

THE IRISH IN SCOTLAND: THE TANNAHILL SONGS

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After releasing **THE COMPLETE SONGS OF ROBERT BURNS** (12 vols, Linn Records 1996-2003), I turned my attention to a sadly neglected artist: Robert Tannahill of Paisley (1774-1810). Tannahill was a weaver, a song-writer and poet who wrote over 100 songs of a quality comparable to Burns.

This illustrated lecture, drawing musical examples from my **COMPLETE SONGS OF ROBERT TANNAHILL**, concentrates on a unique collection of songs – **with their Irish melodies and subject matter written in defence of the early 19th-century Irish emigrants to Scotland**. A total non-sectarian, Tannahill, in his own way, contributed a great deal to changing perceptions of the downtrodden Irish as they settled into their new country; and, at the same time, he left us with a lovely body of Irish song.

Moreover, as an early Romantic artist, he was far ahead of his time. His unique, urban Paisley songs movingly provide a critical insight into both the **despair and the dynamism of early industrialisation**. And his use of the **comic and the grotesque** certainly does look forward to Blake with its mixed message in relation to the working classes: figures both corrupted and enervated by urban life and, simultaneously, morally and socially liberated from the constraints of their 'betters'.

The McPeake family of Northern Ireland based their famous folk song, 'The Wild Mountain Thyme', directly on the Paisley poet's 'The Braes o' Balquhiddie' and over the past 200 years, his works have been published in various Irish and Northern Irish editions.