

INTRODUCTION

COURT-SONG OF SIXTEENTH-CENTURY SCOTLAND

THE SIXTEENTH century was a great one in the music of western Europe, an age distinguished in the cultivation of court-song. On the occasions when the development of music in western Europe is described, small mention if any is made of musical culture in Scotland during those hundred years—the last decades of the Middle Ages and the first of the Renaissance in a remote northern kingdom¹. Yet during that great century of part-writing there was part-music composed and enjoyed there, part-song sacred and secular, indigenous to the country and in touch with the music of France, England and the Netherlands, even with that of far-away Italy.

As long as Scotland had a court, a repertory of art-song existed, changing and developing in its own way, somehow surviving periods of violence when court-life itself was in abeyance. The sacred part-music of the Catholic Church was succeeded by the part-music of the Reformed Kirk. As late as 1632, when King Charles was to visit his northern kingdom—a kingdom deprived of a resident court since the Union of the Crowns in 1603—a body of ‘old Scotch musick’ was in being; its presence on the shelves of the Chapel Royal in Scotland was noted, alongside ‘all sorts of English, French, Dutch, Spaynish, Latin and Italian’ music vocal and instrumental.² This repertory of part-music never reached print but for the issues of one late and isolated part-book. By 1701 it had passed from memory.

An anthology of this early Scottish part-music of church and court was published for the first time in the national series *Musica Britannica* as volume XV, *Music of Scotland 1500–1700*.³ This anthology ranges from mass and motet of Latin church music to fine psalm-setting whose words are in the vernacular, from early unaccompanied dance-song to four-part song in the *chanson* style, from *air-de-cour* to regional dance-song, and it includes instrumental music for viols, for cittern and for keyboard.

¹ See introductory note to Bibliography.

² ‘Information touching the Chapell-Royal of Scotland’—a letter to the King from E. Kellie, January 1631/2 printed in Dauney, Appendix iv.

³ Edited by Kenneth Elliott, song texts edited by Helena Mennie Shire. Introduction and notes etc. by Elliott and Shire (1957); second edition (1964) gives new sources and a list of publications in this field.

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Of this music only a remnant survives from what must have been a rich repertory, for years of violence and neglect had done their work of destruction. Indeed the dice of history were weighted against the very production of courtly part-music in Scotland: over the hundred years from 1503 to 1603 there were short periods only when there existed at all in Scotland the stable court culture centred on an adult monarch that would seem to provide the minimal condition of growth for court-song. Yet court-song there was, and enough of it survives to show creative vitality overcoming the severest odds. Future historians of music in western Europe must find room not only for a tribute to Scotland's treasury of 'folk-song'—music of the regional dance-song and of traditional balladry—but also for consideration of its cultivation of part-writing sacred and secular, its contribution to art-song of courtly ambience. Art-song of the court in sixteenth-century Scotland, its character, its origins and its history, is the subject of these studies.

Court-song is song enjoyed by a courtly company. It may be engendered in that company or received into it from courtly circles elsewhere or it may enter from another social milieu. Court-song is art-song, the work of a skilled musician. In the sixteenth century it was usually part-song, in three or in four parts apt for viols or voices; such song might on occasion be rendered by the single voice and lute. The Scots had a term for such song: part-writing sacred or secular, for voices or instruments, was known as *musik fyne* or *fine musick*. (The phrase appears as entitling in the music manuscripts.) Words and music of other ambience—'popular song' or 'folk-song', regional dance-air of Scotland or international dance-tune, even on occasion music of the church—might by adoption and grooming become court-song. Contrariwise, after birth or breeding as a song of the court, as *musik fyne*, a court-song might pass outwards to castle, burgh or song-school into a wide and varied currency.

Court-song of Scotland is court-song of the sixteenth century: we can study only what has happened to survive the violent courses of Stewart history, and the destructive force of the Reformation. During the Middle Ages there was courtly making of words and music round the Scottish monarch; that we know from traveller's description, from accounts of royal expenditure and from the poetry of the period. Indeed a festal song in Latin has come down to us from an occasion of state in early times, the wedding of Princess Margaret of Scotland to King Eric II of Norway, in 1290.¹ But the earliest pieces in the vernacular whose age we know come from the year 1503, from the social celebrations of the marriage of King James IV to the English Princess, Margaret Tudor. The songs are part-songs, 'Now fayre, fayrest off every fayre. . . Welcum of Scotland to be Quene' and ' . . . red rosse fayre and sote of

¹ John Beveridge, 'Two Scottish Thirteenth-century Songs'.

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sent'.¹ Both songs have survived in fragment only. Both songs were recorded in English manuscripts, brought back doubtless by returning wedding guests. To judge by the sense of the words, the second song may be English in origin whereas the first is patently Scottish.

Of court life under King James IV we are well informed. A detailed and perceptive account was given by a visitor from Spain, de Ayala, while a rich and humorous picture of the King and the company about him, their personalities, pastimes and celebrations, rises from the pages of the poet William Dunbar. The Treasurers' Accounts show a Household Music of some strength and a Chapel Royal set up afresh in princely style in the year 1501.² We know that during this king's lifetime and through the decades that followed there was fine sacred music being written in Scotland notably by Robert Carver, Canon of Scone. But from that reign and that court no trace of the music of secular song can now be found, other than the fragmentary wedding pieces.

King James IV and his court were defeated in battle and destroyed in 1513 at Flodden Field. This disaster meant an infant prince on the throne, a foreign Lord Governor in office who was for the most part *in absentia* abroad and a Queen Mother unsuited to rule who married and remarried among her subjects. The infant King was brought up in safe retirement at Stirling. To speak of court-life in the public sense we must wait ten years until his adolescence.

This prince, King James V, was musical and musically educated and he wrote verse with skill and ease. His formal education was put an end to early in his 'teens. In 1524 a powerful faction 'planted in his hand the government of all Scotland'. With the Queen Mother of their party, they or other power groups indulged and debauched the youthful King but kept him for some years 'in cure', under their control. This period has been described by David Lyndsay in verses of satiric vein. We know that the King's entourage was not without its poetry and music, 'plays' and minstrelsy. But of court-song, words and music complete, again nothing has come down to us, though some fine sacred music has survived.

A third phase of King James's life-story sees him escaped from this bondage and attaining rule in his own person. From 1528 he was head of a lively court of lords and ladies, favourites and mistresses, where royal favour was the way to 'win lands'. Here the social pleasures were actively pursued, riding and the chase, music and the dance, mummings and masquerades, games like the Italian *giuochi* and 'plays' or mimic performances. The young Stewart King was 'King of Love' in a court where

¹ 'Now fayre' B.M. MS Royal Appendix 58: words attributed to William Dunbar... 'red rosse': New York Public Library MS Drexel 4180. See Shire, *The Thrissil, the Rois and the Flour-de-lys*, p. 7; listed by John Stevens, *Music and Poetry in the Early Tudor Court*, Appendix B No. 273 a.

² Details available in Charles Rogers, *The History of the Chapel Royal of Scotland*.

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épîtres galantes and love-songs were in currency as well as lewd and ribald lampoon and satire.

A fourth chapter of his reign opens with his wooing journey to the Continent in 1536 and his bringing home from France as consort the Princess Madeleine. On her early death he married Marie de Lorraine, of the powerful family of Guise. The court of these years, Franco-Scottish in sympathy and in style, came to an untimely end with the King's death in 1542.

The gifts and personal taste of this Stewart monarch are important and deserve to be remembered along with his reputation for avarice and debauchery. His active participation in music-making is attested by Thomas Wode in one of his invaluable annotations to his Part-Books: 'King James was a good musician himself. . . but his voice was harsh.'

King James' own letters record his delight as a young man in the companionship of a visitor from Italy who provided him all one long winter with the pleasures of part-music: in a letter King James begs Maximilian Duke of Milan, from whose court this Thomas de Averencia had come and to whom he was now returning, to allow him to visit Scotland again.¹ An early act in the King's personal reign was to restore and re-endow the Chapel Royal which had fallen on hard times during his troubled minority. Cherishing of musical culture here joins with religious enthusiasm of a Catholic prince and pious concern to maintain the Chantry Chapel of his royal ancestors, so many of them violent in their deaths. It is not surprising that the court under this music-loving monarch should have produced *fine musick* both secular and sacred.

The King's participation in the 'writing game' at court is borne witness to by Sir David Lyndsay, who had been his 'gouvernant' in infancy and was later court servitor and Lyon King at Arms. We have, indeed, Lyndsay's reply to the King's 'flyting' though we lack the royal verses of bantering invective. Lyndsay had been accused by his royal master of being 'no more valiant in Venus' works' and his reply, couched as 'advice to the prince', is a dignified rebuke. There is good reason for attributing to the court of this prince and his companions a substantial number of verse pieces of a courtly amorous nature including poems by [George] Steill royal favourite, 'Clapperton' of the Chapel Royal and Sir John Fethy, priest and musician. For several of these there was music. Sometimes kinship with Tudor England can be traced in songs of this time, which is understandable when we recall the intermittent presence at court of the Tudor Queen Mother and the attendance there from time to time of musicians from the south. A number of fine songs, however, show the

¹ Thomas de Averencia of Brescia, *The Letters of James V, 1513-42*; R. K. Hannay and Denys Hay, pp. 163, 169-70.

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Franco-Scottish style in its first blossoming, from the years when King James had a French princess as queen. Song in the 'style King James V' as I call it, coming from the years between 1528 and 1542 is a prominent theme in these studies; but the full-length portrait of this reign and its music and poetry, its musicians and poets and its court pastimes is reserved for a future volume.

The death of King James V in 1542 saw once more disaster for Scotland and 'the monarch a child'. His newborn daughter was Mary, Queen of Scots. A long minority ensued with the country rent by the civil and religious strife of the years of Reformation and harried by invasion. It is hard to envisage over these years a court-life in which court-song might flourish. Some song-making is traceable, however, to circles round the French Queen Mother, Marie; some 'plays' and devisings attended ceremonial occasions under the Lord Governor. But a settled hearth for established music of the royal household and for courtly 'making' was lacking over many years.

The personal reign of Queen Mary from the time of her return to Scotland in 1562 certainly included days and nights of 'balling and dancing'. Her 'stand' of musicians and singers for part-singing gave to David Rizzio, Italian secretary with a fine singing voice, the opportunity to step into royal favour. Queen Mary's reign in Scotland was short. Little remains of the fashionable and sophisticated song, dance and devising at her court that so affronted the powers of the Reformation.

The long years of her imprisonment in England did not mean that the 'Scotch Quene' ceased to exist as a court lady. As a force in politics she was notoriously active. As a force of inspiration or patronage to poet or musician she was, although impoverished and in prison, still quite remarkably potent. Makers of court-song, poet and musician Catholic in their sympathies were, as we shall see, attendant on her 'shadow court'.

It is with the reign of her son, King James VI, that our full-length study of court-song and its making can begin, with pieces of which we know the author, the date of composition and the occasion of commission or presentation. The date and seat of our principal interest is the first decade of King James VI's personal rule and his courtly company over those years, from 1579 when he was thirteen years old and emerged from tutelage until 1590 when he married. Thereafter until the end of the story in 1603 the hazards of time, destruction and neglect have left us tantalising traces only of court-song and its making. We can read contemporary descriptions of ceremonies for a queen's coronation or a birth of a prince, devisings in which words and music played a part, but of the songs themselves only vestiges remain.

It was exactly one hundred years after the making of 'Now fayre' and 'Red rosse' that Scotland lost her royal court. In 1603 King James VI of Scotland went south to

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claim the throne of England. His court went with him and from that time onwards, apart from brief presence of the sovereign on state visit, in arms or in flight, Scotland lacked a court and lacked any settled focus for the making and enjoyment of court-song. Apart from the running bids for favour made by the would-be courtiers during the visits of King James in 1617 or King Charles in 1633, poets and musicians in Scotland lacked the opportunity of employment or patronage offered by a court and a courtly audience—and all chance of recognition or advancement was at an end in the north.

Not in its history only but in its geography also Scotland asks for individual consideration as a ground for the cultivation of courtly song. Remote and peripheral among countries of western Europe, it was cut off for more than half the year by impassable weather; poor in resources and undeveloped in comparison with England or France, it was yet, according to its powers, proud in princely state: torn by faction it was yet alert to foreign politics.

Scotland's remoteness in terms of Europe in general, the peripheral nature of its culture, made it retentive of old style. Its window open on the ancient Celtic culture of the far west, its turbulent history, its uneasy relations with its island neighbour, England, together with its strong ties of affinity with France—all these laid down a pattern of politico-cultural relations in which the making and development of its courtly part-song may be traced in bright threads. To do so is the pleasant task I have set myself in this book.

The book is planned as a series of linked studies rather than as a continuous exposition in chapters. Each study aims at taking new bearings on its topic. New facts are to the fore or a familiar tract of thought is renewed by cross-fertilisation with thought in another discipline. Poetry is taken with music, dance or ceremony; 'lyric' forms are examined along with song-styles or patterns of the figured dance; song in Scotland is related to song elsewhere in Europe; political history is considered pertinent to the devising of courtly entertainment.

At the same time this series of studies has a chronological basis. First, the two great manuscript collections of the 1560s, George Bannatyne's 'Ballat Buik' and Thomas Wode's Part-Books or 'Psalter', are considered as main source-books of words and music of court-song. Beside these is placed the printed volume that gives moralised versions of many court-song texts. Later source-books are then briefly enumerated with a note on their nature and provenance. An analysis follows of some ways in which words and music were combined to make court-song.

At various points in the pages that follow I review briefly what possible ways there were in sixteenth-century Scotland of combining words and music with other elements, dance, spectacle, contest, joust or ceremony, in order to make a 'devising'

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for courtly participation or entertainment of a simple or more complex nature—the danced song, the sung romance, the interlude or *cartel*, the wedding psalm or mourning ‘mynd’. Verbal texts survive from several courtly ‘plays’ and many more of the court-songs, extant complete or in fragment, may indeed be residua of *fête* or ceremony, pastime or courtly celebration of seasonal rite.

The stage thus set, certain figures and phases of *Scottis Poesie* long familiar to literary critic and literary historian are brought to new account. Alexander Scott is considered as a maker of court-song, creator perhaps of music as well as words, living in courtly circles under King James V, possibly canon and organist of Inchmahome Priory under his daughter Mary, Queen of Scots, and present in old age at the court of his grandson, King James VI. Scott is revealed as an important factor for continuity in the making of court-song in Scotland.

Courtly making of *Scottis Poesie* under King James VI has often been chronicled and the story told of King James’ ‘Castalian band’ of poets and musicians. Now the poems are discussed with the music-for-the-words in mind. The making of court-song and its live presentation are linked to the royal *puy*; this activity, in the Scottish court, begun as a boyish ‘writing-game’ and advancing to princely status as an academy in little, is pondered as being in itself a kind of serious ‘play’, *lusus regius*, ‘His Majesty’s recreations at vacant hours’. How far royal policy was involved with poetry in the court of King James is adumbrated in a new reading of Montgomerie’s *The Cherrie and the Slae*. Montgomerie is studied as the chief maker of words for courtly part-music.

The investigation of court-song and its function in courtly society must pause at the year 1590 for paucity of surviving matter. The influence, however, of Castalian poetry and song is traced within the court to some younger writers hitherto unidentified and, without the court, to Robert Ayton. Impressed in youth by the poetry of the King’s circle, Ayton shows himself heir in matter and in manner to the ‘smoothly flowing’ Castalian verse. This bore fruit in his light and delightful court-songs that won wide favour under King James VI and I *in aula Britannica* and under his son King Charles.

A postscript traces the currency of Scottish court-song as it continued to be enjoyed in seventeenth-century Scotland, the part-song as long as singing to four voices was taught and practised, the monophonic song as long as music for voice with instrumental accompaniment current in the north embraced courtly song of Cavalier or Covenanter poet along with the ‘native airs’ or indigenous folk-songs of Scotland.

Throughout these studies the master theme is court-song, its making and enjoyment, studied in the context of society. My thesis is this: Poetry, sister of Rhetoric, was in courtly society of earlier times much concerned with public celebration, was

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frequently related to ceremony and was for the most part enjoyed aloud. Verses might of course be made for the inner ear, *épîtres galantes* for the private eye of the beloved rather than for her public praise, while narratives might be intended for silent reading as well as for enjoyment aloud in company. But where verse is found matched with music, performance is indicated. Enjoyment aloud of such a piece, where music is part-music, postulates a 'stand' or group of skilled performers, vocal or instrumental, and it postulates an audience.

Where verse is found as court-song we need to know the origin of the words and the origin of the music and also the way in which one was united with the other to form a part-song. As circumstances in which court-song was made, performed and enjoyed we look, then, for the work of the 'makar'—the Scots term for the maker of verses, the poet. We look for the presence of the 'musician', which word usually implied, over and above skill in musical performance, skill of musical composition or musical arrangement and the devising of pieces for presentation. We look also for the skilled musical personnel on the court's payment roll or in the service of near-by abbey or burgh kirk. We envisage, too, the occasion of performance and the nature of the audience and of its participation.

The makar in the Scottish court was unlikely to be supported *as makar*. (The case for Dunbar as in this sense the 'first example of a professional court-poet' has been exploded.) The poet might write for the love of it or to win fame or favour, from a niche as priest or chaplain to the Queen, Treasurer of the Chapel Royal or Keeper of the King's dogs, or as freelance courtier. The court-poet would present his work *in propyne* to King or noble as the honouring tribute-gift that looks for gracious recompense in cash or 'lands', place or pension. The composer also, hoping for advancement, might present work of his *in propyne*. But musicians as musicians were professional and must be maintained, as members of the Chapel Royal or Music of the Household, whether they were performers with voice or instrument or composers or both. Their services were on call, their skill at command or at commission. Court-song, then, is rooted in courtly society through employment or patronage, commission or *propyne*. In matter and in manner it is keyed into the conduct of affairs, through instigation in occasion and through reaction of a courtly audience. The roots of court-song in courtly society strike deeply by way of the words and even more deeply by way of the music.

In the course of these studies here are some of the questions I am interested to ask. Who made the songs, words and music? (Many of the pieces are undated and of unknown authorship.) How were the songs made and how presented? Were they sung and listened to as in a modern concert performance, the interest being primarily musical? Or was the meaning of the words of greater pertinence, the intention of the

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performance of more serious import? Did the performers simply sing or did they 'act in song'—sing with gesture and significant movement? When the music was music of the dance, were the songs danced by the singers or danced by a courtly company to the singers' music? (All three modes of performance are noticed by Bacon as in use in the 1580s, the second as 'vulgar' the first and third as 'a thing of great State and Pleasure' and 'having an extreme good grace'.)

For what reason was an individual song made, for general diversion or against a specific occasion? What part did the songs play, in their making and presentation, in the life of the court that engendered them? How significantly did courtly *magnificence*, pastime or *ludus* mirror the inner life of that court—in joust or bardic contest, masque for a wedding, *cartel* for a 'joyous entry' or love-song 'feygning' the service of 'Venus Queen'? Did such 'play' on occasion voice the profound concern of the court or of its king?

In his essay 'Of Masques and Triumphs' Bacon regarded it as above all important that the 'Ditty should be fitted to the Device', the song be pertinent to the central meaning of the action. It has of recent years come to be recognised that the 'device' of courtly ceremony or pageant, *ballet de cour*, 'joyous entry' or masque, was a well-pondered shaping of a propitious *doing*: prosperity was ensured by a pageant of the fruits of the realm, a schism in the nation could be mimed in dance and thus resolved, the King's coming could be greeted as the coming of Hercules or Alexander and their strength or might would accrue to him; a masque of peace and amity might prevent the evils of civil war. A courtly 'play' or '*magnificence*' partook of the nature of a singing and dancing magic.¹

From this point of critical interpretation I now move to investigate 'ditty' and 'device' in the court of Renaissance Scotland. This study of court-song and courtly making, of ceremony and 'play', dance and devising, has at its core the idea that such phenomena were of serious import, done for the eye of the monarch, enacted at the hub of national affairs—a 'making' for the court, the microcosm.

¹ Henry Prunières, *Le Ballet de Cour en France; Les Fêtes de la Renaissance* (symposium), C.N.R.S. (Paris, 1961); J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*; John Stevens, *Music and Poetry in the Early Tudor Court*, esp. chapter 9, 'The Game of Love'.

I

 THE BALLATIS PRESERVED

 THE CONDITION OF POETRY AND PART-SONG
 IN SCOTLAND IN 1568

IN WHAT circumstances did courtly music and poetry, song and dance find themselves, when, in the year 1568, the crown of Scotland passed to the infant King James VI? In such a sorry plight after the war-torn reign of his mother and the victory of the reforming powers that two men of imagination and culture determined to record and preserve the best of Scotland's poetry and part-music, lest all knowledge of it pass from the realm 'allutterlie'. They were George Bannatyne, who 'in time of pest' collected into his 'Ballat Buik' the best that he could lay hands on of Scotland's earlier and contemporary poetry, and Thomas Wode of St Andrews, who about this time began to compile his musical anthology of part-writing, drawing in music of the past—Scots, English and Continental, sacred and some secular—and commissioning part-writing from musicians composing in Scotland at that time.

A third collection of a very different nature dates also from the infant years of King James, a printed volume, '*Ane Compendious booke of godly and spirituall songs*', popularly known as 'The Gude and Godlie Ballatis'. There among psalms and songs of the Reformed Church were presented words of courtly part-songs of earlier Scotland now 'changeit' into moral and devotional pieces for singing through which Reformed doctrine might be spread.

A consideration of these three collections will show how each in its way contributed to preserve the 'ballatis' of earlier Scotland and keep in currency the kind of music with which their words were associated. It will show also what were the forces inimical at that time to a court culture of music and poetry, dance and song. These three volumes or sets of volumes in manuscript or print are the main source-books of earlier Scottish court-song.¹ For several reasons, then, some study of these three works will make a right beginning to this book.

¹ One or two songs by a Scottish musician were written down in England by the mid-century (*Music of Scotland* nos. 32 and 44) but only one of the Scottish manuscripts that contain court-song dates from that epoch—the Douglas-Fischear Part-Books—and they contain but the single example of secular song, incomplete and perhaps a late inscription.