

Canntaireachd

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Canntaireachd ("CAND-ar-acht") is a Scots Gaelic word meaning "chanting" or "singing," and also refers to a traditional sung mnemonic system for bagpipe players. The piece makes use of several bits of traditional Scottish sung dance music. The first section is based on elements of an Alan Lomax field recording of Mary Morrison, a singer from Barra in the Hebrides, who sang in an intriguing style combining elements of actual canntaireachd and piping imitations. The middle section uses a couple of excerpts of lyrics from a *puirt-a-beul* (traditional Scottish sung dance music, literally "dance tunes of the mouth," or "mouth music"), "Brochan lom." The music in that section is entirely newly composed. The final section is based on a part of another *puirt-a-beul*, "'S ann an Ile." In this case I used a similar melody to the traditional song.

While the lyrics of canntaireachd have no apparent meaning, except as they represent bagpipe sounds, the lyrics of mouth music do have meaning, though they are sort-of silly. The lyrics I use from "Brochan lom" and "'S ann an Ile" are—

Brochan lom, tana lom, brochan lom na sùghain / "Thin porridge, gruely porridge, thin porridge from sowans" (sowans is a fermented broth made from oat husks)

Thugaibh aran dha na gillean, leis a'bhrochan sùghain / "Give bread to the lads, with the sowans-gruel"

'S ann an Ile, n'Ile, n'Ile, 's ann an Ile rugadh me / "It's on Islay, it's on Islay I was born"
'S ann an Ile, n'Ile, n'Ile, 's ann an Ile bhoideach / "It's on Islay, it's on beautiful Islay"

I have dealt with the remarkable complexity of Gaelic spelling by using simple phonetic transliteration. Here is a chart with the particulars...

"a", "o", and "u" are pronounced as their standard European equivalents

"i" is pronounced as a "short i," – as in "hit"

"ei" is pronounced as "ay," – as in "day"

"oi" is pronounced as in "voice"

"eh" is pronounced as "e" – as in "effort"

"ee" is pronounced as in "seen"

"uh" is pronounced as "u" – as in "bug"

"nn" indicates that the "n" sound (with the tongue on the roof of your mouth) is sustained, not the vowel that precedes it.