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Reviews

William Thomson (ed.). *Orpheus Caledonius: A collection of Scots songs set to music*. Hatboro, Pa. Folklore Associates. 1962. 2 vol. in one. \$10.00 (Facsimile reprint).

The historical importance of the *Orpheus Caledonius* (1725) is that it was the first collection of Scottish songs that printed music as well as words; and it appeared in London, not in Scotland, in order to "cash in on" the fashion for Scottish and pseudo-Scottish verse and music then sweeping the Court of George and Caroline. The present reprint is of the two volume edition of 1733, which contained an additional hundred songs in all; deleted the unhistorical attribution of certain melodies to David Rizzio that disfigured the 1725 edition; and replaced the original "wayward bass" with what H. G. Farmer, in his foreword to this facsimile, describes as "something better." Like the 1725 edition, Vol. I of the 1733 *Orpheus* included Thomson's original dedicatory epistle to the Princess of Wales, now the Queen, with its statement that "Your Majesty having graciously heard some of the following songs" (presumably sung by Thomson himself) "encouraged me to resolve on publishing them;" and it also printed the introductory lines *On Mr. Thomson's Orpheus Caledonius* (1725), which state quite clearly what the court and the aristocracy chose to see in Scottish song:

Love's brightest flames warm *Scottish* Lads,
Tho' coolly clad in High-land Plads;
They scorn Brocade, who like the Lass,
Nor need a Carpet, if there's Grass;
With Pipe and Glee each Hill resounds,
And Love that gives, can heal their Wounds.

And "kind Nature" fills the anonymous poets, composers and arrangers (in great measure, Allan Ramsay and his friends) as she fills "the gay Warblers of the Spring" with "sweet and unaffected Notes." Thus artificial verse paid tribute to simplicity and passion in 1725, as it was to do twenty-four years later, when Collins wrote his *Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland*.

Yet the *Orpheus Caledonius* is by no means the first indication of a vogue for Scottish music in England. As Mr. Farmer points out, Henry

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Playford in 1700 brought out *A Collection of Original Scotch-Tunes (Full of Highland Humours) for the Violin: being the first of its kind yet printed*; and — a point not noted by Mr. Farmer — in the second half of the seventeenth century English music publishers often included Scots airs in their compilations, such as *Apollo's Banquet* (1691), Playford's *Musick's Delight on the Cithren* (1666), and *Musick's Recreation on the Viol* (1652). As far back as 1651, John Playford printed Scottish tunes in his *English Dancing Master*; a Highlander's March and a Scots March were added to the 1665 edition; and in the 1669 edition "Johnny cock up thy beaver" appears. One of the most popular London singers in the decade before 1688 was John Abell, who included "Katherine Ogie" in his repertoire; and the references in Pepys's diary are familiar, as when on 2 Jan. 1666 Mrs. Knipp sings the "little Scotch song of Barbary Allen" or on 28 July of the same year he hears Scotch fiddle music at Lord Lauderdale's — "but, Lord! the strangest ayre that ever I heard in my life, and all of one cast." As Shakespearian and other references prove, Scottish music and song were known and valued in England from late Elizabethan times onwards. It follows, then, that William Thomson's *Orpheus* must be seen as a point along a line of development rather than as the start of an altogether new process. If Collins' *Ode* already referred to and Gray's *The Bard* (not to speak of James Thomson's *Rule Britannia*) document the eighteenth century attempt to achieve a new super-nationality that should be British rather than English or Welsh or Scottish, then so too, do Thomson's *Orpheus*, the forty Scots or pseudo-Scots tunes in d'Urfey's *Pills to Purge Melancholy* (ed. 1719-20), the many Scots songs in Gay's *Beggar's Opera* and *Polly*, and — above all — Allan Ramsay's *Tea Table Miscellany*, predominantly Scottish, but whose third volume consisted entirely of *English* songs.

Though he quotes Allan Ramsay's complaint that the words of most of Thomson's songs were really Ramsay's, Mr. Farmer does not dwell on Thomson's plagiarism, nor does he bring out that Alexander Stuart's *Musick for Allan Ramsay's Collection of Scots Songs Edinr: Printed and Sold by Allan Ramsay* was almost certainly an answer to the 1725 edition of the *Orpheus*. It is sometimes stated that a complete set of Stuart's Collection does not exist, but the late Harry M. Wilsher found copies of all the airs in Stuart's six volumes in the Wighton Collection in the Central Library of Dundee. Comparing Stuart and Thomson, Wilsher wrote: "Over ninety of the airs in the *Tea Table Miscellany* appear in the two volumes of the *Orpheus Caledonius*, but Stuart and Thomson hardly ever provide the same version of an air. Sometimes the differences are small; sometimes they are considerable. As a rule, Stuart's

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versions are less simple than Thomson's and are marked by a greater elaboration and ornament. About a dozen airs are found in Stuart's volumes which do not appear in the *Orpheus Caledonius*. ("Music in Scotland during three centuries (1450-1750), being contributions towards the history of music in Scotland," 3 pts. Unpublished doctoral thesis, St. Andrews, 1945, Part II, p. 58). But if Stuart's music is more elaborate than Thomson's, Thomson's is in its turn more complicated — more "art" and less "folk" — than versions of the same airs found in earlier MSS., such as the Agnes Hume MS. in the National Library of Scotland. Wilsher comments that this development is only what we would expect from the evolution of eighteenth century taste, and he criticises the *Orpheus Caledonius* because its

fitment of words to music is sometimes indifferent, often awkward and occasionally thoroughly bad. In the Bonny Earle of Murray and others, especially where the method is one note, one syllable, the fitment is perfect: but too often elsewhere, the accent is on a weak syllable and at other times the sense of the text is killed by the angular and awkward arrangement of the musical phrases. In "Absent from the Nymph I love," the muscular accent comes on the second syllable of the word "fairer." In "Mary Scot," the definite articles and prepositions are given prominence on the first note of the bar without reason, when a little adjustment would have avoided the awkwardness: actually the version of this air chosen by Thomson with its octave leaps for the voice and commonplace "quaverings" is a poor thing compared with the version in the Agnes Hume MS. Doubtless . . . much was left to the singer's ingenuity. . . . As for the accompaniments, they are of the sketchiest and dullest sort, unless Thomson merely meant them as a guide for a skilled performer to fill in a fuller background." (*Ibid.*, pp.57-8)

Mr. Farmer's Foreword repeats the error (also found in his introduction to the 1962 facsimile reprint of the *Scots Musical Museum*) that the *Tea Table Miscellany*, Vol. I, was first published in 1724, and his rather coy approval of Ramsay's "softening" of his bawdy originals is hardly in accord with the spirit of most modern folksong scholars. He has some interesting comments on the bibliography of the *Orpheus*.

The publishers are to be commended on issuing this invaluable reprint. Every library should buy two copies — one for its literature and another for its musical collection; and it should be brought to the attention of folksingers in every part of the world.

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