, in "Macneill of Barra" (vol. 1), we have the Italian vowels *i-o-u-o-* in smooth succession, and these must flow one into the other. In order to make my verses fit into the scheme, I finished each verse with a monosyllable ending in a vowel, and I meant this vowel sound to take its place as part of the series and flow into the vowel refrain.

As to this liquid flow of refrain syllables, in "The Dowerless Maiden" the liquid *l* in *reel* must flow into the next syllable as though it were a prolonged double *l*, thus:—*reel-lie*. (I refer to the Italian fashion of doubling a consonant without any intervening sound or

break whatever.) This *reel-lie* must pass liquidly, musically, over the high grace note.\*

I have given a guide to Gaelic pronunciation in vol. 1 of the "Songs of the Hebrides," but would like to call special attention here to the *io* in *Caristiona*, which so many mispronounce *Caristioh-na*. The *o* that follows *i* here is a mere *vanish* vowel and need not be heard at all. The important vowel is *i* (= *ee*), and with the *t* preceeding it sounds *tchee* as in the English word *cheer*. The last repetition of the cry in this song may be taken an octave lower.

BREATH CONTROL IN ARTICULATION.—When you have studied your words you must practice their articulation. This must be achieved by a breath control that can exercise a fierce economy, largely because mentally we are not concerned with it at all but only with the use we are making of it, linking together the jewel-like vowels by means of the consonants, every one of which we have learnt to conscientiously execute. We must clearly perceive, for instance, that *f* and other such-like breath sounds are not *vocal* at all, are indeed the very opposite of voice or vowel sound, and yet must be hitched off and on to the neighbouring vowels without the faintest cessation of direct breath control. Am I asking for a counsel of perfection? Unless we *aim* at this, unless we realise and can consciously *use* the technical expressional possibilities of our consonants and vowels, we can never become singers whose art

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\* When, in attempted phonetics, I used inverted commas in the songs, I mean that the syllable within is a familiar English word and is to be pronounced as such. In phonetics, by the way, when I use *ch* as in *veech* ("Vow Song of the Birds," vol. 3), rhyming with the German *ich*, I always mean this soft sound, never *tch* as in *veitch*.



conceals art. But if you make ever for a freer and freer throat, a lighter, easier, crisper, more forward articulation, so that all that you *sense* in the song may come through, in this pursuit you will keep ever young, ever mounting the alluring path to perfection, an unending path on which you will learn, in Kenneth Macleod's words, the "joy of seeking, joy of ne'er finding" !

In another pamphlet of this series I have dealt with the pronunciation of Lowland Scots. In some of our translations from the Hebridean, when a humorous sense has to be conveyed, we make use of Lowland Scots. Thus in *The Old Crone's Lilt*, "When I was young, a maiden so shy I was," at the words *hirplin down*, pronounce the latter as if spelt *doon*. In "The Handsome Lad frae Skye" we have "All *oor* cattle, *a' oor* kye." In "The Two Cronies" we have "Tho' your *ain head's* gray, *auld fule*, ye've little sense, if sense *ava'*." These words will all be found classified as to pronunciation among the Lowland Scots.

But note that the word *ewes* in "The Dowerless Maiden" is to be pronounced as the English word *use*, and the word *waken* in "The Island Herd-maid" as *way-kin*, not *waukin* as it would be in the Lowland Scots "Ay wakin' O."

All that has been said with regard to Hebridean Song applies equally to the songs of the Highland areas that do not marge on the Western Shores. We are all of the same race or blend of races and speak the same tongue, although musically the influence of the seas may count for much in the songs of the Hebrides.

And now I would say to all young singers : after you have made long, repeated, and *thought-full* study and practice of your work, when it comes at last to public performance, let all self-consciousness be completely burnt out in the flame of your enthusiasm for the materialisation of your vision. True interpretation is not imitation, however clever, of a teacher's or other artist's performance, nor is it mimicry of the original, which is perilously near caricature. In true interpretation we enter into the mood, character, personality to be "interpreted." We perceive this clearly, vividly, and in that clear vision our own self-consciousness disappears. We can then project beyond ourselves the shape, the form, which our concept is to take musically, and we thereupon consciously use our own bodily means as the instrument through which to convey this vision to others.

This may seem a long-winded way of putting it, but I want you to realise that we must have vision *at the moment of performance*. In my pamphlet on Lowland Song in this series (an Introduction to its Interpretation) I have dealt at much greater length than this with the need for vividness of conception of character, mood, or landscape to be conveyed, all of which play such a large part in the psychology of Scots Song—Lowland, Highland, or Hebridean. And I would have you read the two pamphlets in conjunction, whether you are specialising in the one class of song or the other. For interpretation is a two-sided shield—on the one side concept, on the other performance ; and this is as true of the rendering of Hebridean as of Lowland song, although I may have stressed more the concept in the one paper and the performance in the other.

But now, how to attain this power of vision? We must live in sympathy with the joys and sorrows and idiosyncracies of others; we must steep ourselves in literature; we must learn to feel the music of the painter's art, and that also of the poets in plastic form—the architects and sculptors. But, most of all, we must allow ourselves to be played upon by that great artist, Nature herself, Nature as she manifests herself in our own Scotland, whose mood-landscapes lie behind the true lyrical outpourings of all her children.



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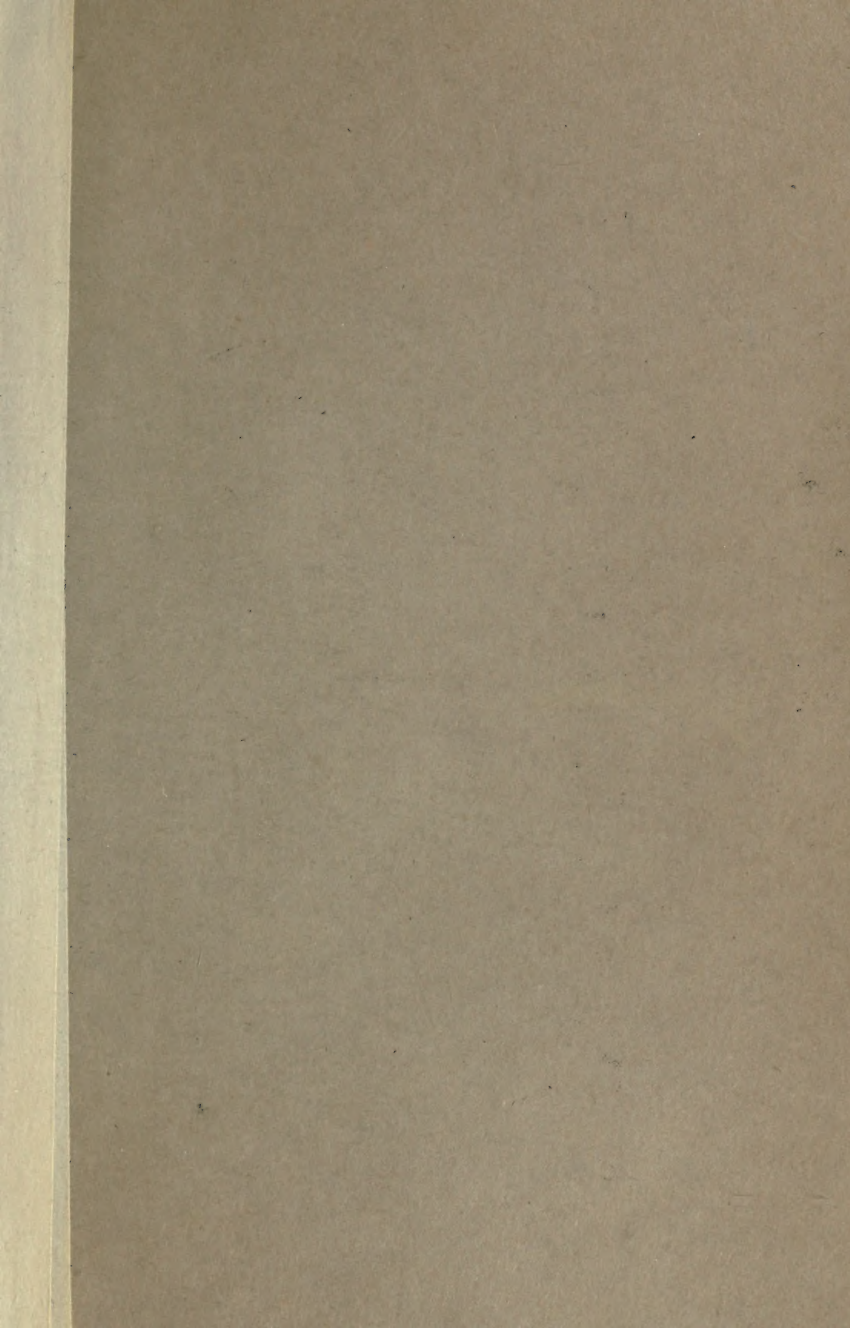
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