

Harry Wood's

Selection on Manx National Melodies

Maurice Powell

The Isle of Man Times, July 3rd, 1920:

'Mr Harry Wood has done much to popularise himself in the opinion of the little Manx nation, and he must be quite the best known figure in Manx musical circles. That being so, local music lovers are bound to appreciate the selection, *The Cushag*, which Mr Wood has arranged for full orchestra . . . it is hoped that the Manx people will make a special effort to be present to listen to their native airs rendered by what is undoubtedly one of the finest orchestras in the kingdom'.

The selection – 'Dedicated to all my Manx Friends'- soon became popularly known as Harry Wood's *Manx Airs*, and regularly featured in the concert programmes of the Douglas Amateur Orchestral Society and its successor, the Manx Amateur Orchestral Society¹, in the decades before World War II. *Manx Airs* was first performed just two days after the above preview appeared, at a Sunday Concert at the Palace Coliseum on July 5th, at which the guest soloist, the great English mezzo-soprano Louisa Kirkby Lunn,² sang arias by Verdi and Edward German, and the orchestra played Mendelssohn's overture *Ruy Blas* and a concluding march, the *Processional March* from Meyerbeer's *La Prophete*.

Manx Airs is essentially a skilfully composed medley of twenty-one well-loved Manx National Airs adapted, with three exceptions³, from *Manx National Songs* (MNS),⁴ transposed into suitable keys, with an introduction, appropriate modulating linking passages between many of the melodies, and a stirring finale. Some tunes share a common ancestry with versions to be found in AW Moore's *Manx Ballads and Music* (MBM).⁵ Harry Wood scored the work for strings, pairs of flutes (+ piccolo), oboes, clarinets and bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, three trombones and tuba, timpani, percussion and organ, and whilst no review of the premier has so far come to light, I have no doubt that the delightful selection was well-received, and its future popularity assured.

A complete performance would have taken approximately 14-15 minutes, but I suspect that some conductors will have taken the optional cut from the end of

Ellan Vannin (no.14) to the beginning of *Ramsey Town* (no.20), or more likely, simply made their own selection appropriate their concert programme; it is unlikely that the complete *Manx Airs* has been performed since the 1920s and 30s.

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Here follows a brief description of the complete work, taken from the published scores (see sources) with brief annotations in italics taken from the piano solo version, and verified with MNS and MBM:

1. Introduction: *Illiam Dhone*, Lento maestoso, G minor (MNS source: *Illiam Dhone no. 2*, Carval: *Drogh Vraane, Of base women*). Opening with timpani roll and brass, leading to full orchestra. ‘A lament on the death of William Christian, the Manx patriot . . .’
2. *Mylecharane*, Allegretto, tempo di Mazurka, Bb major. (MNS source: *Mylecharane*, C minor and *Manx National Anthem*, Bb major). Isle of Man Times preview: ‘The late Mr MW Corran’s version’. MBM source: very similar to *Mylecharaine* in Bb major, ‘slow’. Trumpet and euphonium (trombone?) solos with full orchestra. ‘A popular version of an old Manx song. No less than eighteen versions of this tune were collected in different parts of the Island’.
3. *The Sheep Under the Snow*, Andante con moto, G minor. (MNS source: *Air Ny Kirree fo Niaghtey*. MBM source: *Ny Kirree Fo Niaghtey*, 3/4 ‘plaintively’). Flute, oboe and clarinet solos accompanied by strings, leading to full orchestra at the conclusion. Attention is drawn in the solo piano version to the note F natural (eg in the 4th bar, Dorian mode). ‘A Characteristic Manx tune –sad and mournful’.
4. *A Manx Wedding*, Allegro vivace, G major. (MNS source: *Air Car y Phoosee*). ‘A popular item at Manx festivities’. Lightly scored for woodwind, horns and strings; full orchestra leading to Lento and transition to:
5. *The Wreck of the Herring Fleet*, Agitato, E minor, central ‘storm’ section only. (MNS source: *Air Arrane mysh ny Baatyn-skeddan, Douglas, Sept. 21st 1787, A minor*. MBM source: second version: *Yn Coayl Ny Baatyn-Skeddan, Ab major, ‘slow’*). Begins quietly and ominously with strings with woodwind added gradually until dramatic and stormy entry of full orchestra. Storm dies away to a chromatic Moderato transition to:
6. *Manx Fisherman’s Evening Hymn, The Harvest of the Sea*, Andante tranquillo, G major. (MNS source: *Air Eaisht oo as Clashtyn*, F major). The calm after the storm, simply scored for woodwind and strings.

7. *The Fairies' Dance*, Allegretto, C major. (MNS source: Air *Juan y Jaggad Keear*). 'The old Manx folk still believe in fairies'. Delicately scored for strings, woodwind and glockenspiel. Full orchestra transition to:

8. *The Cruise of the Tiger*, L'istesso tempo, F major. (MNS source: Air *Marrinys yn 'Tiger'*, C major). Brass and strings with touches of woodwind.

9. *Fair Maids of Man*, L'istesso tempo, D minor. (MNS source: Air *Callin veg Dhoan*, E minor). Oboe and trumpet solo, full orchestra when repeated. 'A favourite number at village concerts'.

10. *Heroes All! Row Slowly Shoreward*, Tempo di Marcia, Bb major. (MNS source: Air *My hene woinney veen*). Full orchestra throughout.

11. *The Good Old Way*, Slowly, G minor. (Source: this version is only Manx melody known to have been collected by Harry Wood. Taken down in December, 1895, from Alister R Proctor of Douglas, the popular Manx baritone, who appeared in the first concert of Manx National Music in January 1897. Unlike the MNS version (E minor), this version is characterised by alternate 2/4 and 3/4 bars). Oboe and bassoon at the opening, then with added strings and full orchestra at 'Brighter'. Oboe, bassoon and strings at conclusion. 'A favourite of early Manx Primitive Methodists'.

12. *Hunt the Wren*, Lively, C major. (MNS source: 'sung by itinerant singers on St Stephen's Day, December 26th'). 'The singers wander from door to door, announced by a horn'. Full orchestra throughout with violin cadenza leading to:

13. *Hush, Little Darling*, Andantino, F major. (MNS source: Eb major. Air: *Ushag veg ruy ny moaney dhoo*). Muted strings with sustained horns.

14. *Ellan Vannin*, Andante, Bb major. The section from the central orchestral tutti to the end, where there is a note indicating that 'the Selection may finish here', is identical to the SATB arrangement of *Ellan Vannin* by FC Poulter, which Harry Wood featured later in the 1927 version of the *Selection On Manx Airs* arranged for the Manx Celtic Concert for the Manx Homecomers on Sunday June 19th at the Palace Coliseum. (MNS source: Bb major, 6/8). Brass at opening then full orchestra. 'A song beloved by all Manx folk scattered over the face of the earth'.

15. *The Cutting of the Turf*, Allegro, D major. (MNS source: Eb major. Air: *Hie mee stiagh dhys thie ben-treoghe*). Introduction: woodwind chords with flute solo; strings then full orchestra, woodwind added when tune repeated. 'Arranged in country dance form'.

16. *A Song on Farmer's Daughters, No 2*, L'istesso tempo, G major. (MNS source: C major. Air: *Kiark Catriney marroo*. MBM source: some rhythmic similarities with *Kiark Katreeney Marroo, Eb major, 'quickly'*). Full orchestra. 'Arranged in country dance form'.

17. *The White Wort*, L'istesso tempo, D major. (MBM source: Air: *Yn Bollan Bane*, Baldwin, 6/8, 'quickly'). 'In the old days, all the fiddlers revelled in this tune'. Strings and rim of side drum. Four bar transition to:

18. *The Ploughman's Song*, Andante, A minor. (MNS source: Air: *Arrane ny guilley-hesheree*, G minor). Introduction: strings, woodwind with sustained horns. Flute solo at melody, bassoons added, horns pedal notes. *ppp* ending with pauses. 'A beautiful melody still hummed by ploughman in the south of the Island'.

19. *The Herring is King of the Sea*, Allegretto, C major. (MNS source: *The King of the Sea*, Air: *Yn Colbagh Breck-er-Sthrap*, D major). Full orchestra – solo brass at Slower – full orchestra, *segue* to:

20. *Ramsey Town*, Tempo di Marcia, F major. (MNS source: *Ramsey Town*, words by E Crabb). Introduction brass and strings; solo bass trombone plays tune with strings; woodwind gradually added; full orchestra at 'chorus'.

21. Finale: *Manx National Anthem*, Moderato maestoso, Bb major. (Published in 1907. Source: Air: *Arrane ashoonagh dy Vannin*, adapted from the traditional Manx Air *Mylecharaine* by WH Gill, and found in vol. II of the Combined MNS, 2001⁶). Full orchestra throughout.

Sources

The two editions consulted were: *Selection on Manx National Airs* in the Boosey's Orchestral Journal series, piano-conductor's score. *Manx Airs, a Selection of National Songs of the Isle of Man*. Boosey & Co, Ltd. Pianoforte solo version by Harry Wood.

Notes

1. The story of the DAOS, founded 1917, principal conductor JE Quayle, and the MAOS, founded 1930, principal conductor Kathleen Rydings, can be found in *ENCORE! The Story of the Isle of Man Symphony Orchestra*, by Maurice Powell, 2013.

2. Louisa Kirkby Lunn (1873 -1930) was joined in this concert by the soprano Olive Sturgess and the up-and-coming tenor William Hestletine.

3. The three songs that are not in the 1896 *Manx National Songs* are: no. 11 *The Good Old Way*; no. 17. *The White Wort* and no. 21. *The Manx National Anthem*.

4. *Manx National Songs* was published in 1896 in Boosey & Co's Royal Edition (songs collected and edited by Deemster JF Gill, WH Gill and Dr John Clague), and was generally well-received. Harry Wood was presented with his own copy of the MNS inscribed with a note of thanks from Deemster Gill for ' . . . your great help and assistance in promoting and taking charge of the first series of 'Manx Concerts'', the first of which took place in January 1897.

5. The collection *Manx Ballads and Music* by AW Moore (1896) was thought by some to be more authentically 'Manx'. The simple piano accompaniments, or 'clever and beautiful harmonies', were arranged by Miss ML Wood and Miss McKnight

6. See Bazin, Fenella Dr. *The Secret History of Our National Anthem*, Souvenir Programme of the Haydn Wood Anniversary Concert, Villa Marina, November 22nd, 2009.