

# Music and the Clan Irwin Association

## Part V

The Fiddle is a truly Scottish instrument that has been at the center of social activities in Scotland for hundreds of years. It quite likely developed independently although similar instruments existed in other countries. What sets it apart as a native instrument, is, of course, the music which is played on it. This includes a variety of tune-types, from solo pieces such as the plaintive Lament and graceful Air to the lively toe tapping dance tunes like Jigs, Reels and Strathspeys, often played as a Set, essential for Scottish Country Dance, and enjoyed in Celtic music sessions.

There are also different Regional styles of Scottish fiddling, which reflect the traditions of their cultures. From the Shetlands, there comes a bouncy and lively style with Norwegian influence. The Northeast style is more elegant and classically influenced, most probably from the French Courts. The West Coast/Gaelic/Highland style, home of the Strathspey, was greatly influenced by the bagpipes and Celtic immigration carried it across the Pond to shape the Cape Breton style. The fiddle music of the Borders (Irving territory) has the most in common with English and American fiddle styles and includes techniques that are commonly found in compositions written for two or more fiddlers. This music has been carried around the world, and, for me personally, is music which comforts my soul, lifts my spirit and makes me want to get up and dance!

In MacPherson's Rant and other tales of the Scottish Fiddle, (2004), Stuart McHardy writes "The role of the fiddle in Scotland is a long and chequered one." This thought is humorously illustrated by a tale he includes about a French soldier who visited Mary Queen of Scots in 1561 and reported that five or six hundred fiddlers came out to play for the Queen who were not professional musicians, but citizens of Edinburgh and that even "John Knox 'often portrayed as the personification of Puritanism', wrote positively about the same event". Amusing indeed, but the fiddle did get a bad rap at times over the years, as did the pipes and other Scottish traditions. Thank goodness, for us, it survived and will be enjoyed 'til the end of time!

And so, the fiddle is taking center stage this time, along with music which was written to be enjoyed by members of the Clan Irwin Association. Those of you who attended the Annual General Meeting in April were privileged to hear a live concert by Jamie Laval, acclaimed Scottish Fiddler who played a set of *The Irvings' Welcome to Bonshaw Tower*, a Strathspey, and *Kirtlewater*, a Reel. Many thanks to Jamie for also typesetting new scores and creating a midi file that is in our Music Folder in G Suites which links to our Website.

These tunes were composed by another famous Scottish Fiddler, Barbara McOwen as a commemorative set for Clan Irving in October 1990 and August 1991. This music came to the CIA originally from Gail Erwin of Galt, California, who brought the music to life on her Celtic Fiddle, recorded in Barbara's living room. She encouraged us to share the sheet music with pipers and fiddlers, in the hopes that they will perform the tunes at Irving, Irvine, Irwin, et al gatherings. An exceptional night at Bonshaw of dining in the hall and dancing in the Tower with Bruce and Margaret Irving is remembered fondly. Barbara gained her B.A. in Music from the UC Berkeley and began her Scottish fiddle career as a dance and concert musician, band leader, music arranger, teacher, and researcher/collector of Scottish music. She and her husband Robert have helped to shape the future and popularity of Scottish music in this country. She founded the Boston Harbor Scottish Fiddle School and has been directing fiddle clubs and playing in Scottish Country dance bands since the early 1970's. Barbara was pleased to hear that we were celebrating her tunes on the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of their composition! I hope perhaps that we will be able to add a recording from her at some time in the future.

My EARS are PEELED to hear notes from musicians in our Clan Irwin ranks who would like to be remembered in perpetuity for contributing to the Clan Irwin Music Project. SING, DANCE, PLAY or WHISTLE, just DO IT!

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