

Fiddle Tune History

By Andrew Kuntz

Vive La! (Part Two)

[Ed note: Part One of this article appeared in the Summer 2013 issue. That installment, following some intrigue about the French Revolution's repercussions in England, Scotland, and Ireland, included transcriptions of Robert Bremner's "I'm Over Young to Marry" and Niel Gow's "Loch Erroch Side." We learned that Robert Burns had reworked the song version of "I'm Over Young to Marry," retitling it "I am my mammy's ae bairn," and that lyrics to "Loch Erroch Side" had been composed by an Edinburgh scribe named James Tytler (we also learned about his interesting though sad life). The story continues below.]

Tytler's song was not the only famous Scottish song to be set to "Loch Erroch Side," for the melody caught the ear of Carolina Oliphant of Gask (1766-1845), Lady Nairne, whose father and grandfather joined the Jacobite rebellion of Bonny Prince Charlie in 1745. With the failure of the rebellion, the Oliphant family's fortunes collapsed in Perthshire, but Carolina was born into the post-Jacobite sympathies—she herself had been named after the Young Pretender (Carolina being the feminine form of Charles), so it is perhaps not surprising that many of her songs were sympathetic to the Jacobite cause. Carolina was renowned as the "Flower of Strathearn" because of her beauty, but it wasn't until 1824 that she was able to get her lands and title restored, and became Lady Nairne.

Like Robert Burns, Carolina's song was not entirely original with her either, for she adapted a slightly older song called "Kate o' Gowrie" that had originally been written by William Reid (1764–1831), a Glasgow bookseller and sometime poet. Her "Lass o' Gowrie" actually mirrors Reid's song in the first stanzas, diverging at the end, and it is debatable whether she actually improved the song with her changes. She had the reputation, however, as it was her "Lass o' Gowrie" that was requested by Queen Victoria for a recital by noted singer of Scots songs John Wilson, when she visited Taymouth Castle in 1842. Carolina's lyric begins:

*'Twas on a simmer's afternoon,
A wee afore the sun gaed down,
A lassie wi' a brow new gown
Cam' owre the hills to Gowrie.
The rosebud washed in simmer's shower
Bloomed fresh within the sunny bower;
But Kitty was the fairest flower
That e'er was seen in Gowrie.*

As popular as the "Loch Erroch Side"/"Lass o' Gowrie"/"Vive La" melody was for songs, it was equally popular as an instrumental tune. A number of British army units adopted it as a regimental march.¹ It was the march of the 55th Foot, raised in Stirling, Scotland, in 1755. Although the regiment later became an English one (affiliated with the country of Westmoreland, in northwestern England), the melody was kept due to the regiment's Scottish roots. The 2nd battalion of The Border Regiment played "Lass of



*Carolina Oliphant, Lady Nairne, with her son William Murray Nairne
by Sir John Watson Gordon*

Gowrie" along with "John Peel" as their march tunes. Similarly, "Lass of Gowrie" was played by the 70th Regiment (originally raised in Glasgow in 1756), which became the 2nd Battalion of the East Surrey Regiment. The old 57th (West Middlesex) Regiment, which became the Middlesex Regiment in 1881, also chose "Lass of Gowrie" as their march for several years.

In England, Robert Whinham (1814-1893), a musician, teacher, composer, dancing master, and fiddler originally from Morpeth, Northumberland, set the tune (as "Lass o' Gowrie") with several variation settings in the Northumbrian tradition. However, the melody is better-known in England as the schottische "Over the Hills to Glory," collected from the Anglo concertina playing of William Kimber (1872-1961) by Cecil Sharp at the end of the 19th century. The title "Over the Hills to Glory" is a phrase associated with an incident in southern England. In 1873 sixteen women from Ascott-under-Wychwood were imprisoned for a short time for their part in forming an agricultural workers union, when they sought to prevent "scabs" from replacing their men on the farm. Known as the "Ascott Martyrs," the women garnered much public sympathy and quite a bit of sympathetic press, and as a result were hastily pardoned by Queen Victoria. A placard on the village green reads: "This seat was erected to celebrate the centenary of the Ascott Martyrs, the 16 women who were sent to prison in 1873 for the part they played in the founding of the Agricultural Workers Union when they were sent 'over the hills to glory'."

The tune "Vive La" never left Ireland, in both song and instrumental versions. The song version was once again adapted for the song "Clare's Dragoons," by Thomas Osborne Davis (1814-1845), poet and patriot who was born in Mallow, Co. Cork. Davis became a lawyer and immersed himself in Irish politics and literature, writing numerous essays and poems for *The Nation*. His songs, including "The Lament for Owen Roe O'Neill," "Clare's Dragoons," "A Nation Once Again," "The West's Asleep," and "My Grave" are still popular. "Clare's Dragoons," printed in *The Nation* around 1840, is an ode to the Irish units—including Clare's Dragoons—who fought on the Continent, often in the service of France.

*When, on Ramillies' bloody field,
The baffled French were forced to yield,
The victor Saxon backward reeled
Before the charge of Clare's dragoons.
The flags we conquered in that fray,
Look lone in Ypres' choir, they say,
We'll win them company today,
Or bravely die like Clare's dragoons.*

*Viva la, for Ireland's wrong!
Viva la, for Ireland's right!
Viva la, in battle throng,
For a Spanish steed and sabre bright!*

Lass O'Gowrie

Musical notation for "Lass O'Gowrie" in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The piece consists of four staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody is written in a single line. The second staff starts at measure 5, the third at measure 9, and the fourth at measure 14. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Over the Hills to Glory

Musical notation for "Over the Hills to Glory" in G major (one sharp) and common time (C). The piece consists of four staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody is written in a single line. The second staff starts at measure 3, the third at measure 5, and the fourth at measure 7. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

The same melody as “Clare’s Dragoons” can be found in the Scottish song “Happy We’ve Been A’ Thegither,” which demonstrates the continued strength of the melody in that country. The lyric has been credited to Robert Burns, but may also have been by Daniel Macphail, and is sometimes sung at the end of a Scottish convivial evening, much as “Auld Lang Syne” or “We’re No Awa Tae Bide Awa” is.

“Clare’s Dragoons” was also adapted for an American Civil War song from c. 1862, entitled “The 12th Regiment, New York State Militia,” a stirring martial lyric along the lines of “Clare’s Dragoons,” that boasted of besting the “rebels” and “traitors” in the American South. Professor Samuel Bayard collected a reel version of the melody from a southwestern Pennsylvania fiddler named Emery Martin in 1946. Martin said he had learned it from Max Hohl, another local fiddler whom he described as a “soldier in the Spanish War” (1898). Hohl called his tune “Rocky Road to Dublin,” a floating title applied to several unrelated tunes.

At present, the tune’s strength resides not with the song versions but with the instrumental ones that have been adapted as marches or polkas in Ireland. It was being played in the early 1980s by a Munster fife and drum band playing for the Dingle “Wren,” a St. Stephen’s Day tradition in that part of Ireland², and “Clare’s Dragoons” is occasionally played as a march in modern sessions. There are several polka versions of the tune. Bernard O’Sullivan and Tommy MacMahon played it in their set “Stack Ryan’s Polkas” from their 1975 album *Clare Concertinas*, named for their source for the melody. Renowned County Kerry button accordion player Johnny O’Leary called it “Tom Billy’s Polka,” after Tom Billy Murphy of Kingwilliamstown (1879-1944), an influential fiddler in the Sliabh Luachra region of the Cork/Kerry border. Dublin flute and whistle player Brian O’Connor, of the band Oisín, recorded the polka as “The Spent Money” on his 1999 solo debut album *Come West Along The Road*. Many Irish session players will be familiar with it as the polka “Lakes of Sligo,” first printed



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under that title in 1949 in Jerry O’Brien’s *Accordion Instructor*. O’Brien was a button accordion player from Boston, originally from Kinsale, County Cork, who played with O’Leary’s Irish Minstrels and Dan Sullivan’s Shamrock Band. He was the mentor of many Boston musicians, including his star student and sometime playing partner Joe Derrane (b. 1930). The title “Lakes of Sligo” was derived from a song recorded in Boston in the 1950s by Connie Foley, who was accompanied by Derrane’s trio. Finally, “Spanish Lady,” another Irish polka, is a related melody; musically distanced from the root melody to be sure, taking it in different directions.

¹ *Music of the Scottish Regiments*, David Murray, Edinburgh, 1994.

² *Green and Gold*, Steve MacDonogh

[Andrew Kuntz is the author of a book of old time songs and tunes called *Ragged But Right* (1987) as well as the on-line tune encyclopedia “*The Fiddlers’ Companion*” (www.ibiblio.org/fiddlers). When not researching tunes, he enjoys playing in Irish music sessions.]

Clare’s Dragoons

