

1. Aire: The Gentleman (Brandon Vance)

I composed this tune in the fall of 2016, when I first started exploring the idea of a solo Scottish fiddle album. I wanted this tune to be a musical expression of the dignity and strength of character associated with a gentleman.

2. Reels: The Scholar (J.S. Skinner)/Kitty Face (Brandon Vance)

The first tune is a classic by virtuoso fiddler, James Scott Skinner (1843-1927), known as the “Scottish Paganini.” It is designed to be a cheeky pairing to *The Gentleman*, poking fun at the well-known compliment, as well as referencing a quote from Robert Burns’ *Twa Dogs*. *Kitty Face* was inspired by watching a particularly hyper-active cat leap from one piece of furniture to another.

3. Jigs: Caress (Brandon Vance)/Northside Kitchen*

Caress is the synthesis of several melodic fragments that I felt were representative of this highly evocative verb. The physical movement of left hand and the smooth arc of the melody is meant to imitate a caressing motion. I learned the second tune from a fantastic Northumbrian band called 422.

4. Long Variation Set: Black Jock (Charles McLean, fl. c. 1737, ed. Brandon Vance)

This variation set is from Robert Bremner’s *Collection of Scots Tunes* from 1759, with a vague source attribution “after the playing of Charles McLean.” During the 18th-century, many fiddlers and composers in Scotland began using variation stylings from Europe in their music, and *Black Jock* is a prime example of one of those continentally influenced tunes. It was a popular folk tune that was then taken up by skillful fiddlers and violinists such as McLean, and varied, quite often in a florid manner. While these long variation sets (in this case 30 strains) were written down in collections, evidence suggests that many performers would have had their own versions, with some parts cut out, added, or re-ordered. In keeping with this tradition, I have selected my favorite variations to create the version recorded here. I play this track on a Baroque violin, cross-tuned to AEA, which is explicitly called for in the Bremner manuscript.

5. Strathspey & Reels: Craigellachie Brig (William Marshall)/Paddy’s Trip to Scotland/Spay In Spate (J.S. Skinner)

The first tune is by one of Scotland’s greatest violinists and composers, William Marshall (1748-1833). It is an example of the grand Northeast style of Scottish fiddle playing. Hector MacAndrew (1903-1980) was a leading exponent of this Northeast style, and his recordings have had a great impact on my playing.

6. Strathspeys & Reels: Miss Hutton (John Bowie)/Ewie Wi’ Da Crooked Horn/President Garfield’s Hornpipe/Arthur Muise (Jerry Holland)/Arthur Carignan’s Reel

This whole set is a tribute to one of my Cape Breton fiddling heroes, the great Jerry Holland (1955-2009). I was fortunate to receive a bootleg recording of his final performance with Janine Randall on February 28th, 2009, just months before his passing. To this day, it is one of my favorite recordings.

7. Classical Hornpipe: Banks Hornpipe (Parazotti-Vance)

While the details of Parazotti's life (19th-century) are somewhat obscure, he is credited with this notoriously tricky tune, made famous by the playing of J.S. Skinner. I was inspired to write my own Paganini-style variations on the tune, and I hope they serve as a complement to this perennial classic.

8. Hornpipes: Compliments to Sean Maguire (Brendan Mulvihill)/The Recluse (J.D. Michie)

Brendan Mulvihill is a contemporary Irish fiddler and composer, but this particular tune has become popular in Cape Breton, and I learned it from the playing of Jerry Holland. *The Recluse* is part of a four-tune fiddle "suite" by the Scottish fiddler, music shop-owner, and poet, J.D. Michie (1884-1960). I chose both tunes because they possess a certain ragtime feel that appeals to me.

9. Aire: Màiri Bhàn Òg

The title of this haunting aire translates to *Mary Young and Fair*, and has been a favorite of mine for years. When I recently dusted it off and started performing it, I fell in love with it all over again.

10. Jigs: The Rock and The Wee Pickle Tow/Miss Sally Hunter of Thurston (Nathaniel Gow)/Rattlin' Roarin' Willie

Nathaniel Gow (1763-1831) was the son of Scotland's most renowned fiddler, Neil Gow, and this tune represents a class of Scottish repertoire that is clearly influenced by 18th-century continental Baroque music, while still retaining its Scottish character. The last tune is a rousing romp based on the life of an itinerant fiddler, Johnnie Brown, nicknamed "Rattlin' Roarin' Willie."

*"O Willie, Come sell your fiddle,
O sell your fiddle sae fine;
O Willie come sell your fiddle,
And buy a pint o' wine!*

*If I should sell my fiddle,
The warl' would think I was mad;
For mony a rantin' day
My fiddle and I hae had."*

11. Strathspey & Reels: Calum Breugach/Caber Féidh/Highland Plaid/Bear in the Buckwheat

This is a Cape Breton set inspired by the playing of fiddler Buddy MacMaster. For those aficionados who might be curious, I play a pipe setting of *Caber Féidh*.

12. Song: A' Chailin Àlainn (Tomás Mac Eoin, arranged by Brandon Vance)

The Gaelic words to this song were composed by the Irish poet and songwriter, Tomás Mac Eoin. The words were then set to tune of *Mingulay Boat Song* (a Scottish song), and adapted from Irish Gaelic (Gaeilge) into Scots Gaelic (Gàidhlig). This is the version I am singing. Being true to the cumulative nature of the oral tradition, I've added an introduction, with my own Gàidhlig vocables (e.g. "fa la la la la" in English).

*I bhi roho io, i bhi roho io
I bhi roho io horo i (2x)
Horo i bhi roho io ro
Horo i bhi roho io horo i (2x)*

*A' chailin àlainn dh'an tug mi 'n gràdhsa
'Si fhèin as àille na blas nan ròs
Gun i bhith làimh rium 'sann tùrsach tha mi
A' chailin àlainn 's tu fàth mo bhròn.*

*An àm dhomh dùsgadh is mi nam aonar
'Se sin an uair as motha mo bhròn
Bidh mi smuaintean air a' chailin uasail
A dh' imich bhuamsa 'sa rinn mo leòn*

*A' chailin àlainn gun tug mi gradh dhut
Thig na mo chòmhnaidh mo luaidh's mo stòr
S'abair riumsa gur tu mo ghràdh geal
S' bidh mise àghmhor gun adhbhar cràidh*

*Nach tig thu leumsa, a' chailin àlainn
Gu siorraidh bràth cha bhith ort bròn
Sheinnin ceòl dhut mar cheòl na clàrsaich
'S mar ghuth na smeòraich an driùchd an fheòir*

*I bhi roho io, i bhi roho io
I bhi roho io horo i (2x)
Horo i bhi roho io ro
Horo i bhi roho io horo i (2x)*

*Beautiful girl, to whom I gave my heart
She alone is more lovely than the roses
Without her beside me I am sorrowful
Oh, beautiful girl, you are the cause of my grief*

*The time when I wake, and I am alone
It is then that my sorrow is greatest
I think on the noble girl
Who went from me, and created my wound*

*Beautiful girl, who I gave my heart to,
Come to me, my dwelling, my treasure
Tell me that you are my fair love
And I'll be happy without cause for pain*

*Won't you come with me, beautiful girl
Forever more you will have no sorrow
I would sing to you like the music of the harp
Like the song of the thrush in the dewy grass*

13. Reels: Jenny Dang the Weaver/The High Reel

*All music traditionally arranged by Brandon Vance, except where noted elsewhere. Track titles without composer name are considered traditional, and part of public domain, to the best of my knowledge.

An Introduction:

The fiddling traditions of Scotland and Cape Breton are subtle, complex, and powerful. To play with mastery within these traditions requires an emotional and intellectual understanding of melodic nuance and technique. To compose within these traditions requires fluency in the beauty and flexibility of these Celtic dialects. In *The Gentleman and Scholar*, Brandon Vance demonstrates with striking creativity the great knowledge and sensitivity involved in playing the most danceable fiddle music.

I believe all listeners will encounter profound art when they listen to this recording. There is energy, grit, elegance, humor, and a fierce and brilliant sense of the most refined human musicality.

-Eliot Grasso