



Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

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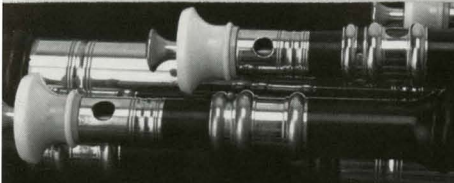


NORTHUMBERLAND RANT

TRADITIONAL MUSIC FROM THE EDGE OF ENGLAND



Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

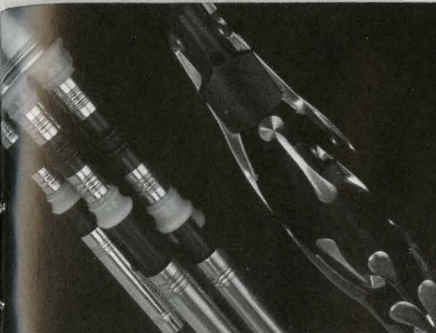


NORTHUMBERLAND RANT

TRADITIONAL MUSIC FROM THE EDGE OF ENGLAND

- 1 **Billy Pigg** NORTHUMBRIAN
SMALLPIPES *Archie's Fancy* (T. W. Pigg)/
Holey Ha'penny 2:58
- 2 **Chris Ormston** NORTHUMBRIAN
SMALLPIPES *Keening in the Wind/Alston
Flower Show* 3:36
- 3 **The High Level Ranters** FIDDLE,
CONCERTINA, ACCORDION, GUITAR
La Russe/The Winshield's Hornpipe
(J. L. Dunk)/*Jane's Fancy* (Alf Gray)/
Da Road to Houll (T. Anderson) 4:47
- 4 **Jack Armstrong** NORTHUMBRIAN
SMALLPIPES *Rothbury Hills* (J. Armstrong)/
Whittingham Green Lane/The Cott (A. Ellis)/
Border Fray 4:13

- 5 **Willie Taylor** FIDDLE *Murray River Jig*
(G. Townsend)/*Roland and Cynthia Taylor*
(B. Black)/*Alistair J. Sim* (W. Taylor) 4:09
- 6 **Anthony Robb** NORTHUMBRIAN
SMALLPIPES *I Saw My Love Come Passing
By Me* 2:52
- 7 **Willie Taylor, Joe Hutton, and
Will Atkinson** FIDDLE, NORTHUMBRIAN
SMALLPIPES, AND MOUTH ORGAN
*Dance de Chez Nous/Aunt Mary's Canadian/
Neil Taylor's Jig* (W. Taylor) 3:28
- 8 **Pauline Cato** NORTHUMBRIAN
SMALLPIPES *The Lady's Well* (A. Dag)/
Random/The Cliff (medley arr. P. Cato) 3:53
- 9 **Anthony Robb** *Dargai*
(J. Scott Skinner) 2:04
- 10 **Billy Pigg** *Skye Crofters* 1:14



- 11 **Wayne Robertson and Nigel Jelks**
ACCORDION AND MANDOLIN *Torryburn
Lasses/The Wandering Tinker/Marry Me
Now/Mrs. Wedderburn/Randy Wives of
Greenlaw* 3:21
- 12 **Joe Hutton** NORTHUMBRIAN
SMALLPIPES *Speed the Plough* 1:28
- 13 **Billy Pigg** *There's Nae Guid Luck
about the House/High Level Hornpipe*
(J. Hill) 3:27
- 14 **Willie Taylor** *Robertson's Reel*
(Tom Anderson)/*The Grand Chain* 2:08
- 15 **Colin Ross** NORTHUMBRIAN
SMALLPIPES *Jock of Hazeldean/Gentle
Maiden* 2:50
- 16 **Willie Taylor** *The Pearl Wedding* (W.
Taylor)/*Nancy Taylor's Reel* (W. Taylor) 2:37

- 17 **Anthony Robb** *Lament for Ian Dickson*
(A. Robb) 2:35
- 18 **Jack Armstrong and the
Barnstormers** COUNTRY DANCE BAND
*Keel Row/Durham Rangers/Greencastle/
Hesleside Reel/Yankee Doodle* 2:56
- 19 **Chris Ormston** *Miss Hannah*
Ormston (C. Ormston)/*Katie Elliot's Jig*
(C. Ormston) 3:57
- 20 **Kathryn Tickell** NORTHUMBRIAN
SMALLPIPES AND FIDDLE *Mr. Nelson's
Birthday Waltz* (K. Tickell/Park West
Music) 3:44
- 21 **Billy Pigg** *Border Spirit* (T. W. Pigg) 1:20

NORTHUMBERLAND RANT

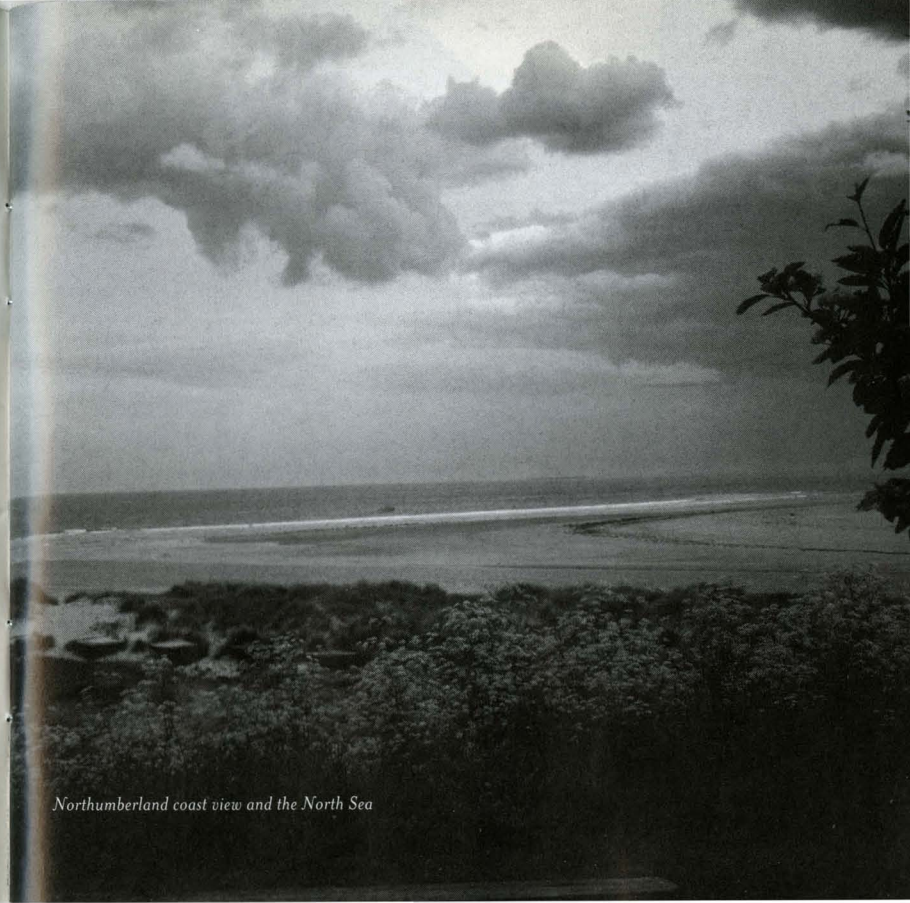
TRADITIONAL MUSIC FROM THE EDGE OF ENGLAND

by Burt Feintuch

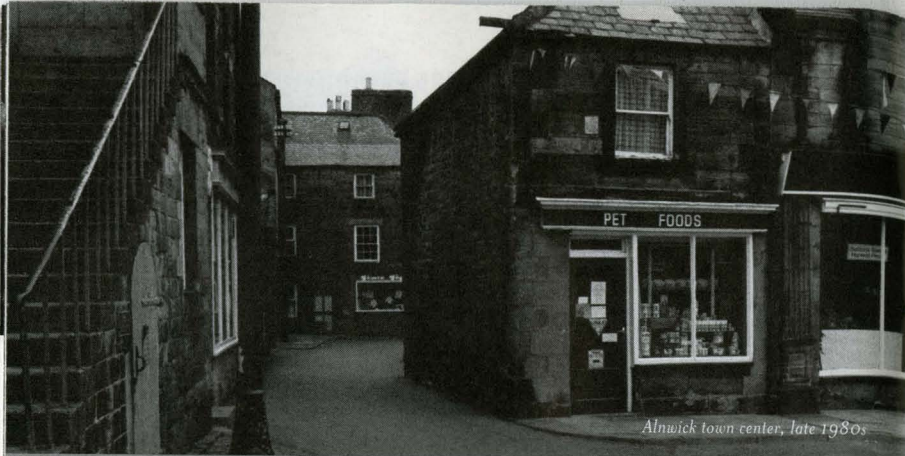
INTRODUCTION

In a nation of places with strong regional identities, the county of Northumberland stands out because of the durability of the idea that it is a distinctive and "other" part of England. A borderland, Northumberland is the northeastern edge of England. Bounded by Scotland, the North Sea, and the English counties Durham and Cumbria, it is neither English, in the BBC sense, nor Scottish. Historically, though, it is one of the places against which those identities were constructed and fought out. I once saw an advertisement for a shop claiming to sell the music of England, Scotland, and Northumberland.

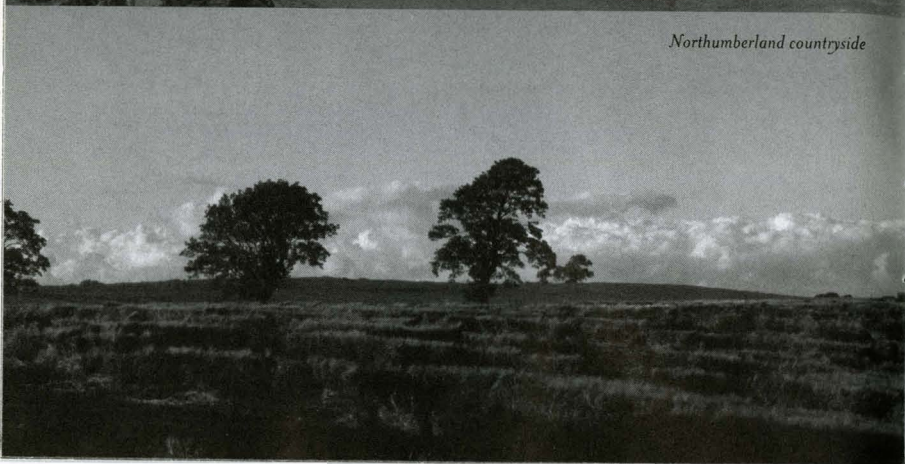
Two very different landscapes meet in the county. In the south-east, there is the detritus of the Industrial Revolution, in and around Newcastle-upon-Tyne, the major city of the urban sprawl on the banks of the River Tyne. People dug coal for about six hundred years here, built ships, mined lead, built armaments and chemical factories. But now the industry is almost all gone, and the unemployment rates have often in this century reflected that loss. In the 1970s, Newcastle became part of a new urban county, Tyne and Wear, and the River Tyne was no longer Northumberland's southern border, but for centuries Newcastle has been Northumberland's city. Move beyond Tyneside and southeastern Northumberland and you're in some of the most sparsely populated countryside in England. Sheep, some claim, outnumber people.



Northumberland coast view and the North Sea



Alnwick town center, late 1980s



Northumberland countryside

Much of the land is pastoral; some of it is wild, hilly. The seacoast includes a forty-mile stretch designated a national scenic treasure.

Not surprisingly for a border area, language and music are two of the markers of Northumbrian identity. Bookshops sell books about the local dialect, along with collections of dialect songs. A Northumbrian Language Society tries to encourage local ways of speaking. At record stores, Northumbrian sections feature recordings of dialect comedians and local musicians. Music festivals and competitions advocate the local music, as do sessions, dances, courses, school programs, concerts, and local organizations.

The Northumbrian smallpipes are the county's indigenous instrument. A small, bellows-blown bagpipe, the smallpipes surprise the uninitiated with their sweet sound. This is an instrument very different from the more familiar Scottish highland pipes. The earliest examples of the Northumbrian smallpipes date to the late 1600s, but the instrument assumed most of its contemporary form in the nineteenth century. Some describe the smallpipes as the most sophisticated of the many forms of bagpipes found from Britain to Asia.

The bellows provide the air. Pumped slowly between the right arm and rib cage, they inflate the bag, connected by a tube. The left arm squeezes the bag against the torso, sending air across the reeds that create the sound. A set of drones, generally four, are mounted in a stock which is tied into the bag. A player uses two or three drones at once, usually tuning to the tonic and a fifth above. With three drones, you tune tonic, fifth, and octave. The drones hum.

The chanter, or melody pipe, is also tied into the bag, in its own stock. Here is where the Northumbrian smallpipes are unique. The chanter's bore is cylindrical (not conical, as in the highland pipes), which accounts for its sweet, quiet sound. Chanters have eight finger

holes and, depending upon the individual set, between seven and eighteen metal keys that cover or open holes. The eight finger holes yield an octave. The keys extend the range beyond that single octave and add accidentals. With eighteen keys, the chanter is fully chromatic over its range. No other bagpipe can make this claim. But what is most striking about the Northumbrian chanter is that it is closed at the bottom end. In virtually every other bagpipe, air excites the chanter reed, and the chanter must sound because its end is open. The closed chanter of the Northumbrian pipes allows the piper to close all the holes, providing silence. This leads to the ability to articulate crisp, staccato notes. The highland pipe chanter sounds continuously, the music always falling out of the bottom. But the Northumbrian piper can make notes sound like "peas popping from a pod," to use a conventional description. Chanter and drones, always played together, combine the sweetness of the former with the unwavering insistence of the latter. No other musical instrument in the world approximates it.

Local enthusiasts claim that the smallpipes have enjoyed an unbroken tradition since they first appeared, and many people associate the instrument with shepherds and the pastoral countryside. But the story is more complicated than that. Since at least the 1770s, the preservationist impulses of local enthusiasts—mostly middle- and upper-class urban men—account for the instrument's continuity. In the cause of "true Northumbrianness," the pipes came to be an emblem of place. "True Northumbrianness" implied rural Northumberland, at least to the people who worked to save the instrument. Thus, a large irony: urban revivalists are mostly responsible for both the continuity of the instrument and its long association with the countryside.



Alnwick Pipers Society, 1987



Northumberland countryside

NORTHUMBRIAN GATHERING

TOWN HALL, 7.30 p.m.

NORTHUMBERLAND HALL, 9.30 p.m.

ALNWICK

FRIDAY, FEB. 25th

Northumbrian Pipes Contest—Northumbrian Songs and
Stories—Dressed Stick Contest (plain, plain horn, fancy horn)
—Amateur Hunting Horn Contest—"CASH OR KIND." Play
by Esther McCracken especially written for Pipers' Society—
Olde-Tyme Dancing to Northumbrian Minstrels

SEE PRESS AND POSTERS FOR FULL PARTICULARS

MAKE UP A PARTY—ENJOY MEETING OLD FRIENDS

GAZETTE PRINTING WORKS, KILNBYTH

Northumbrian gathering in Alnwick, 1949

Historically, the smallpipes' nadir was probably the years following World War II, when some estimate there were perhaps as few as fifty players. Today, there must be at least several thousand sets of pipes in circulation. For the first time, full-time pipemakers support the instrument, as do sessions, courses, festivals, recordings, publications, and organizations, notably the Northumbrian Pipers Society, established in 1928, but also the Alnwick Pipers Society, the Northumbrian Musical Heritage Society, and Folkworks. Today's players are probably the most technically proficient in the music's history.

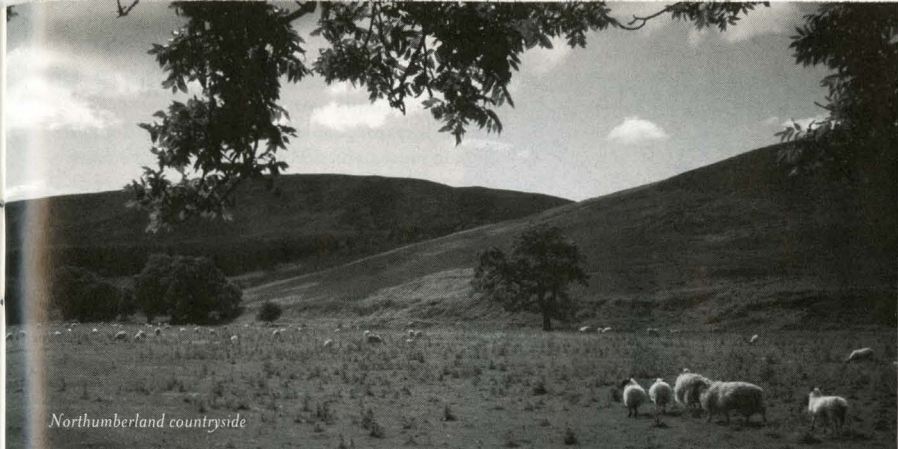
But not all Northumbrian music is pipe music. Tune manuscripts dating as far back as the 1600s document a regionally distinctive body of melodies. Field research beginning in the 1950s yielded a rich picture of instrumental music played on the fiddle, accordion, mouth organ, whistle, and other instruments, much of it played by agricultural workers. Starting in the 1960s, a band called the High Level Ranters played a very significant role in generating widespread interest in the local music. In the 1980s and into the 1990s, Willie Taylor, Joe Hutton, and Will Atkinson—three retired shepherds—playing fiddle, pipes, and mouth organ, became icons of the music and symbols of a vanishing pastoral Britain.

The development of the idea of the distinctiveness of Northumbrian music is easy to trace. Through the nineteenth century, antiquarians and others motivated by preservationist impulses helped codify a repertory for the pipes and other instruments, drawing on a variety of sources. A Northumbrian Smallpipes Society was founded on the heels of the 1882 publication of the *Northumbrian Minstrelsy*, an antiquarian project that documented, very selectively, the county's music. (It ignored much of the music of the day, especially the flourishing music hall scene.) Other organizations fol-

lowed in this century. Piper Tom Clough, a colliery worker and eccentric genius, recorded in 1929, setting remarkably high musical standards. After World War II, Jack Armstrong, a canny musician, appeared often on the radio playing his sweet Northumbrian pipes as a soloist and leading his band, the Barnstormers, on fiddle. His contemporary, Billy Pigg, a very different musician, was less in the public eye, but he was probably more influential on the musicians themselves.

The English folk revival of the 1960s found a distinctive regional embodiment in the formation of a folk club, Folk Song and Ballad, at the Bridge Hotel in Newcastle, where local music was highlighted. Earlier features of the regional scene—the Northumbrian Gathering, which began in 1949 in Alnwick, the piping and other music competitions, and country dances—were joined by new musical contexts and events such as folk clubs, sessions, and festivals (most notably the Morpeth Gathering and the Rothbury Traditional Music Festival). Local recording companies provided further impetus. Kathryn Tickell, a young urban woman inspired in part by her family's roots in the rural parts of the county, became an international star in traditional music circles, playing small-pipes and fiddle. No other English region has seemed so well endowed with its own music.

In a sense, I began the fieldwork that led to this recording thirty years ago. I was an exchange student at the University of Durham, south of Tyneside. A faculty member directed me to the Bridge Hotel in Newcastle, at the foot of the High Level Bridge, to hear local music, and I found it exhilarating. That experience helped me understand that music can be deeply rooted in place, and it helped me find my way to graduate school in folklore and folklife. In 1985, I went back to Northumberland to study the rebirth of the small-



Northumberland countryside



Pipemaker David Burleigh

pipes, wanting to understand a cultural revival from the inside out. That 1985 visit renewed my long relationship with the music, a continuing fascination with the ways in which people look for virtue in their part of the world, find it in music, and try to create community around the music. When I think about Northumbrian music today, I realize the inadequacy of some of the concepts folklorists, ethnomusicologists, and others have applied to local musics—notions such as “revival” and ideas that give too little weight to the social and economic realities in which music exists. But I’m deeply appreciative—and not a little envious—of Northumberland as a place that has a music of its own.

A NOTE ON THE RECORDINGS

The sounds featured on this album come from a variety of sources and span more than forty years. Many are my field recordings, done in local settings on portable analog recorders in the 1980s and early 1990s. Some are earlier. I was very fortunate to learn about, and then locate, an American, Royce Wilson, who made some excellent recordings around 1958 on Tyneside. The School of Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh was kind enough to provide copies of 1964 recordings in their archive. Three tracks are licensed from commercially released albums. Both Anthony Robb and Chris Ormston supplied me with digital recordings of their playing, helping me rethink the role of the field recordist. Finally, I recorded one track—Colin Ross’s—to digital audio tape at my home in New Hampshire where Colin was visiting, inverting the traditional pattern of fieldwork. As a byproduct of the diverse sources of these recordings, sound quality varies. But the music, I hope you will agree, is consistently excellent.

THE RECORDINGS

1 Billy Pigg NORTHUMBRIAN SMALLPIPES

Archie's Fancy (T. W. Pigg)/Holey Ha'penny

Born Thomas William Pigg at Dilston Park in 1902, Billy Pigg was one of the most remarkable musical figures in the county's music. He pushed the smallpipes about as far as they can go, playing with a wild, lyrical flair that captured the musical imagination of many of his contemporaries and many of the musicians who would follow him. His family lived in the southwestern part of the county originally, and he first worked as a mechanic, patrolling the roads for the Automobile Association. Eventually, he and his family lived in various locations in rural Northumberland, and he became a caretaker on a country property. Plagued by health problems much of his adult life, he died in 1968.

Billy used to bicycle to lessons and sessions with an earlier generation of musicians, notably Tom Clough. Clough was an exponent of a brilliant, highly technical style with exceptionally tight fingering. Billy developed an almost florid aesthetic, playing wild cascades of notes, his fingers flying faster than seems possible, his timing taking the music right to the edge. He won most of the competitions he entered, and there's a



perhaps apocryphal story that eventually he was asked to stop competing to allow others a chance. When he lived in Coquetdale, he played with local farming musicians, including fiddler and piper John Armstrong, fiddlers Archie Bartram and Archie Dagg (who also played and made smallpipes), and Annie Armstrong (later Annie Snaith) on piano, playing sometimes in small concerts in an ensemble called the Border Minstrels. He was also a contemporary of the well-known piper Jack Armstrong. The two men had dis-

tinctively different approaches to the music, and their styles came to define the range of traditional style.

By the time Billy had moved with his family to the country, urban musicians began seeking him out. Forster Charlton, in particular, a great advocate of the pipes, began visiting Billy after Forster's brother Bill had invited Billy to play at the annual Northumbrian Gathering concerts he began in Alnwick in 1949. The city and the country began to come together as the larger British revival of interest in folk music gained momentum, and Billy's influence helped shape the regional musical loyalties of younger urban musicians. Forster's amateur recordings of Billy were issued as an LP in 1971, bringing his music to a younger generation. Richard Kelly, a radio producer on Tyneside, also recorded Billy Pigg for the BBC, and those recordings were issued on tape as *The Legendary Recordings* in 1988. Kelly likened Billy's playing to the jazz of Sydney Bechet—"fiercely rhythmic" with "cascading groups of notes." He "had a beautiful tone," Kelly said to me. He also said that he was never certain whether Billy was playing in esoteric rhythms or missing an occasional beat. Listening retrospectively, it does seem that, even with his extraordinary facility, Billy

sometimes let the tunes run away from him.

This recording was made around 1958 by Royce Wilson, an American working on Tyneside. There, inspired by the local music, he bought a state-of-the-art tape recorder and recorded a number of musicians in a small hall outside of Newcastle. The Wilson tapes are remarkable, capturing excellent informal performances. Billy played well that day, and I am indebted to Royce Wilson for making these recordings available.

Billy opens with one of his compositions. Generally called "Archie's Fancy," after either Archie Dagg or Archie Bartram, the tune may have originally been titled the "Winter Waltz" or "Raindrop Waltz." The physical limitations of the smallpipes provide little leeway for techniques of expression as allowed on other instruments—changes in dynamics, for instance, are not possible—but in his exquisite timing and use of ornamentation, Billy gives an unusually lyrical performance. He segues into a major test piece, a tune with variations called "Holey Ha'Penny." Pipers today use "Holey Ha'Penny," with its torrents of notes in the variations, as a competition piece, and versions by Tom Clough and Billy Pigg remain the standards against which today's players compete.

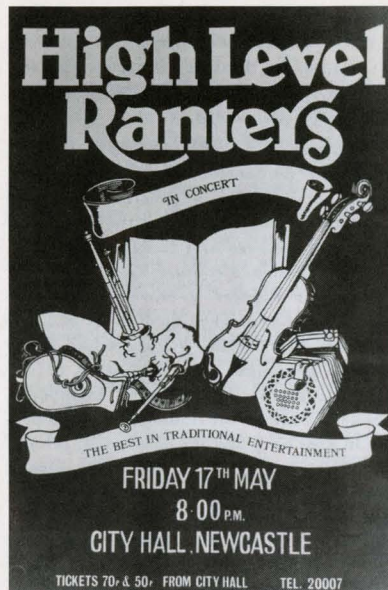
2 Chris Ormston NORTHUMBRIAN SMALLPIPES *Keening in the Wind /Alston Flower Show*

Chris Ormston was born in 1960 in Jarrow, south of the Tyne, and lives on Tyneside in North Shields. At twelve he first heard the pipes, but because of the difficulty of obtaining instruments before the current revival was in full swing, he was fifteen before he got started. He began by listening hard to classic recordings by Tom Clough, Billy Pigg, and Joe Hutton. Later, he had help from Anthony Robb. An occupational therapist, Chris has become particularly well known as an exponent of Tom Clough's style, although these tracks do not showcase that aspect of his outstanding musicality.

"Keening in the Wind" (also known as "Back to the Hills") is associated with Billy Pigg. "Alston Flower Show" is a fine hornpipe, known in several versions. Alston, west of Northumberland in Cumbria, is the highest market town in England. Chris's rendition of the two tunes, recorded in Kim Bibby's studio in Morpeth in the summer of 1998, is a model of contemporary piping, showing great control and dexterity, the instrument in the hands of one of today's masters.

3 The High Level Ranters FIDDLE, CONCERTINA, ACCORDION, GUITAR *La Russe/The Winshield's Hornpipe (J. L. Dunk)/Jane's Fancy (Alf Gray)/Da Road to Houll (T. Anderson)*

Missionaries for Northumbrian music, the High Level Ranters took their name from the High Level Bridge, a nineteenth-century engineering marvel that spans the River Tyne between Gateshead and Newcastle, and the Cheviot Ranters, a country dance band who had chosen "Ranters" to evoke the rant step, a local dance step. The title of the High Level Ranters' first album, *Northumberland Forever* (1968), proclaims their dedication to the county's music. Five original members—Forster Charlton on fiddle and smallpipes, Colin Ross on fiddle and smallpipes, Johnny Handle on vocals, piano accordion, piano, and tenor guitar, Alistair Anderson on concertina and smallpipes, and Tom Gilfellon on vocals, guitar, and cittern—comprised one of the first virtuoso instrumental groups of the modern revival. During the Ranters' heyday, the four members (Forster had dropped out) were very much in demand in the region, playing in folk clubs, for dances, in concerts, and at festivals in Britain, Europe, and the United States. Aly Bain, the



brilliant and influential fiddler from the Shetlands, said in a 1985 interview that Colin Ross was, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, nearly the only young musician playing traditional fiddle music in England. Alistair

Anderson virtually reinvented the English concertina, taking advantage of its sharp cutting tone and showing the world that, in the hands of a virtuoso, it could play dance music. Tom Giffellon was a cutting-edge accompanist and very fine singer. Johnny Handle sang local songs with bravado, and he composed songs that soon became associated with the region. Wherever they went, the Ranters were advocates for old songs and instrumental music, music they encountered in the persons of Billy Pigg and his contemporaries, in old publications such as the 1882 *Northumbrian Minstrelsy*, and in tune manuscripts they found in archives. Their songs came from local sources, from the once flourishing musical halls of Tyneside, from old books, and from dialect entertainment. And they also featured the pipes. A new generation of mostly urban fans and musicians learned from the Ranters that music can be connected to place, and many first heard the pipes when Colin played them in concert.

Over roughly twenty years, the High Level Ranters made about ten albums. The core group remained intact through the 1979 Topic recording, *Four in a Bar*, from which this selection comes. With Colin and Johnny at the center, various versions of the band perform occasionally today.

Here they play a set of tunes associated with the country dance, "La Russe." The first is "La Russe" itself. Two tunes follow—"The Winshield's Hornpipe" (often spelled "Whinshield's") and "Jane's Fancy"—published by the Northumbrian Pipers Society in their first of several tunebooks. A tune by Shetland fiddler Tom Anderson closes the set.

4 **Jack Armstrong** NORTHUMBRIAN
SMALLPIPER *Rothbury Hills (J. Armstrong)/*
Whittingham Green Lane/The Cott (A. Ellis)/
Border Fray

Jack Armstrong was probably the best known of Northumberland's pipers until Kathryn Tickell came along. Born in 1904 in Wide-open, a coal-mining community, Jack began playing the pipes at twenty-four, having moved south of Northumberland to Yorkshire, where he worked as a chauffeur. Perhaps he missed home or the sound of his father's piping, for around 1934, he moved back to Northumberland to start a haulage business. He began broadcasting from Newcastle in the 1930s, and he was asked to assume the honorary position of piper to the Duke of Northumberland, playing at ceremonial events at the castle at Alnwick and elsewhere. A product of industrial Northumberland, Jack enjoyed traveling north to the rural districts, meeting



and learning from local musicians. He formed a country dance band, the Barnstormers, which he led on fiddle, with his wife Jenny on drums. They played first at Dinnington, a colliery village, but their fame spread, and they broadcast on radio and television. The Barnstormers' programs always included a selection of tunes on the pipes, giving the dancers a chance to catch their breath.

A handsome man, dressed in what he described as his Northumbrian tartan with a black feather tucked in his hat, Jack Armstrong became an emblem of Northumberland and was featured on radio and television. Burl Ives invited him to Hollywood to work on a film based on the Pied Piper story, but the film was never made. His widow once showed me an autographed publicity still of Marilyn Monroe that he brought back with him. In poor health, he went to live at Wallington Hall, a National Trust property in Cambo, where he entertained visitors at the cafe, frequently playing duets with Patricia Jennings, whose family had donated the property to the Trust. He died in 1978.

This 1954 field recording by Peter Kennedy shows Armstrong's straightforward playing to its advantage. It has none of the wildness of his contemporary Billy Pigg's playing, but it has a dignity that many found appealing. "Rothbury Hills," one of his compositions, remains a familiar tune in Northumberland, as does "Whittingham Green Lane." "The Cott" is a composition by Alice Ellis, a harpist with whom Armstrong played and recorded. "Border Fray" is his name for a tune commonly called "Buttered Peas." A number of older rural

musicians tell stories about Jack Armstrong visiting them, learning their tunes, and then retitling them, sometimes in ways that evoke the rural county. That seems to be what happened here.

5 Willie Taylor FIDDLE *Murray River Jig*
(G. Townsend)/*Roland and Cynthia Taylor*
(B. Black)/*Alistair J. Sim* (W. Taylor)

Visiting Willie and Nancy Taylor is always one of the pleasures of my trips to Northumberland. Willie was born in 1916 in Glendale. He and his wife Nancy lived on hill farms, shepherding for most of their adult lives. When I first met them, they lived in retirement in a cottage on a farm in North Middleton. They have since moved from the country to the small town of Wooler.

Encouraged by his parents, Willie began fiddle lessons when he was twelve or thirteen. His mother's family was, as he says, "a family of fiddlers." He found little pleasure in the instrument then, and circumstances worked out so that he stopped the lessons. Speaking of his first teacher, Willie told me in a 1987 interview, "As a stroke of luck for me, this old man, he went away, turned religious. He got the religious bug. And he went away, and that was the finish of the fiddle." The next year, he lost the tip of his left-hand



index finger in an accident, and that seemed to put an end to Willie's career as a musician. But his father wouldn't give up; he bought his son a piano accordion, and for a few years Willie played it for local dances. He tried the mandolin, the concertina, the button accordion. He came back to the fiddle when, at nineteen or so, he went to live near one of the best fiddlers in the border country, George Armstrong. And, like George Armstrong, he became one of the finest fiddlers in the border country. As was true for many rural agricultural workers, being a musician meant long treks across the countryside to play for dancing or in sessions. He won his share of competitions, starting in

1950 at the Northumbrian Gathering. In the 1950s, when Peter Kennedy was recording traditional musicians for the BBC, Willie made his first recordings, and he has since made a solo tape and appeared on other recordings with friends.

Like many Northumbrian musicians of his era, Willie plays a wide repertoire. Scottish music has had a strong influence on him, and he has always been happy to learn a good tune, no matter what its source. He writes tunes, too, mostly naming them for family and friends. Some of his tunes are played widely in the region.

We made this recording in Willie and Nancy's cottage on April 20, 1990. It's unaccompanied fiddle, probably the most difficult way to play the instrument. I got the tape rolling and made my formulaic announcement of who, when, and where. Willie mused for a moment on how old his father would have been that day. Then he named and launched into these three jigs. The first is by the late Canadian fiddler Graham Townsend. The next one, as he explains, is for Roland and Cynthia Taylor, composed by the Scottish dance musician, Bill Black. The last is one of Willie's tunes. This is rock-solid playing, reminiscent of older recordings of an earlier generation of

Northumbrian fiddlers. The bowing is strong, and the melodies stand with little ornamentation. There's a purity here, a strength, and a directness, all of which add up to masterful playing.

6 Anthony Robb NORTHUMBRIAN
SMALLPIPES *I Saw My Love Come
Passing By Me*

Born in 1948, a Ph.D. chemist and headmaster of a school in Alnwick, Anthony Robb is a brilliant player of the smallpipes. As a teacher, a competitor, a competition judge, performer, and session leader, he has been very influential in the piping world. He first heard the pipes on Jack Armstrong recordings, but the High Level Ranters' first LP introduced him to an older repertoire. The Ranters had used the 1882 *Northumbrian Minstrelsy* as a source for a number of their tunes, and Anthony was drawn to the archaic sound of the old tunes. Then Alistair Anderson showed Anthony an earlier publication, John Peacock's *A Favorite Collection of Tunes with Variations Adapted for the Northumberland Small Pipes, Violin or Flute*, which had been published around 1800 in Newcastle. Anthony cultivated an interest in the older music,



much of which stays within the one-octave range of the keyless chanter, using complex and demanding variations to add interest for listeners and to challenge musicians. He also nearly wore out the Billy Pigg 1971 LP. Anthony became one of the finest virtuosos players of his generation.

Here, in a recording he made at home in the spring of 1995, Anthony plays a tune published in both the Peacock collection and the *Northumbrian Minstrelsy*, a lovely short melody with increasingly complicated variations. Crisp notes pop out, clearly articulated, moving at a great speed.

7 Willie Taylor, Joe Hutton, and Will Atkinson FIDDLE, NORTHUMBRIAN
SMALLPIPES, AND MOUTH ORGAN
*Dance de Chez Nous/Aunt Mary's Canadian/
Neil Taylor's Jig (W. Taylor)*

Willie Taylor, piper Joe Hutton, and Will Atkinson on the mouth organ achieved a kind of fame, first in the county and then across the country, starting in the 1980s. Each had been a shepherd, and each had shaped his music in the settings of small rural communities. Those community contexts changed dramatically over the course of their lives, but in their retirement, Willie, Joe, and Will each found renewed pleasure in their music.

Will Atkinson was born in 1908 in Crookham, and he spent his life before retirement as an agricultural worker. He also worked at maintaining road signs for the local government. In his youth he had lessons from a violin teacher, and for many years he played accordion, but he is best known for his expertise on the mouth organ, which is locally called the "moothie." The composer of a number of excellent tunes, he has a long and distinguished musical history, having played and broadcast with many of the county's finest traditional musicians. It can be

difficult to hear the mouth organ, against the fiddle and pipes. On those occasions when he plays solo, he achieves a wonderful bounce in his playing. Will Atkinson and Willie Taylor are first cousins, and in the 1930s they first began playing together for dances. He and Joe Hutton were also distantly related. Will lives in Wooler, and at 91 he and his music remain spirited and full of good humor.

In June 1994, Margaret Dickson hosted a night of music at her cottage in honor, she said, of my visit. Willie, Joe, Will, and a number of their friends came with their wives to play, talk, and enjoy good company. It was a wonderful night, an unusual pleasure for Willie, Joe, and Will to get together for the sheer delight of playing rather than to practice for an event. The musicians were exhilarated, sitting in a circle, talking, laughing, making music, in one of the last times these three senior musicians reveled in each other's company. Here, Willie and Joe play a set of jigs they described as "French-Canadian." Willie learned the first two from a fiddler from Oxfordshire. The third is a tune Willie wrote for his son. You can hear the chairs creaking and the squeak of the leather in Joe's bellows—the sound of a rollicking good night of music.

8 Pauline Cato NORTHUMBRIAN SMALL-PIPERES *The Lady's Well (A. Dag)/Random/The Cliff (medley arr. P. Cato)*

Pauline Cato began playing when she was fourteen. Richard Butler, the Duke of Northumberland's piper, was offering a course in her school, and her mother, Margaret, an enthusiast of the pipes, encouraged her to enroll. Pauline had won medals as a pianist, but she and her older sister Susan knew little about the pipes. But Pauline went on to win virtually every competition, and today, trained as a language teacher, she is a professional performer on the pipes, based in Sheffield and performing mostly with fiddler and vocalist Tom McConville. Susan plays, too, and so does Margaret. The Cato family house in Stakeford, near Ashington in the industrial section of the county, has often been the site of sessions including many of the most active members of the network of pipers centered on Tyneside. The family has been very active in the Northumbrian Pipers Society, and they are familiar faces at most of the piping venues across the county.

Pauline is a superb player who makes everything seem easy. This set of tunes comes from her first solo recording, *The Wansbeck Piper*. "The Lady's Well" is a slow tune in 6/4,

composed by the late Archie Dagg. Next comes a jig, called "Random" or sometimes "Random Notes," attributed to James Hill, the mid-nineteenth-century itinerant fiddler and composer, born in Dundee, Scotland, but resident mostly on Tyneside. Pauline plays a set of variations she penned. The set closes with a hornpipe often attributed to Hill, although in his fine book about Hill, Graham Dixon says there is no conclusive evidence of Hill's authorship of either "Random" or "The Cliff," and he suggests that "Random" may be a French three-part cotillion from Hill's era.

9 Anthony Robb *Dargai (J. Scott Skinner)*

I recorded this stunning piece at Anthony's home, then in Whittingham, on July 17, 1985. Composed by the Scots fiddler J. Scott Skinner, "Dargai" is reminiscent of a highland pipe *pibroch*, a melody followed by increasingly ornamented restatements. Billy Pigg played this tune, and Anthony's increasingly intense, rippling cascades of notes in the variations are evocative of Billy's playing. Anthony was one of the first to use the concert G chanter as his preferred instrument, playing at a pitch roughly one step up from the pipes' conventional tuning, and here the sound of the G pipes is featured.

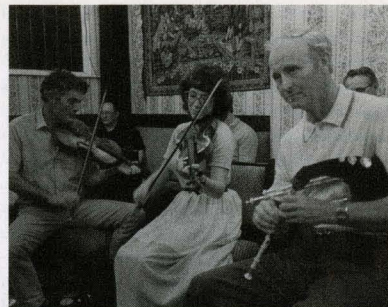
10 Billy Pigg *Skye Crofters*

This recording comes from the archive of the School of Scottish Studies in the University of Edinburgh, recorded during Billy's 1964 visit. Billy always preferred a sharp tone, and here, as he plays in a key that requires tuning his drones up a full step, that preference is especially pronounced.

11 Wayne Robertson and Nigel Jelks

ACCORDION AND MANDOLIN *Torryburn Lasses/The Wandering Tinker/Marry Me Now/Mrs. Wedderburn/Randy Wives of Greenlaw*

Scottish piano accordion virtuoso Wayne Robertson and ace guitarist/mandolinist Nigel Jelks perform in accordion and fiddle clubs throughout Scotland and the border country. The club movement originated in Scotland, but it, along with Scottish instrumental music in general, has a strong presence in Northumberland. The clubs encourage young people to take up the music, provide local musicians the chance to play in public, and generally feature guest artists. I recorded this at the Rothbury club in April 1995, visiting with Joe and Hannah Hutton. The five reels are a set for Scottish country dancing. Wayne's electronic accordion makes it sound as if a piano and bass are lurking in the background, and Nigel does a very nice job of matching him on the mandolin.



12 Joe Hutton NORTHUMBRIAN SMALL-PIPERES *Speed the Plough*

Joe was an icon of the music and of changing ways of life in England. Born in 1923, he died suddenly in August 1995. His father, a shepherd, played the fiddle. Young Joe first heard the pipes at a competition, and he was captivated. He arranged to take piping lessons from G. G. Armstrong, a noted piper in Hexham. This required him to start on horseback and transfer to a bus, eventually arriving in town. As a young man, Joe won virtually all the competitions. In his retirement from shepherding, Joe lived in Rothbury with wife, Hannah, a fine singer and descendant of a line of musicians. Both had a deep regard for tradition and deep

family roots in the region, and in recent years Hannah has begun to make her mark as a singer of old songs. Joe was ever-present at musical events, teaching for the Alnwick Pipers Society and at his own residential piping course.

Joe's music had a distinctive easiness about it, perhaps because he grew up hearing fiddle music. He would play nearly anything that appealed to him on his ivory pipes, and, no matter what he played, it had a characteristic smoothness and lift that set his music apart from others' and made his playing instantly recognizable. When he performed with Willie Taylor and Will Atkinson, he played a concert G set given to him by Mike Nelson, and his playing blended well with the fiddle and the mouth organ. He had a large repertoire, a small ego, great enthusiasm, an impish grin, and genuine generosity in music and life.

I visited Joe for a lesson on April 20, 1990, and we made this recording then. We were talking about the old Scottish tune, "Speed the Plough." Joe told me there are two ways to play it, and, first apologizing for not having played it recently, he launched into it. For me, Joe's several commercial recordings never quite captured the sparkle of his playing. This casual recording seems to come closer.

13 Billy Pigg *There's Nae Guid Luck about the House/High Level Hornpipe* (J. Hill)

From the Royce Wilson recordings, here are two tunes with variations Billy often played. The first is almost certainly an eighteenth-century fiddle tune. "High Level Hornpipe" is probably James Hill's best-known composition.

14 Willie Taylor *Robertson's Reel* (Tom Anderson)/*The Grand Chain*

One of my field recordings (July 30, 1986), this showcases Willie's interest in good tunes. A familiar piece among pipers in the county, "Robertson's Reel" was written by Shetlander Tom Anderson. "The Grand Chain" is sometimes called "Glise de Sherbrooke," and it's closely associated with Québec.

15 Colin Ross NORTHUMBRIAN SMALL-PIPES *Jock of Hazeldean/Gentle Maiden*

Colin Ross's influence on the piping scene has been immense. He came to the local music while at university, where he trained to be an art teacher. A founding member of the High Level Ranters, he is a self-described missionary for the county's music, playing the fiddle and pipes. Many pipers today will say that Colin's performances with the Ranters first introduced them to the pipes. He left a teaching post to become a full-time



pipemaker, serving too as the honorary curator of a large collection of pipes held then by the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle-upon-Tyne (now forming the core collection of the Bagpipe Museum in Morpeth). His careful study of fine old instruments informed his own work, and his keen mind and devotion to the music led to the creation of very refined sets of small-pipes. His interest in bellows-blown pipes from the borders led to the revival of the Scottish smallpipes, a revival of huge proportions among players of Scottish music, and the modest revival of interest in the half-

longs, a larger bellows-blown border bagpipe associated with Northumberland. Always happy to share his hard-won technical knowledge, he has trained a number of today's instrument-makers, and he has long served the Northumbrian Pipers Society. He and his wife, Ray Fisher, a leading singer of Scottish traditional music, live in Monk-seaton, and their house is a magnet for people passionate about the music.

We recorded these tunes on August 20, 1998, at my house in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Colin was en route to a gathering of Northumbrian pipers in Vermont, and I prevailed upon him to play some tunes on a stunning set of pipes in Thailand ebony and silver he had recently finished. This was a kind of free-association for Colin, as he played whatever came to mind. You can hear the tunes come to him, and you can hear the sound of the bellows being pumped up. Then he plays "Jock of Hazeldean," a melody for a ballad associated with Sir Walter Scott. "Gentle Maiden," another slow piece, is probably Irish, although it is a familiar part of the modern Northumbrian smallpipes repertoire.

16 Willie Taylor *The Pearl Wedding (W. Taylor)/Nancy Taylor's Reel (W. Taylor)*

These two reels are probably Willie's best-known compositions, one celebrating a special anniversary, the other honoring his wife. We recorded these on July 30, 1986, in Willie and Nancy's cottage.



17 Anthony Robb *Lament for Ian Dickson (A. Robb)*

Anthony wrote this beautiful, slow piece to commemorate the early passing of a friend, Margaret Dickson's husband, Ian. In a multi-tracked recording he made at his home in spring 1995, he plays it as a duet, using a second line written by his former wife, Carole Robb.

18 Jack Armstrong and the Barnstormers COUNTRY DANCE BAND
Keel Row/Durham Rangers/Greencastle/Hesleyside Reel/Yankee Doodle

Sometimes listed as the Northumbrian Barnstormers, Jack Armstrong's band featured Jack and Leslie Beatty on fiddles. Roy Hartnell played accordion, and Phil Sutherland played bass. Alice Ellis was the pianist until Wally Fell replaced her. Jack's wife, Jenny, or Bill Armstrong played the drums. Alice Ellis also sometimes played the harp to accompany Jack when he played the pipes. The Barnstormers broadcast extensively, made recordings, and played a heavy schedule of bookings, often playing five nights a week.



The Northumbrian country dance band sound was heavily influenced by the accordion-driven Scottish dance music, and today bands led by John Dagg and Tommy Edmundson continue that sound. This is a 1954 field recording by Peter Kennedy, featuring the band in a selection of tunes mostly familiar in Northumberland.

19 Chris Ormston *Miss Hannah Ormston (C. Ormston)/Katie Elliot's Jig (C. Ormston)*

Two of his own compositions, recorded in the studio in August 1998, give Chris the chance to show a couple of unorthodox techniques. In the first tune, his slow, sliding, slurring transition between two notes flies in the face of the convention of crisp, staccato articulation. But his rapid ornamentation, reminiscent of an Irish triplet, in the second shows remarkable articulation. He wrote the first around Christmas 1996 as a gift for his daughter, the second for the daughter of a friend.

20 Kathryn Tickell NORTHUMBRIAN
SMALLPIPES AND FIDDLE *Mr. Nelson's
Birthday Waltz* (K. Tickell)

Beyond Northumberland, Kathryn Tickell is the best-known contemporary Northumbrian piper. She received early tuition on the pipes from Anthony Robb, did well in competitions, and, with the encouragement of Alistair Anderson and others, established herself as a leading younger player, on pipes as well as fiddle, in the world of traditional music. An engaging performer, she tells stories about the music, rooting it in her family and in the county. Her recordings document a progression toward a strongly personal style of playing and composing, although she has also recorded an album of traditional tunes from the county. This track comes from her 1997 recording on Park Records, *The Gathering*. Accompanied by Ian Carr on guitar, Paul Flush on piano, and Neil Harland on bass, she plays (on pipes and fiddle) a tune she wrote for Mike Nelson of Bar Hill, near Cambridge, a very highly regarded pipemaker.



21 Billy Pigg *Border Spirit* (T. W. Pigg)

This is one of Billy Pigg's compositions, a masterwork from the Royce Wilson recordings. Played very freely, it illustrates a different side of Billy's virtuosity. There is a story that he composed it to show his friend John Doonan, a very fine Irish piccolo player who lives on Tyneside, that the pipes could invoke the slow airs of Ireland, but for many the tune seems more evocative of the border country itself.

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Back cover photograph: Tyne Bridge, Newcastle-upon-Tyne

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Inside front cover, second image: George Mitchell and Will Atkinson, 1985

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1. BILLY PIGG, *Archie's Fancy/Holey Ha'penny* 2:58
2. CHRIS ORMSTON, *Keening in the Wind/Alston Flower Show* 3:36
3. THE HIGH LEVEL RANTERS, *La Russe/The Winshield's Hornpipe/Jane's Fancy/Da Road to Houll* 4:47
4. JACK ARMSTRONG, *Rothbury Hills/Whittingham Green Lane/The Cott/Border Fray* 4:13
5. WILLIE TAYLOR, *Murray River Jig/Roland and Cynthia Taylor/Alistair J. Sim* 4:09
6. ANTHONY ROBB, *I Saw My Love Come Passing By Me* 2:52
7. WILLIE TAYLOR, JOE HUTTON, AND WILL ATKINSON, *Dance de Chez Nous/Aunt Mary's Canadian/Neil Taylor's Jig* 3:28
8. PAULINE CATO, *The Lady's Well/Random/The Cliff* 3:53
9. ANTHONY ROBB, *Dargai* 2:04
10. BILLY PIGG, *Skye Crofters* 1:14
11. WAYNE ROBERTSON AND NIGEL JELKS, *Torryburn Lasses/The Wandering Tinker/Marry Me Now/Mrs. Wedderburn/Randy Wives of Greenlaw* 3:21
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