

FESTIVAL

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LOWLAND SCOTS PRONUNCIATION

Marjory
Kennedy-Fraser



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Pronunciation in Lowland Scots Song

By
Marjory
Kennedy-Fraser

It is more or less commonly taken for granted that singers who dwell in Lowland Scotland know how to sing Lowland Scots. This does not follow. English singers who have been trained exclusively in Italy say, often do not know how to sing English! But further, the young Scots singer of to-day has had no opportunity of hearing the sounds of the Classic Scots of our finest national lyrics.

The vowels and consonants of Classic Scots can be easily taught to singers acquainted with Italian, French, and German, the Scots pronunciation having more in common with these tongues than with English. The Italian "a," the French "u," and the German "ch," for instance, are all very much in evidence in Scots, and the trilled "r" is not, as in English, almost a negligible quantity.

And for examples of this Classic Scots we need not go further than to the lyrics of Burns, who may be said to have set for us a permanent standard among the shifting sands of our varying dialects much as Dante's work raised his native Tuscan to the rank of Classic Italian from among the varying Italian dialects which still locally persist as Milanese, Venetian, etc.

As a first lesson we shall run carefully through one song, and then try to give some general rules with lists of words which commonly occur, grouping them more or less according to these rules.

I may say that in this matter I speak from a direct oral tradition extending back to the eighteenth century to my great-grandmother, Mary More, who was a noted singer of the traditional songs in her time. (On the Kennedy side we were entirely Gaelic-speaking Perthshire Highlanders.) From her Lowland mother, Mary More, my grand-aunt, Isabella Kennedy, learnt the tradition, and she in turn passed it on to my father, who carried it round and round the world. And as, from my twelfth year with intervals of years for study, I was his accompanist, and sat at his feet as his disciple nearly every night of every week of every year for many years, I could not escape the tradition. And from this, graven on my brain as on a gramophone disc, I am now attempting to deduce some rules of pronunciation and to formulate a table that may be helpful to our future singers and may save them alike from hesitancy and from error.

Let us take, then, as an example on which to base certain generalizations, the beautiful old lyric, with hypnotic refrain, and verses added to by Burns :—

Ca' the yowes to the knowes,
Ca' them where the heather grows,
Ca' them where the burnie rows,
My bonnie dearie.

The words we shall deal with in the refrain will be (1) Ca', (2) yowes, (3) to, (4) knowes and rows, (5) where, (6) heather, (7) grows, (8) my, (9) bonnie.

In the word (1) *Ca'* = call, we have an instance of the Scots manner (akin to the French) of dealing with "l" by simply dropping it. In the Scots words :—

gowden = golden	ha' = hall	
stown = stolen	sma' = small	
knowe = knoll	wa' = wall	
pow = poll	ca' = call	
row = roll	fause = false	} vowel sound ò
cowt = colt	saut = salt	
dowie = doleful	haud = hold	} vowel sound à
fa' = fall	scaud = scald	
fa'n = fallen	fu' = full	
a' = all	pu' = pull	

we have numerous instances. In the cases of *ol* the sound becomes the *ow* of the English word *now*. In cases of the rich *a* in words with double *l*, the rich vowel sound remains, the *ll* simply drops out.

The next word (2) *yowes* is apt to give rise to controversy. It is *spelt* sometimes *ewe* sometimes *yowe*. *But the spelling makes no difference.* The assonances in the context are our guide. And thus it is sometimes pronounced like the English *yew*, sometimes, as here, to rhyme with the word *knowe*, which is sounded like the English *now*.

"Will ye gang to the ewe-buchts, Marion," another beautiful old song, furnishes a case in point, the *yew* sound being there the more appropriate in its relation to the surrounding vowel colours. Also, some say, it was thus traditionally sung.

But *vow* always as in English—"She *vowed* she swore she wad be mine"—Roy's wife o' Aldivalloch.

We would call attention to an important distinction between the convention of vowel spacing in singing *ow* or *ou* in English and in Lowland Scots. Whereas, in singing the English diphthong the principal vowel is prolonged as much as possible, the *vanish* vowel appearing only at the very end of the syllable thus:—AAAAAoo; in singing the same diphthong in Scots we allow *a little more time* to the second vowel, thus:—AAAAooo*.

The next word calling for remark is (3) *to*. This should be pronounced somewhat like the French *tu*, or as a prolonged *i* in English *tip*, never as *tae*. The latter is not appropriate in the beautiful *singing* Scots we are aiming at standardizing. And singers, in guarding against this, will find themselves rewarded in that giving attention to delicate discrimination of vowel sounds will tend to sharpen their ear-sense all round and will be found an invaluable means of ear-education.

We have already dealt with (4) *knowes* and *rows* as rhyming with *yowes*, and as belonging to a large class of words taking this sound from the elision of an *l* or *ll*.

The next word (5) *where*, although *spelt* generally as in English was always sung in this song by my father as *whaar*†, the *a* not being quite so dark as might be indicated by the spelling *whaur*. It will be found, I

* An analogous case will be found in the difference that exists between the proportion of time allowed to the *o* in *io* in Italian and in Gaelic. In Italian the second vowel (as in the pronouns *io* and *mio*) is distinctly heard, whilst in Gaelic the *o* of *io* (in *piob* for instance) can only be detected by the expert ear, so short is it. Please note this, those who sing *Caristiona*. The vowel *i* here usurps the time of the whole syllable, the following *o* being merely an introductory hanger-on to the coming *n*.

† *i.e.*, like Italian *a*, not like Italian *ò*.

think, that with the vowel sounds that precede and follow it in these lovely lines "Ca' the yowes to the knowes, Ca' them where the heather grows," the rich *ah* sound in *whaar* gives a more satisfactory sound-colour scheme than would the thinner sound of the English *where*. In the one case we almost echo the rich sound of *a* in "Ca'" and in the other we stress the coming vowel sound in "heather" by anticipating it.

Another example of this balance of vowel colour will be found in Hector Macneill's "Whaar hae ye been a' the day, my boy* Tammie?" The "*whaar*" and the "*a*" here answer or balance one another as do also the "hae" and "day," the *ee* vowel of "ye been" giving zest to these again by its shrill contrast.

But let us return to the song we are considering. The word (6) *heather* belongs to a class of two-syllabled words that in old Scots song generally conform to a given rhythmical pattern. Needless to say that in strophic song the melody, repeated for each verse, undergoes certain modifications, adaptations to the slightly varying rhythms of the fresh lines. One very important matter in such adaptations is the choice of the characteristic Scots short-long ————— or long-short ————. Such words as *heather* in this song and *tassels* in the line "But I dinna see the broom wi' its *tassels* on the lea" in "Why left I my hame," take the short-long —————, a trick that gives a *parlante* (natural-speaking) effect to the diction while not throwing out the swing and balance of the rhythm, since the second syllable, without unduly calling attention to itself, can quite easily fill in

* Note that boy here is sung as two syllables *bo'-ee*.

the longer but unaccented space until the following syllable and its note are due.

In dealing with this frequently interchangeable short-long and long-short rhythm in Scots song, a good deal of experience and judgment is called for, as our published versions give as a rule only one verse with the melody, and even that not carefully fitted to the words.

For the sake of helping the student in this matter let us leave for a moment "Ca' the yowes" and look at Burns' "My Tocher's the jewel," which is bristling with this rhythmic mannerism. The words :—

mickle	apple	laddie	cunnin'
little	nourish	siller	timmer
tocher	hinney	canna'	rotten
jewel	cherish	proffer	credit

all take the short-long — ———. Whilst other words such as :—*brawlie, bargain, crafty, knotless*, take the long-short ——— —. This song, by the way, like "Ca' the yowes," was one of the already existing old songs that Burns touched up. Burns, with the true insight and economy of genius, used up the fragmentary traditional stuff that lay around him and, setting it in order and sifting it, fused it into a concentrated artistic whole. We must realize therefore that Scottish song, while to a large extent traditional, has nevertheless been constantly undergoing this process of being worked over by song-makers alike on the literary and on the musical side. Burns took over much that was strong and beautiful and (as Kenneth Macleod is doing in Hebridean Song to-day) wrought it up afresh. Edmund Gosse indeed went so far as to assert that not one line of "My love is like a red, red rose" was original on Burns' part, but that

with his genius he selected and put together, as a convincing beautiful whole, fragmentary floating lines of old Scots tradition. This being so, we may expect in our classics to find lines that belong to different epochs, and we must accordingly adapt our pronunciation to the best *ear*-effect to be got out of the present versions. Burns himself sometimes wrote in Scots*, sometimes in English, and we must judge of the required pronunciation accordingly. "Scots wha hae," for instance, is written entirely in English with the exception of the words *wha*, *hae*, *wham*, *aften*, *die* (dee). Apropos of the way to sing *now*, *hour*, *power* in this song, let us turn again to "Ca' the yowes" and deal with the word (7) *grows*. This, as is evident from the rhymes, is to sound like English *grouse* (but with the *z*-like *s*). It belongs to a class of words that change the sound *o* into *ow* as :—four=fower, o'er=ower, etc.

Now there are words that fall into another classification and change *ow* as in *now* into *oo*, as for instance :—

moo=mouth	stoond=stound
noo=now	poother'd=powdered
oor=our	croon'd=crowned
oor=hour	goon=gown
prood=proud	oot=out
lood=loud	doon=down
poor=power	broon=brown
pootch=pouch	toon=town
boor=bower	'boot='bout
floer=flower	hoose=house
coorin'=cowering	moose=mouse
shoor=shower	soond=sound †
sooth=south	

* See his "Afton Water," containing only one English word pronounced in Scots fashion—among=amang.

† But never *poond*=*pound*, instead (if Scotisized), it becomes *pumd*.

And these, as a rule, are to be thus sounded even if spelt in the song after the English fashion.

But in "Scots wha hae," which, as aforesaid, is nearly all English and is in a grandiose mood, we should not Scotisize the "Now's the day and now's the hour, See approach proud Edward's *power*" into "Noo's the day and noo's the oor," etc. The caressing *oo* sounds would be here inappropriate*. This caressing *oo* sound is one much used alike in Gaelic and in Lowland song, especially in near contrast with the more passionate *ee*. But the use of this sound-colour scheme is not peculiar to Scots song. We have a beautiful instance of it in Heine's "Du bist wie eine Blume." What we want to emphasize here in that while *oo* is not appropriate to the martial ardour of Bruce's Address to the Scots at Bannockburn, in the tender "John Anderson my Jo," on the other hand, it plays an important part. "Your bonnie *brow*" would be *broo*, and "Now we maun toddle down, John" would give us *noo* for now and *doon* for down.

While on this point, we might digress to the two versions (modern attempts to reconstruct an old one lost) of "The Flowers o' the Forest." In Jean Elliot's, which is frankly Scots all through, I would advocate the

* The same holds good in Walter Scott's martial songs, such as "March, March, Ettrick and Teviotdale," where we should certainly not soften the *ou* in *sounding* and *bounding*, but give them their full English resonance, whilst in the old ballad, "The Bonnie Earl o' Moray," on the other hand, the beautiful "comes *soondin* (sounding) thro' the *toon*" owes its effect mainly to the onomatopaeic hypnotic repetitions of *oon* and *oo*. In "March, March" note also that the word *fight* here must not be Scotisized into *fecht*, and this not entirely because it is a martial song, but because it is consistently originally conceived in English not in Scots. Other such songs

pronunciation *floers*, but in Mrs. Cockburn's, which is largely English, the singer might use either *floers* or *flowers*, as might best please himself. Also in Mrs. Cockburn's version I would sing the final *g* in *blooming*, *perfuming*, etc., whilst in Jean Elliot's I would cut off the *g* and sing *moanin'*, *liltin'*, *gloamin'*, *milkin'*.

And coming back now to "Ca' the yowes" we would drop the *g* in *evenin'*, *fauldin'*, *soundin'*, in the *verses*, and the latter word should be assonant with *Cluden*. In the last verse, *stowen*=stolen, is assonant with *Thou*—"Thou hast stown my very *heart*." The Scots pronunciation of that last word *hert* (not *hart*) would seem to be related to the Saxon *herz*, as would also the old Scots *hairst*=harvest to the Saxon *herbst*. The word *part*, used here to rhyme with *hert*, takes somewhat of the same vowel colour (as would also *y^rrd*=yard, *ērt*=art, *M^rrtmas*=Martinmas, *m^rrrit*=married, etc.). The closing lines:—

" I can dee, but canna part
Frae my bonnie dearie."

yield us *dee*, *my*, and *bonnie*. *Die* is invariably sung *dee*; *my* must never be given the lazy colloquial sound of *ma*; *bonnie* is classed as a rule with the short-long rhythm. But, in cases like the "Birks o' Aberfeldy," where the strong melodic rhythm of the air overrules this generalization, we sing Bon-nie lassie, etc.

are "Bonnie Dundee," "Pibroch o' Donuil Dubh," and "Kenmure's on and awa.'" As an instance of martial song conceived and to be sung in Scots we have the Jacobite "Wha wadna fecht for Charlie." Burns also has a number of beautiful love songs conceived in English, notably "Afton Water," "Ae fond kiss," "My Nannie's awa'," "Ye Banks and Braes," "My heart is sair," "My love is like a red, red rose," and this, in spite of the fact that Scots words appear in the titles. In the songs, however, he uses only a few classic Scots words as *ilka*, *gang*, *fause*, *sae*, for their beauty of sound.

Without reference to any particular song, we now add a few further generalizations. Words even if spelt in the text with *gh* have a *ch* sound :—

†bocht=	bought	*licht=	light
socht=	sought	*nicht=	night
focht=	fought	*sicht=	sight
ocht=	ought	*fricht=	fright
fecht=	fight	*bricht=	bright
lauch=	laugh	dochter=	daughter

also laigh or laich=low

In some words, as *tough*, *enough*, a soft *y* is introduced before the vowel, thus :—*tyuch*, *enyuch*. The like happens in the word *duck*, which is pronounced like the English word *duke*.

The consonants *ng* in *anger*, *langer*, must, as a rule, be given as in the English word *singer*, not as in *finger*.

Past participles sounded as two syllables thus :—

†lookit=	looked	†likit=	liked
†stockit=	stocked	†beggit=	begged.

Also knockit=knocked, etc.

And other words of one syllable sounded as two :—

warald=	world	Kèrel=	carle
léren=	learn.		

This in conformity with the Gaelic pronunciation which vocalizes between two consonants thus :—*falax*=*falbh*.

* With vowel sound like that in lick, nick, sick, friction, brick.

† The *ch* as in Gaelic *och* or German *ich*.

‡ See "Last May a braw wooer."

Words in English with close *ó* sound given with *aw*
or *ò* :—

auld=old	blaw=blow
cauld=cold	craw=crow
fauld=fold	raw=row
snaw=snow	new-mawn=new-mown.

The same with a clearer *ah* (the Italian *a*) :—

brak=broke	saft=soft
spak=spoke	aff=off
	aft=oft.

The same with *oo* :—

coort=court	poor=pour.
-------------	------------

The same with *ae* :—

gae=go	claes=clothes
*sae=so	rade=rode
	hame=home.

* “ Sae true his heart,
“ Sae smooth his speech.”

nae=no	stane=stone
sair=sore	mair=more
baith=both	wae=woe
lane=lone	laith=loth

also thus—

gane=gone
nane=none

but—

sang=song
lang=long
amang=among

Above we have given *nae* as the pronunciation of *no*. But there is more than one *no*. *Nae* as in “ There’s nae luck about the hoose ” is our equivalent for *not any* ; the negative, a refusal, as when Mistress Jean refuses the Laird o’ Cockpen’s offer of marriage, is *Na*. And again, the Scots equivalent of the English *not* is *no*, as

* See “ There’s nae luck about the hoose.”

in "Will ye no come back again," and "This is no my ain hoose." *Aye* for *yes* is pronounced like *I*, 1st person singular. *Ay*, for *ever*, is *ae*.

Aye, for *always*, *continually*, has no easily understood equivalent, it does not dwell so long on the first, main vowel, and this is not so pure as in *ay*=*yes*.

The equivalent of *one* is *ae*, and *ane*. See "Ae fond kiss." The equivalent of *once*=*aince*. And these must never in poetry be pronounced with the colloquial *yae*, *yin*, *yince* sounds, but always *ae*, *ain*, *aince*. Again *ain*=*own*, and *ane*=*one*, are almost alike in sound except that in *ain* the vowel sound is prolonged and in *ane* the consonant enters a *littie* sooner and is proportionately prolonged.

While discussing numbers, *twa*=*two* sounds both the *t* and the *w*

Words occurring frequently with *ee* sound are :—

e'e=eye

gie=give

een=eyes

hee=high

breer=brier

Heelant=highland

wee=wi'

dee=die.

lee=lie (to tell a falsehood)

"Ye lee, ye lee, sae lood's ye lee"—old ballad.

neest=next

weel=well

breest=breast

neebor=neighbour

preen=pin

Common verbs are :—

ha'e=have, pronounced hay ;

ha'en=had, pronounced hain ;

ta'en=taken, pronounced tain ;

mak=make, pronounced mahk ;
 shak=shake, pronounced shahk ;
 tak=take, pronounced tahk ;
 cam=came, pronounced kahm.

Whereas in English *who*, *whom*, *whose*, have only the *h* sound, whilst *where*, *why*, *when*, *what*, have all the *wh* sound ; in Scots they all alike have conserved the *wh*, thus :—*wha*, *wham*, *whawse*.

Much of the Lowland Scots poetry is of the gently amorous kind, and the words *lo'e* and *lo'es* meet the singer at every turn. *Lo'es*=*loves* is pronounced exactly like the English verb *to lose*. The word *glove*, however, which rhymes with the English verb *to love*, is always pronounced in the old ballads as in English. Also *love*, as a noun, as “ my true love, my lover,” as in English. The woeful cry of “ Waly, waly up the bank,” my father always pronounced like *wall-y*, and the *a* in *wakin'* “ Ay wakin' o' ” was similarly treated.*

We have said that the Scots, like the French, drop the consonant *l*. The Scots, like the Italians, sometimes clear out a complexity of consonants and just double the easiest, as the Italians in *aspetto*=*aspect*, etc., and the Scots in

timmer=timber	hunner=hundred
siller=silver	cahnal=candle, etc.

The Scots have many French affinities, and, indeed, they have incorporated many French words into their dialect as *braw*, from *brave* ; *douce*, from *doux* ; *bien* (pronounced *been*), from *bien* ; etc. And there is a

* N.B.—In the Hebridean song, “ The Island Herdmaid,” the word *waken* must have the English pronunciation.

strong French influence in our local pronunciation of *u* and *oo*, thus :---

mune==moon

gude=good

fule=*fool* ; but *fu'*=*full* and *pu'*=*pull* (with double
l) keep the original, the Italian *u*.

sune=soon

shune=shoon=shoes

abune=aboon=above

There is also a tendency to give :—

ate for eat

sate for seat

mate for meat

daith for death

nate for neat

hade for head

defate for defeat*

waur for worse

simmer for summer

Dare is pronounced *dahr* ; but *care* always as in English ; *blind* as *blin'*, rhyming with *din* ; but *mind*, *kind*, as in English ; *brother* and *mother* as *brither*, *mither* ; *father* as *fayther* ; *Jamie* as *Jimmie* ; *Marion* as *Mayron*.

Lass with a French *a* ; *lad* with the richer Italian *a*.

In conclusion, make a minute study of consonant formation and function and cultivate a keen sense of vowel colour and significance, and lastly make of it a life-long study and joy.

* See "Johnnie Cope."

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To Thee, O Lord, our hearts
we raise, | An Wasserflüssen Babylon.
Ermuntre dich. |
| 3 For the beauty of the earth,
Brightest and Best | Hilf, Herr Jesu, lass gelingen.
Liebster Immanuel. |
| 4 Through the day Thy love has
spared us (Vesper Hymn).
O Sacred Head, | Welt, ade! ich bin dein müde.
Passion Chorale. |
| 5 Jesus lives!
Holy, Holy! | Meinen Jesum lass ich nicht.
Sanctus! |
| 6 Come, Thou Holy Paraclete .
Jesus, Master, whose I am, . | Jesu, meine Freude.
Nicht so traurig. |
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