

# Barnaby Brown

*Northern triplepipe & Great Highland bagpipe*

## Sample programme (1 hour)



*Ardchattan Priory, Argyll, 9th century grave stone*

**BARNABY BROWN**

*Northern triplepipe made by Luciano Montisci*

**The John Purser Sonata** (2005)

*Variations on korffiniwr – 11001011, one of 24 grounds possibly established before 1119 at a council of musicians at Glendalough, Ireland.*

**IAIN DALL MACKAY, 'THE BLIND PIPER OF GAIRLOCH'** (c.1656–c.1754)

*Iain Dall's chanter and 18th-century drones reproduced by Julian Goodacre*

**Gogallaich na'n Cearc – The Hen's March o'er the Mudden**

***Voluntary Prelude & Reel: Cailleach Liath Rarsair – The Gray Wife of Rasay***

**Failte na'n Rothaich – The Munros' Salute (c.1698)**

*The theme & variations of 'The Monros' Salute' follow the ground:*

**A A B A**  
**B B A B'**

**Cumh Mhic Caoie – MacKay's Lament** (1st Lord Reay, Iain Dall's grandfather)

*Sung in canntaireachd – traditional didactic chanting*

***Voluntary Prelude & Jig: Cailleach a' Mhuillear – The Miller's Wife***

**Lament for the Laird of Arnaboll** (Donald MacKay, Iain Dall's 2nd cousin)

## The Northern Triplepipe

There are two triplepipe traditions. The oldest and richest is in Sardinia, where the instrument is known as the *launeddas*. The survival of a Bronze-age statuette there suggests that it enjoyed unbroken oral transmission and cultural distinction for over 2500 years. Despite a substantial and virtuosic repertoire, the number of professional players fell to dangerously low levels in the 1960s and 70s and a generation of Sardinians scarcely knew about the instrument. Fortunately, an exciting crop of young players is now changing that.

The triplepipe tradition of Britain and Ireland died out in the late Middle Ages. It was known as the *cuisle* in Gaelic-speaking regions, where it enjoyed prestige between the eighth and twelfth centuries. In the thirteenth century, the triplepipe was known to stone masons in London and Devon, and to manuscript illuminators working in Canterbury and York.



Westminster Abbey  
13th century



St John the Baptist, Hawkchurch, Devon  
c. 1200, South Arcade capital



Clonmacnois, Ireland  
early 10th century

The revival of the northern triplepipe was initiated by John Purser in 1992. New instruments and repertoire were first developed by Hamish Moore (1993) and later by myself and Luciano Montisci (since 2001). In the absence of any surviving instruments or written music, this revival draws its inspiration from medieval iconography, a set of fifteenth-century grounds (from a syllabus for Welsh harpers), and the living traditions of Sardinian *launeddas* and Highland pibroch.

A lively cultural exchange has blossomed between Scotland and Sardinia, thanks to the excitement and energy of Brian Vallely, John Purser, Dante Olinas and Franco Staffa. I joined the scene in 1999, after John Purser showed me the Irish and Scottish images. Julian Goodacre then lent me *The Launeddas* (1969), a study by the Danish musicologist Andreas F. Bentzon. This inspired me to visit Sardinia and take the project seriously. Helped initially by Pitano Perra, I ended up living in Sardinia for almost 6 years. During this time, I developed four hybrid “Northern” instruments with Luciano Montisci. That was the easy part; composing repertoire for them is a more daunting creative task.

Given the instrument’s prominent representation in medieval art, and the high esteem for Irish instrumental music expressed by Geraldus Cambrensis in the late twelfth century, the northern triplepipe tradition was surely as rich as *launeddas* music. Triplepipes differ from most bagpipes by having two chanter. This allows the player to use each hand independently, like an organist, which opens up musical possibilities unavailable on wind instruments where the fingerholes are all on one tube (like an oboe or whistle).

The scale of the two chanter often overlaps. While this reduces the melodic range, it increases the richness of sound and potential for hypnotic textures. This is not an instrument which lends itself to melody; instead, its strengths lie in spell-weaving, prayer, rhythmic games, and the subtle, sophisticated, ever-changing textures which, in expert hands, entrance the listener. The effect is like gazing on an Oriental prayer rug, or carpet page from the Book of Kells.

## Iain Dall MacKay, 'The Blind Piper of Gairloch' (c.1656–c.1754)

Iain Dall was bard and piper to three Lairds of Gairloch (7th–9th). He is unique among the hereditary pipers of Scotland in achieving fame both for music and for poetry. Nearly 300 pibrochs survive from era of the piping dynasties, most of them anonymous; of these, eleven can be attributed to Iain Dall with reasonable confidence. Several of these have acquired a hallowed status in the piping community, including the two laments performed today. These cathedrals of melodic craftsmanship represent the peak of nobility in Gaelic music.

Between 1694 and 1720, Iain Dall's dynastic employers barely set foot in Gairloch. During their absence, Iain Dall was a regular guest of the 23rd Munro chief (the Blind Baron) at Foulis Castle, and of the 14th Baron of Sleat (Sir Alexander MacDonald) at Duntulm and Mugstad on the Isle of Skye. As well as his bagpipe chanter, much of our knowledge concerning Iain Dall was carried by descendants to Nova Scotia in 1805. In his *Reminiscences of a Long Life* (1868), 'Squire' John MacKay wrote:

*My father, grandfather and great-grandfather were successively Pipers to the Lairds of Gairloch and as such held free lands under successive Lairds. My great-grandfather was blind and was known far and near under the name of "Piobair Dall", that is the "Blind Piper"... The celebrated Gaelic poet, William Ross was this blind man's grandson by a daughter; and thus William Ross and my father were first cousins... My grandfather, Angus MacKay, was I believe a good scholar – a rare thing in the Highlands in those days. When a young man he travelled a good deal with the young Laird, Sir Alexander McKenzie, and they were on the closest intimacy during the rest of their lives.*

This intimacy carries significant historical resonance. Masters of musical and poetic craft were often second-degree nobility or valued companions to the chief. Iain Dall's own sense of station emerges from an anecdote in *Sar-Obair nam Bard Gaelach* (1841), in which *Iain* is translated as 'John':

*After the death of Sir Alexander McDonald of Slate, John paid a visit to his old rendezvous, now occupied by his friend's son. The aged bardic-piper soon experienced the verification of the adage – new kings, new laws – instead of being honoured with a seat in the dining-room as usual, he was ushered into the servants' hall immediately below – an indignity he was by no means disposed to pass sub silentio. As the young chief was taking dinner, a liveried servant made his appearance in the hall, and addressing John said – "My master wishes you to play one of those tunes he often heard his father praise" – "Go back to your master," replied Iain Dall warmly, "and tell him from me, that when I used to play to his father it was to charm and delight his ears, and not to blow music up his a——!"*

This joke still holds currency in Gaelic-speaking circles 250 years later.

The aristocratic friendships of Iain Dall and his son lend support to a belief passed down on both sides of the Atlantic that Iain Dall's maternal grandfather was Donald Duaghal MacKay, 1st Lord Reay. Donald Duaghal's notoriety as a womaniser is remembered to this day in Strathnaver, and the stigma of illegitimacy would account for the omission of this biographical detail in nineteenth-century sources.

The two examples of *ceòl beag* ascribed to Iain Dall are, like his chanter, unique in having a pedigree attaching them to such an early composer. The most intriguing source of Iain Dall's music, however (and that closest, culturally, to the world of the hereditary pipers) is *Colin Campbell's Instrumental Book*, 1797. This was written out in Argyll, using an enigmatic notation derived from the *canntaireachd*, or traditional "chanting", used in teaching.

Born and raised in Glasgow, **Barnaby Brown** was principal flautist of the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain. While a student at Cambridge, he took up the baroque flute and sang with Gonville & Caius College Choir. In 1996, he was Composer in Residence at St George's English School, Rome, and in 2000 won a Scotland's Year of the Artist residency, composing polyphony for Gaelic choirs in Trotternish, Isle of Skye. He has recorded two CDs of Bulgarian music with Derek Bell and is editor of the Siubhal Series, bringing single malts of unwritten British music to a wider audience.

Barnaby is the first Highland piper to apply the principles of the early music movement to pibroch. He began measuring historic instruments with Julian Goodacre in 1998 and plays a reproduction of a chanter from c.1680, originally played by the Blind Piper of Gairloch. His historically-informed performance style led to three appearances at the Edinburgh International Festival and numerous invitations to festivals abroad. His recordings, articles and editions since 1998 have helped to revolutionise the way pipers approach the sources of pibroch (1760–1850), enriching the tradition beyond the legacy of the competition system.

His quest to revive the northern triplepipe, the bagpipe's predecessor, led to six years in Sardinia and the formation of Band-Re with guitarist Gianluca Dessí. Their debut album, *Strathosphere* (April 2006), draws on an eclectic range of traditions to inspire original compositions and refresh historic Gaelic material. Since 2006, Barnaby has been a lecturer at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, teaching "Composing & Arranging", "Listening Skills" and "Historical Studies" on the BA (Scottish Music) course, and "Teaching Musics of the World" on the BEd (Music) course.

Barnaby's recent inter-cultural projects include reviving the silver pipes of Ur (c.2450 B.C.); composing works for gamelan and Highland pipes; developing the "Four Nations Piping Concert" with Mick O' Brien, Pauline Cato and François Lazarevitch; performing with the Izmir State Orchestra; and co-directing the Scottish Government commission "Yatra" for the Edinburgh Mela 2008 and 2009, combining Japanese Taiko, Indian dhrupad, and Scottish traditions. His research interests include Scotland's traditional grounds, historic intonation, and *canntaireachd* – the Gaelic art of "chanting", or expressing instrumental music with the voice.