# The Essential Niel Gow



A collection of tunes composed by Niel Gow of Inver 1727-1807

#### The Essential Niel Gow

A Collection of tunes composed by Niel Gow of Inver 1727 - 1807

Compiled by Roy Campbell

#### WINDFALL MUSIC

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

No part of this publication may be
Reproduced without the permission
of the publisher in writing.

© Copyright 2008 Windfall Music info@windfallmusic.com www.windfallmusic.com



#### Niel Gow

Niel Gow was born on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 1727 and lived in the village of Inver near Dunkeld in Perthshire until his passing in 1807. During that time he made his mark in a long and successful career as a fiddler and composer of Scottish dance music.

His parents, John Gow and Catherine McEwan were plaid weavers and Niel would have been expected to follow this trade but for his considerable skill on the fiddle. It is thought that he taught himself to play on a kit from the age of nine, his one and only teacher, a few lessons at the age of thirteen, being John Cameron who was in the employ of Sir George Stewart as a retainer. Niel though, also lived within a community steeped in musical tradition and would surely have had any number of willing teachers to call upon.

By the time Niel was 18 he outshone all others by winning an all Scottish competition. That he was well known at this time was also evident in that the judge of the competition, who was blind, was able to say that he could tell the stroke of Niel's bow from among a hundred players.

He began to enjoy the patronage of the Atholl family, even earning a retainer of £5 per annum from the third Duke of Atholl. Niel also travelled down to London providing entertainment for the Duke's family the Murray's whilst the Parliament was in session and the Duke attended, becoming just as popular there as he was at home. He was very much in demand and travelled all over Scotland to play at Balls and other social events, being able to ask for fees well in excess of any other musicians of the time.

Niel's style as a fiddler was very distinctive. He is credited with the invention of – or at least the passing on – of the up-driven bow technique. This bowing uses a strong down bow followed by three notes played on the up bow with the second note being accented by increased travel and pressure, the last note being played staccato. Niel was also noted for giving a sudden shout during a quick dance tune which had the effect of electrifying the dancers.

Niel Gow's first wife Margaret Wiseman bore him five sons and three daughters. Of his sons who followed him into music his fourth son Nathaniel was the most famous and we can credit him with ensuring that the Gow name is still held in such high esteem. Nathaniel, though an equally famous composer and player in his own right, became a publisher of music and for some forty three years between 1784 and 1827 ensured that the family's own music was set down in print. Along with hundreds of other traditional and contemporary tunes, the Gow's compositions went to press saving them from slipping into obscurity. Due to those publications, some ninety of Niel Gow's tunes are known today along with those compositions of his sons William, the eldest, Andrew, John and Nathaniel along with Nathiel's own son Niel Gow Junior.

'A Collection of Strathspey Reels' compiled by Niel Gow at Dunkeld was published in 1784. Controversially most of the tunes in this collection are not credited to any particular composer and are a mix of traditional tunes, those written by Niel Gow and his sons and other contemporary fiddlers such as Marshall, Dow and others.

This led to the Gow's being wrongly criticised as having claimed authorship of all the tunes in the collection and indeed, only Niel Gow, Sir Alexander Don and William Nisbet are credited in that first collection. Niel Gow could not possibly have been attempting to pass all these tunes off as his own however, as they were very well known and popular tunes of the day as well as many having been published previously. Even now though, some traditional tunes are mistakenly ascribed to Niel Gow as the composer when they were in fact traditional, the 'Stool of Repentance' being one such example.

The omission of Niel Gow's name beside his own compositions was just as damaging to the Gow's as it was the Gow name and reputation which attracted people to purchase the collections. Later editions started to include credit for authorship.

In total, Niel may be credited with 1 Quickstep, 2 Hornpipes, 4 Marches, 8 Jigs, 20 Reels and 53 Strathspeys. Of his Strathspeys only 20 are played at a dancing tempo with others played at much slower speeds. Well over half of Niel's own compositions are to be played slowly as these were not just dance tunes but tunes to simply be listened to for their own sake.

Niel himself is credited with being a man of exceptional humour, honest and forthright he was unconcerned about the distinctions of rank or wealth and Robert Burns who met Niel in 1787 described him as having "...an interesting face, marking strong sense, kind open-heartedness, mixed with unmistrusting simplicity." His portrait, painted that same year by Henry Raeburn shows Niel in tartan trews, seated with his fiddle. This now hangs in the National Portrait Gallery and was commissioned by the nobility and gentlemen of the Perth Assembly as Niel was, they thought, looking rather unwell and they wanted a permanent record of him – just in case. Happily he lived for a further twenty years. This painting is also thought to be the earliest recorded example of tartan.

Niel was certainly no stranger to grief or sorrow. He outlived his first wife, three of his sons and two of his daughters, his brother Donald, his second wife Margaret Urquhart and many good friends. This is all reflected in Niel's Lament for his second wife written only two years before his own passing. Perhaps the most famous and well known of his compositions it is immensely sad but reflects a lightness of spirit as if it were his last dance with no regrets and much happiness.

His immense spirit and character still shine out from his work and presented here is the most complete collection of his compositions ever brought to the public.

#### Abercairney House. a Strathspey.



Cheap Mutton. a Strathspey.



Col: Robertson of Strewan's Welcome home.



#### Colonel David Stewart of Garth's Reel.



#### Col: Robertson's Strathspey.



#### Countess of Hadinton's Strathspey.



# Dunkeld Bridge. a Reel.



This is the last Tune Composed by Niel Gow.

# Dunkeld Hermitage. a Reel.



# Dunkeld House. a Jig.



Dunkeld Steeple. a Hornpipe.



Earl of Breadalbane's Hermitage. a Reel.



Earl of Dalhousie's March.



## Farewell to Whisky.

Very slow & pathetick.



This Tune alludes to prohibiting the making of Whisky in 1799. It is expressive of a Highlander's sorrow



on being deprived of his Favorite Beverage.

#### General MacDonald's Reel.



# General MacDonald's Strathspey.

This Tune to be played Slowly when not danced.

#### General Wemyss of Wemyss.



### Hilton Lodge. a Strathspey.



## Hon. George Baillie's Strathspey.



Hon. Mr. Ramsay Maule's Strathspey.



Lady Amelia Murray's Strathspey.



Lady Ann Hope's Favorite.



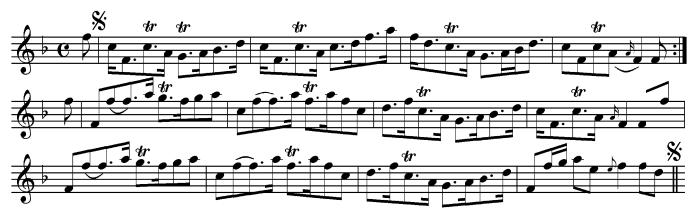
Lady Charlotte Murray's (NOW DRUMMOND) Favorite.



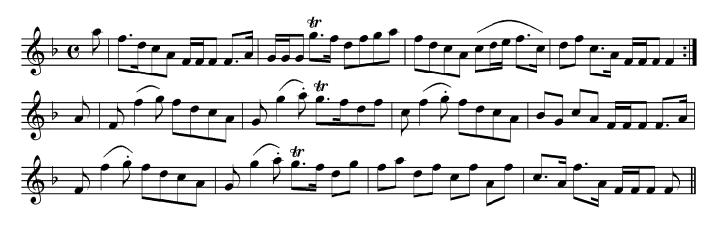
Lady Grace Douglass's Reel.



Lady Jean Montgomrie's Strathspey.

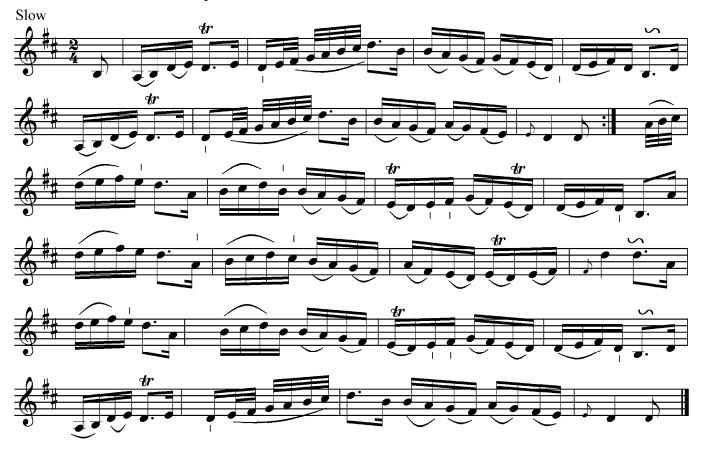


Lady Lucy Lesslie Melville's Reel.





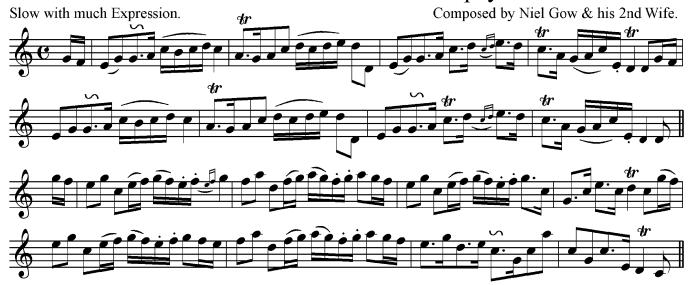
Lady Muir McKenzie's Favorite.



#### Lawer's House. a Scottish Measure.



# Loch Erroch Side. a Strathspey.



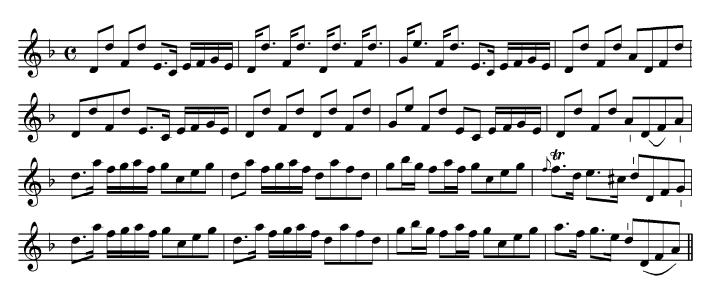
#### Lord Airley's Reel.



#### Lord Blantyre's Strathspey.



#### Lord Charles Murray's Strathspey.



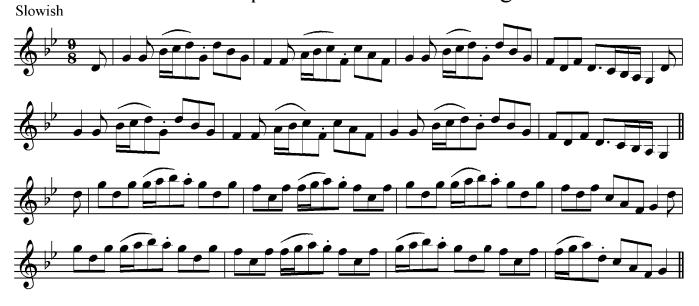
#### Lord James Murrays Reel.



Major Graham of Inchbrakie. a Strathspey.



Marquis of Tullibardine. Jig.



#### Master Erskine's Hornpipe.



#### Miss Colston's Strathspey.



#### Miss Drummond of Perth's Strathspey.



### Miss Farquharson of Invercauld's Srathspey.



#### Miss Johnston of Hilton's Strathspey.



#### Miss Margaret Graham of Inchbrakie.



#### Miss Muir McKenzie's Strathspey.



#### Miss Ross's Strathspey.



# Miss Stewart of Grantully's Reel.



#### Miss Stewart of Grantully's Strathspey.



Mr. Graham of Orchill's Strathspey.



Mr. Menzies of Culdare's Reel.

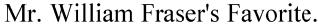


Mr. Moray of Abercarney's Strathspey.



Mr. Robertson of Lude's Strathspey.



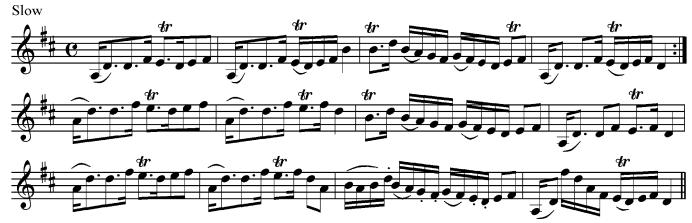




Mrs. Baird of New Byth's Strathspey.



Mrs. Carmichael of Skirling's Strathspey.



Mrs. Chisholm of Chisholm's.



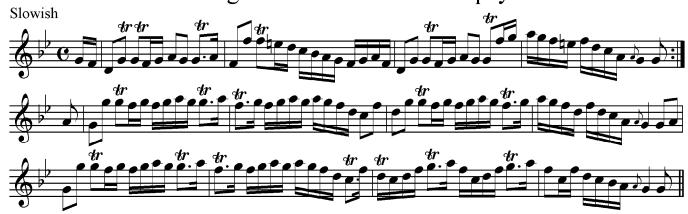
#### Mrs. Donaldson.



Mrs. Drummond of Logiealmonds Reel.



Mrs. Ferguson of Reath's Strathspey.



Mrs. Fleming of Moness. a Strathspey.



Mrs. Menzies of Culdare's Strathspey.



Mrs. Moray of Abercarney's Strathspey.



#### Mrs. Wright of Laton.



Niel Gow's comliments returned to Mr. Marshall.



Niel Gow's Lament for the Death of his 2nd Wife.



Niel Gows Lamentation for James Moray of Abercarney.



Niel Gow's Lamentation for the Death of his Brother Donald.\*



\* Donald Gow was the favorite Bass, and it was only by the Solicitations of respected Patrons that Niel could be prevailed upon to perform after his Brother's Death.

#### Niel Gow's Recovery. a Strathspey.



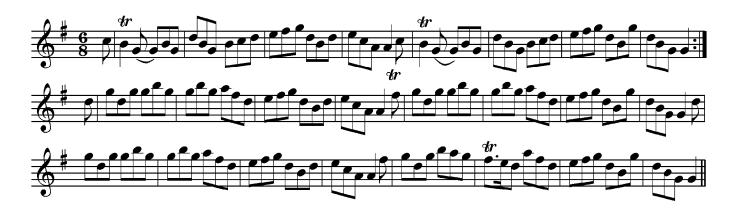
#### Orchill Graham.



# Sir George Mackenzie's. Reel.



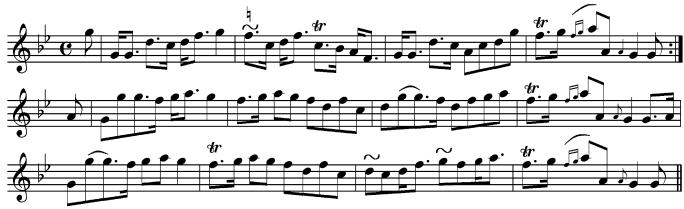
#### Sir John Henderson.



Sir John McGregor Murray in the Celtic Chair.



Strathearn. a Strathspey.



Susie Brodie. a Strathspey.

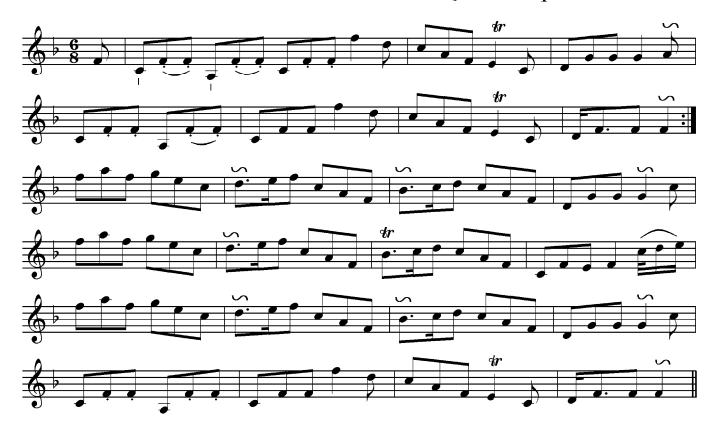




#### The Athole Volunteer's March



The Athole Volunteer's Quick Step.





The Brigg of Balater.



The Countess of Eglintoun's Delight.



The Duke of Gordon's Strathspey.



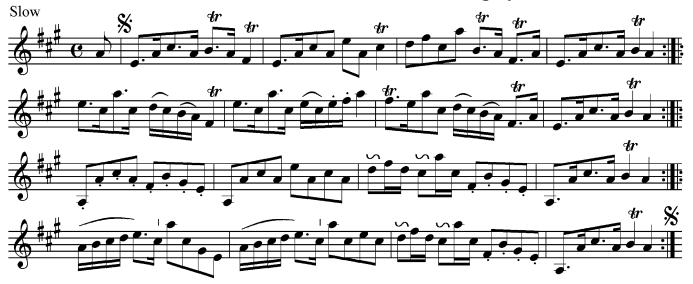
# The Dunkeld Hermitage Bridge.



The Dutchess of Atholl's Slipper.



The Dutchess of Atholl's Strathspey.



The Dutchess of Buccleugh's Strathspey.



The Hon: John Lesslie Melville's Strathspey.



The Hon. Miss Drummond of Perth's Reel.



## The Landlady of Inver Inn.



# The Marquis of Huntlys Snuff Mill. or the Royal Gift.



## The Ready Penny. a Srathspey.



#### \*Watson's Class



\*An eminent teacher in Perth



## Wha can help it.



# Whisky Welcome back again. a Strathspey



Alluding to permitting Whisky to be distilled in the year 1801 it is a merry dancing Tune.

#### Yester House. a Reel.





#### Index

Niel Gow – Introduction	1	Mr Moray of Abercarney's Strathspey	19
Abercairney House	3	Mr Robertson of Lude's Strathspey	
Cheap Mutton	3	Mr William Fraser's Favorite	
Colonel David Stewart of Garth's Reel	4	Mrs Baird of New Byth's Strathspey	20
Colonel Robertson of Strewan's		Mrs Carmichael of Skirling's Strathspey	20
Welcome Home	3	Mrs Chisholm of Chisolm's	20
Colonel Robertson's Strathspey	4	Mrs Donaldson	21
Countess of Hadinton's Strathspey	4	Mrs Drummond of Logiealmond's Reel	21
Dunkeld Bridge a Reel	5	Mrs Ferguson of Reith's Strathspey	21
Dunkeld Hermitage a Reel	5	Mrs Fleming of Moness a Strathspey	22
Dunkeld House a Jig	5	Mrs Menzies of Culdare's Strathspey	22
Dunkeld Steeple a Hornpipe	6	Mrs Morey of Abercarney's Strathspey	22
Earl of Breadalbane's Hermitage a Reel	6	Mrs Wright of Laton	23
Earl of Dalhousie's March	6	Niel Gow's compliments returned	
Farewell to Whisky	7	to Mr Marshall	23
General MacDonald's Reel	7	Niel Gow's Lament for the Death	
General MacDonald's Strathspey	7	of his 2nd Wife	23
General Wemyss of Wemyss	8	Niel Gow's Lamentation for	
Hilton Lodge a Strathspey	8	James Morey of Abercarney	24
Honourable George Baillie's Strathspey	8	Niel Gow's Lamentation for the	
Honourable Mr Ramsay		Death of his Brother Donald	24
Maule's Strathspey	9	Niel Gow's Recovery a Strathspey	25
Lady Amelia Murray's Strathspey	9	Orchill Graham	25
Lady Ann Hope's Favorite	9	Sir George Mackenzie's a Reel	25
Lady Charlotte Murray's		Sir John Henderson	26
(Now Drummond) Favorite	10	Sir John McGregor Murray	
Lady Grace Douglass's Reel	10	in the Celtic Chair	26
Lady Jean Montgomrie's Strathspey	10	Strathearn a Strathspey	26
Lady Lucy Leslie Melville's Reel	11	Susie Brodie a Strathspey	27
Lady Muir McKenzie's Favorite	11	The Athole Volunteer's March	27
Lawers House a Scottish Measure	12	The Athole Volunteer's Quick Step	28
Loch Errochside a Strathspey	12	The Brigg of Balater	28
Lord Airley's Reel	13	The Countess of Eglintoun's Delight	29
Lord Blantyre's Strathspey	13	The Duke of Gordon's Strathspey	29
Lord Charles Murray's Strathspey	13	The Dunkeld Hermitage Bridge	30
Lord James Murray's Reel	14	The Dutchess of Atholl's Slipper	30
Major Graham of Inchbrakie		The Dutchess of Atholl's Strathspey	30
a Strathspey	14	The Dutchess of	
Marquis of Tullibardine Jig	14	Buccleugh's Strathspey	31
Master Erskine's Hornpipe	15	The Honourable John Leslie	2.1
Miss Colston's Strathspey	15	Melville's Strathspey	31
Miss Drummond of Perth's Strathspey	15	The Hon. Miss Drummond	2.1
Miss Farquharson of	1.6	of Perth's Reel	31
Invercauld's Strathspey	16	The Landlady of Inver Inn	32
Miss Johnston of Hilton's Strathspey	16	The Marquis of Huntley's Snuff Mill	22
Miss Margaret Graham of Inchbrakie	16	or the Royal Gift	32
Miss Muir McKenzie's Strathspey	17	The Ready Penny a Strathspey	32
Miss Ross's Strathspey Miss Stayyart of Grandfully's Roal	17	Watson's Class	33
Miss Stewart of Grandfully's Reel	17 18	What can help it	33
Miss Stewart of Grandtully's Strathspey Mr Graham of Orchill's Strathspey	18	Whisky Welcome back again	34
Mr Menzies of Culdare's Reel	18	a Strathspey Yester House a Reel	34 34
IVIT IVICITZICS OF CUIUATE S INCCI	10	i estel libuse a reel	J <del>4</del>