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Book Reviews: Skye and Fraser Collections Reviewed by John Shaw, Glendale For Scottish violinists everywhere, the recent re-issues of these two important collections, realized through the initiative and careful work of musician-lighthousekeeper Paul Cranford, are a most welcome event. Together the collections make accessible over 600 tunes from the Highland musical tradition through accurate renditions based on traditional settings. The joy of reading through both volumes is added to considerably by their design: before going to press the negatives were carefully brushed giving a cleaner copy than the original, and both are spiral bound for the music stand. The Skye Collection, the more recent of the two, was compiled by Keith Norman MacDonald of Skye and first published in 1887. Both the first and second editions have been out of print for fifty years, and all of the tunes from the more complete first edition are given here. MacDonald was a noted collector of Gaelic music, having edited the Gesto Collection, and a volume of "Puirt-a-Beul" containing the Gaelic words to many instrumental tunes from Skye informants. The compiler's awareness of the affiliation between Gaelic music and song is apparent from the inclusion of a Gaelic index, listing the Gaelic names for many of the tunes in the collection. The aim of the collection, as stated in the Preface, is to supply "a work which should embrace all the fire and vigour of our National Music concentrated in one volume" • in other words an anthology of the best tunes available at that time, with piano arrangements. A list of the published sources of the violin tunes, covering nearly all of the major collections and some minor collections from the 18th and 19th centuries, includes works of the more famous composers such as the Gows, Marshall, Macintosh, and Skinner. There are also a number of pipe tunes, noted down as played in Skye. Of the 400-plus tunes, most are strathspeys and reels, with a smaller number of slow airs ("solos"), and a very few jigs. Those familiar with the Cape Breton fiddler's repertoire will notice that the selection of tunes and their settings are close to the traditional playing here, but whether this is due to a shared "unlettered" fund of tunes, or to the previous influence of this and other printed collections on the Island is not clear. The new edition of Captain Eraser's work, better known as The Simon Fraser Collection, includes all of the revised 1874 edition with a few selections at the end from the original 1816 edition. Fraser compiled the 230 tunes largely from his own father's repertoire while residing in Stratherrick, near Inverness, in the Scottish Highlands. A good portion of the tunes were originally transmitted from his paternal grandfather whose business took him throughout the Highlands during the early and mid 18th century. Eraser's father added a good deal more material which he acquired from other Gaels during his tour of duty • presumably as a loyal soldier of the Crown • in the "First American War." Simon Fraser himself saw service in Ireland where he became familiar with O'Carolan's compositions; he was an accomplished violin player and contributed many of his own compositions to the collection. The Simon Fraser Collection's tunes and airs, noted down from an early 18th century oral tradition, are closer to the



centre of Gaelic song and instrumental music than those contained in the la- C44'

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