

(1893–1902), which for Donald Jay Grout was ‘a monument to French operatic reaction to Wagner’.⁸

Discrepancies existed from the initial publication in 1894 between the score and the parts, the former corrected by Debussy but the latter not so. At a later point, Debussy made a large number of corrections and alterations in a copy of the first edition, which alterations have been incorporated in this Bärenreiter Urtext edition. The critical edition utilizes all sources including the composer’s letters, which offer a valuable insight into the genesis of the composition. The editor notes that the bulk of Debussy’s foremost compositions underwent extensive revisions, some of these documents have not been recovered, some witnessed destruction or loss of significant stages by Debussy himself, others encounter alternative versions vying for primary authority, and still others passed through the 1933 sale by the widowed Mme. Debussy absent tracing mechanisms. Taken together, these conditions create enormous difficulties for the editor. Other Debussy sources needed for critical editions fall reasonably well into place, but the *Quatuor* belongs clearly to the first order. Douglas Woodfull-Harris has painstakingly investigated each of these to which he could gain access, weighed all evidence such as the separate publication of score and parts – there is no autograph or proof copy of the parts in Debussy’s hand, and one must presume that a Durand or other professional copyist generated the string quartet parts. The editor moreover found it necessary to corroborate emendations likely in Debussy’s hand against other sources. Despite the Byzantine labyrinth he faced at times, he has produced a model of editorial scholarship.

That Bärenreiter has kept the price of the score and parts low – the score costs a bargain €15 per printed page – might serve two impressive purposes. It will encourage many libraries, more and more cash-strapped, to acquire a score of which they might already possess a copy ostensibly authentic, with the indication ‘édition originale’ distracting from the mandate of this critical edition. And second, by its reappearance in a version quite so fine, well laid-out, direct in the service of performance, and authoritative, Debussy’s artistry will be perceived more forcefully by a widening audience. The significance of this edition is keen, therefore: not only does it vividly portray a major creation of a young composer on the cusp of forming a new sound world, but by its scholarly prowess it convinces us unequivocally that French music with Debussy at the apex embodies an innovation plentifully potent to lead the century ahead.

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Hamish MacCunn, *Three Overtures: ‘The Land of the Mountain and the Flood’, ‘The Ship o’ the Fiend’, ‘The Dowie Dens o’ Yarrow’*, edited by Jennifer Oates (Madison, WI: A-R Editions, 2010).

It is fair to say that the nineteenth-century Scottish composer Hamish MacCunn is not exactly a household name. For much of the twentieth century he was little more

⁸ *A Short History of Opera* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947, revised 3rd edition 1988 by H.W. Williams): 581.

than an entry in the history books, in common with many a nineteenth-century composer from these isles. In 1968 (coinciding with the centenary of MacCunn's birth), Alexander Gibson did his compatriot a service by recording the national-picturesque overture *The Land of the Mountain and the Flood* as the Scottish entry for a *Music of the Four Countries* LP released by HMV, thus gaining the composer some audience from aficionados of British music.¹ A decade later this same overture appeared popular enough to be included on a *Hallé Encore!* album released under the direction of Maurice Handford.² It was, however, only in 1995 that MacCunn's wider compositional output – including the other two overtures published here – became heard by a broader public, first when his music was included in a BBC Radio 3 instalment of 'Composer of the Week' entitled 'Scottish Romantics' and subsequently when a full CD of his music was released by Hyperion in the wake of the interest stimulated by the broadcast.

Born in 1868 in Greenock, MacCunn grew up by the Clyde before making the trek south to London in order to study at the Royal College of Music under Parry and Stanford. His first major success, the Walter Scott-entitled overture *Land of the Mountain and the Flood*, followed at the age of 18. A regular sonata-form movement of tidy proportions, the overture contrasts a brief B-minor first-subject idea (with prominent flattened seventh and hint of the Lombardic 'Scotch snap') with a more extended secondary theme of pentatonic hue. Though previous critical writing on this piece has understandably emphasised its supposed genuine 'Scottishness' (befitting the product of a true native of Caledonia) – and therefore, one would be led to believe, distance from those more famous foreign musical constructions of Scotland – in truth the model of Mendelssohn's *Hebrides* hangs rather close to MacCunn's work. While not downplaying the potential musical markers for Scotland, Jennifer Oates, in her excellent introduction to this edition, rightly does not seek to hide MacCunn's kinship with his illustrious German predecessor. Beyond the B-minor tonality and D-major second theme, Oates astutely picks up on the i–III–v–i harmonisation of the opening theme, aligning this with a familiar Ossianic topos explored by R. Larry Todd and other scholars. One might in fact note the most obvious surface allusion of all to Mendelssohn's work – the climactic F#–G trills descending through the orchestral texture from first violins down to the bass in the lead back to the recapitulation at bars 184–191 (a gesture coincidentally copied in another nationalistic B-minor-based overture, Balakirev's Overture on Three Russian Themes from 1858 – and for that matter more banally in the Act III Prelude to *Die Walküre*). Particularly perceptive is Oates's analysis of the passage in the development section (bb. 142ff), which as she notes fuses elements of both first and second themes, in a manner that rather than seeming merely academic forms a memorable point of the music.

The Overture to *The Ship o' the Fiend* (1888) is already freer and more individual in approach. The introductory notes speak of the modified sonata form adopted in the work, though such is the effect of the overture's through composition that it might be more apt to think of a loose symphonic poem structure, even if the musical argument is compellingly concise and focussed in its laconic recasting of a tale of gradually emergent horror. Particularly effective is the hermeneutic developed by Oates in her

¹ *Music of the Four Countries* (MacCunn: *Land of the Mountain and the Flood*, Hamilton Harty: *With the Wild Geese*, Ethel Smyth: *The Wreckers Overture*, Edward German: *Welsh Rhapsody*), Scottish National Orchestra, Alexander Gibson, HMV ASD2400, 1968.

² *Hallé Encore!* Hallé Orchestra, Maurice Handford, Classics For Pleasure CFP 40320, 1979.

commentary (p. x) concerning the alternation of horn and oboe (standing for the characters of the devil and female victim respectively) and their respective motives in the opening section; the way in which the oboe, upon continued prompting, finally completes the horn's motive suggests perfectly the form of the woman's fateful acquiescence. Also noteworthy in this passage is MacCunn's tendency to harmonise the natural (Aeolian) seventh degree in the minor not with the minor dominant chord (as Dvořák, for instance, commonly does in his more modal 'nationalist' idiom) but with the chord of the seventh degree itself, as is earlier attested to in *The Land of the Mountain and the Flood*. After a slow though uneasy opening section – the calm before the storm – and the warmer lyricism of a second-subject idea, the erstwhile development suddenly breaks in to the soundworld of the piece with a brutal, mechanistic ostinato in the strings' middle register, which sounds closer to Bernard Hermann's *Psycho* (or at least Bartók) than Victorian Britain. Overall, despite the occasional jejune moment, the way in which MacCunn manages to fuse the eerie calm of the opening with the eventual diabolical outcome in a way in which the atmosphere of dread seems ever present is remarkably successful.

The final overture, *The Dowie Dens o' Yarrow* (1888), strikes a middle course between the formal convention of the *Land of the Mountain and the Flood* and through-composed sectionality of *The Ship o' the Fiend*. An attractive march-like opening in E-flat major, imbued with an infectious swinging lilt, establishes the balladic air of the piece, which, as with MacCunn's previous overture, yet hints at darker elements to come. At times one finds prophetic touches of Strauss or Elgar, or even the Nordic soundworld of early Sibelius (the *En Saga*-like violas at bb. 45–46). Oates comments that this overture did not achieve the same popularity as MacCunn's earlier two, and while the music is hardly bad one might wonder if the apparent mismatch between his retention of formal convention (the recapitulation of the first subject) and the supposed programmatic narrative (the death of the hero, in the bars immediately preceding) has something to do with this possible dissatisfaction. On the other hand, the reprise of the opening theme does admittedly convey a distinct sense of tragic irony and the subsequent reprise of expositional material is 'deformed' in light of the narrative content though the transformation of the second subject into a funereal topic. Alternatively, London audiences might have been getting used to MacCunn's brand of Scottishness (its exoticism wearing off more quickly than Sir Walter Scott's had done), while it is arguable that the musical invention throughout the latter course of the overture does not quite sustain the level that had been promised by the opening.

The scores are clearly printed (with bar numbers helpfully added from the original unnumbered nineteenth-century editions), critical commentary tucked away discretely at the back, and the introductory notes and other supporting material present a detailed contextualisation and analysis of the three works. Editorial intervention is not excessive, though a substantial number of dynamic markings, hairpins, et cetera, have been standardised or added from MacCunn's manuscript or Hologram sources and are clearly marked as editorial additions. In all, this excellently produced volume is a very welcome addition to current printed editions of nineteenth-century music.

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