

Transforming tradition: Gaelic psalms in the works of Capercaillie and Runrig

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In this paper, I will present a centuries-old religious tradition of song, which is unique in the world in this form. Whereas it might seem unfamiliar and strange to inexperienced hearers, for the participants themselves the Gaelic psalm singing on the Outer Hebrides is a deeply moving, emotional and spiritual experience.

First I will briefly sketch an overview of the origin(s), historical development and practice of this unique form of the praise of God. Subsequently I will attempt to demonstrate, using theoretical aspects of cultural (musical) hybridization, in what different ways modern artists deal with this historical tradition, subjecting it to a process of transformation and thus not only raising its public profile (on a national and international scale), but also making it accessible to a wider audience.

The origin and historical development of Gaelic psalm singing

In the middle of the 16th Century the Protestant Reformation in the form of Presbyterianism spread in the whole of Scotland under the leadership of John Knox (roughly 1514–1572), whose religious views were heavily influenced by the teaching of John Calvin (Reiniger 1992, 173–179). This led, as in other parts of Europe, to significant changes in the musical form of worship. While previously the musical praise of God was reserved for the choir only, from then on all members of the community were allowed to participate – the practice of religion as an individual act, carried out in the language of the people rather than in Latin, guided by principles of simplicity.

To satisfy the desired simplicity, people chose the psalms of David. These were sung in unison and unaccompanied, a practice that had been taken over from the English Puritans (MacLeod 1994, 1). Some of the melodies that were used were not very old. In fact, many of them were not even of Scottish origin but came from composers from England or from the mainland (for instance Louis Bourgeois but also the Scottish composers Andrew Blackhall and David Peebles) (Collinson 1966, 261).

The psalms were set to music in a syllabic way, using the ballad meter and were organized in verses of four lines each. This meter with a change of four-stressed and three-stressed iamb is a variant of the common meter (CM, abab), but is less strict in its formal structure, since only the second and fourth line must rhyme (xaxa). In the Lowlands of Scotland, the new psalm settings were well received, as the people were already familiar with the meter which can be found in many traditional songs and ballads like the Child ballad *Tam Lin* or the Burns songs *Auld Lang Syne* and *My Love is like a red red rose*, to give just a few examples.

As in many communities a lot of people were not capable of reading, although Scotland is a country with a long and high literary culture, the practice of reading the line, which was sanctioned by the Westminster Assembly of Divines in 1645, was taken over in worship.¹ This practice consists of a precentor reading each line of the verse, prior to its repetition by the whole congregation. The practice was not confined to Scotland and England, but was known in other European countries such as Germany and Hungary as well as in America and survives, among others, in some congregations of Old Time Baptists in the Appalachian Mountains and Black Primitive Baptists in Alabama / USA (Dargan 2006, 25–28; Campbell 2011, 241–265).²

Five years after the Reformation had been brought to Scotland by John Knox, the Edinburgh publisher Robert Lekprevik issued the *Scottish Psalter* of 1564 (Wormald 1981, 187). It wasn't until a hundred years later (in 1659) that the first psalm collections were printed in Gaelic (Collinson 1966, 261). Since the meter had not been changed, the same melodies could be used. However, the common meter or ballad meter is alien to the Gaelic language and literature,

and therefore was completely unfamiliar to the Gaelic speaking listeners (Thomson 1983, 244). The meter and language did not harmonize with each other. This may be another reason why the tradition of 'reading the line' survived in some communities of the Outer Hebrides until today, for this practice breaks the four-stanza form and thus weakens the 'effects' of the meter (MacLeod 1994, 2). In the communities of the Scottish Highlands and Islands, where musical traditions were handed down orally, the precenting also has a reminder function.

The precentor gives the text and the melody as well as a specific pitch (ibid., 3). He starts alone singing the first two lines of a verse, while the congregation is joining in singing in unison. The third and fourth line is alternating between precentor and congregation. The melody is sung very slowly and melismatically 'stretched'. This leads to vocal overlaps between precentor and congregation, at the same time a very dense atmosphere is produced, although the cause, namely, the praise of God, is a light and joyous one. Since every member of the congregation individually varies the tempo and outline of the melody by adding passing notes and ornamentation (which is particularly rich on the Isle of Lewis and Harris) an iridescent sound structure emerges in free heterophony that fills the entire church room (for a better comprehension of the performance practice attention is invited to the CDs *Salm I & II* produced by Calum Martin). Thus the service is a very intimate and personal issue also in terms of music. Due to the extreme melismatic expansion, these 'long tunes' can take four times the length of the original melody, which is almost impossible to recognize due to the strong ornamentation and the heterophonic way of singing.

The ornamentation of the tunes has its origins in the Gaelic style of singing, but is probably also strongly influenced by the classical music of the Great Highland Bagpipe, the Piobaireachd (also known as ceol mòr, 'big music'), whose essential characteristic is the increasing variation and ornamentation of a musical theme (gael. urlar, 'ground') (Davie 1980, 36; Collinson 1966, 261). In its basic form, the melodies vary from island to island and in some cases diverge even within the communities (Davie 1983, 244).³

Whereas in the Gàidhealtachd (the Gaelic-speaking area of Scotland) originally only six different melodies were in use, which can be found under the same name in the Scottish Psalter, the repertoire now includes 17-20 tunes (Collinson 1966, 262; MacLeod 1994, 2). However, the origins of the psalm tunes eventually fell into oblivion (also because they barely had similarities with the original tunes due to the extensive ornamentations). Even in 1887, in the preface to the Macbean Collection one can find the thesis that the melodies are of Swedish origin and were taken home by Scottish soldiers in service of Gustavus Adolphus during the 30-year war (Macbean 1887, 1). However, this assumption is highly unlikely, because in 1844 Joseph Mainzer demonstrated in a systematic investigation that the 'long tunes', as the Gaelic psalms are called, are extremely ornamented versions of the Lowland Psalter tunes (Mainzer 1844; Collinson 1966, 262–263).

Although the Gaelic psalms disappeared from general use at the end of the 19th Century, they can occasionally be heard in Gaelic services of the Presbyterian Church and in family worship (MacLeod 1994, 3). This tradition, however, has endured not only in these contexts, but also in songs whose compositional guiding principle involves the mix of this specific vocal music with elements of Anglo-American rock and pop music: the stylistics of Gaelic psalm singing has survived the ages. In the following, with Runrig and Capercaillie I will present two bands that have torn down stylistic boundaries in their work and thus created space for musical innovation. Both groups have taken on the tradition of Gaelic psalm singing in two of their songs, but treated it in different ways, as will be shown below.

Hybridity in the work of the bands Runrig and Capercaillie

Runrig is a folk-rock band which was founded on the Isle of Skye in 1973. The first performances took place under the name "Run Rig Dance Band". The name derives from a medieval form of joint agriculture, especially in the Highlands of Scotland. It is thanks to this group and its music, that the Gaelic language and culture was made attractive again to the people of the

Gàidhealtachd, especially to young people. This happened in a time when Gaelic culture was mostly marginalized.⁴ During the 1950s and 1960s, the whole of Scotland was bitten by the dynamics of the Second Folk (song) revival (see Munro 1996; Bort 2011; Hutchinson 2005; Collinson 2001). However, this process had little impact on Gaelic music compared to, for example, the development of Scots Song (Benn 1978, 24–26).⁵

Although Runrig began as a kind of ceilidh band and played traditional tunes as well as cover songs from western popular music including John Denver, CCR and The Beatles (Morton 1991, 41), it was ultimately their blend of traditional material and western pop and rock music, mainly own compositions – that is new contemporary songs in Gaelic – with which they met the spirit of the times (not least, they filled a gap in the market), and thus had significant share in the Gaelic revival of the 1970s and 1980s.⁶ Nevertheless, other bands had already paved the way for them, such as the JSD band, Five Hand Reel or the Irish band Horslips regarding the musical aspects and style but especially Na h-Òganaich, The Lochies and Na Siaraich in respect of the linguistic-cultural aspect by the popularization of Gaelic song as a folk group (and not as a solo artist) (Denselow 1975, 171; Collinson 2001, 197–225; Cormack 2013). The co-founders Calum and Rory Macdonald in particular cited the English electric folk group Fairport Convention as a musical model (“a real eye-opener”) (Morton 1991, 24), which raised their interest in their own musical tradition and the Gaelic heritage and significantly influenced their first album *Play Gaelic* (ibid., 24).

At the same time the success of Runrig formed the ‘breeding ground’ for the following generation of musicians including the band Capercaillie, founded in Oban in 1984. The Western Capercaillie is an animal threatened with extinction in Scotland and thus can be understood symbolically for the endangered status of the Gaelic language. The musical material of the first album *Cascade* entirely consists of Gaelic songs and sets of various tunes. The sound of the album is predominantly acoustic and the instrumentation (guitar, fiddle, flute, pipes and accordion) is very traditional. But the use of synth-pad sounds, for example in the song *An t-Iarla Diurach* (The Earl from Jura)⁷ already indicates the following

musical development of the band, which is characterized by the adoption of elements from pop and jazz. This mainly concerns the harmonics of the songs as well as the increased use of electric bass, percussion and keyboards. Capercaillie made a great contribution to the representation of Gaelic culture on national and international scale, among other things, by the production of their third album *The Blood is Strong* that acted as soundtrack for the eponymous Channel 4 TV series tracing the cultural history of the Gaels, as well as by their participation in the production of the soundtrack to the film *Rob Roy*, regardless of the historical inaccuracies of the last-mentioned Hollywood movie. Their song *Coisich a Ruin* (from the album *Delirium*), a 400-year old Waulking song⁸, was the first Gaelic song to place in the UK Top 40 Singles Chart (with number 39 as the highest chart position, EP *A Prince Among the Island*).

The musical genres which the two groups can be attributed to are those of “folk rock” and “electric folk”, respectively. The term “electric folk” was used in the late 1960s to describe and categorize the music of bands that began to mix traditional English music with contemporary genres such as rock and jazz (although both rock and jazz are musical hybrids in themselves), and in this way founded new hybrid forms of music – this particularly included the groups Fairport Convention and Pentangle. But as Britta Sweers points out in her seminal study of transformation processes within English traditional music, “a folk musician merely amplifying his acoustic instrument is not playing electric folk” (Sweers 2005, 24). The music must be rooted in the tradition and the mix of different styles must consequently lead to musical changes of the source material. The originally American term “folk rock”, designated both a music style that combined acoustic and electric instruments and rock music off the mainstream (ibid., 24). However, while in regard to electric folk the focus is clearly on the traditional material, folk rock music is clearly rooted in rock music and maintains the connection to the traditions mainly via a specific instrumentation (pipes, fiddle, accordion etc.) (ibid., 23–24).

It is obvious, that when trying to classify musical groups one must consider the musical development of the band, because although the music of Runrig can rather be positioned in folk rock, and Capercaillie can be seen as

representatives of electric folk (“electric folk” in this context is a term not to describe a specific musical phenomenon of the 1960s and 1970s but as a genre that is not time-bound), neither the sound of the first Runrig album *Play Gaelic* nor the one of the Capercaillie debut album *Cascade* (except the occasional use of synthesizer Pads) indicate the appropriate genre.

The reference to the hybrid nature of “electric folk” and “folk rock” makes use of a key concept in Cultural and Social Anthropology as well as Cultural Studies and Postcolonial Studies (in this connection it is mostly used with the cultural and social impacts and interdependencies of colonial and post-colonial migration and the formation of diaspora cultures). Free of its former negative connotation as something ‘unclean’ (for an overview of the history of the concept see Young 1995, Nghi Ha 2005, Ackermann 2004), hybridity is seen as a

“positive and even desirable development which sowed the seeds of the new in itself. [...] Basically, The hybrid concept allows for unlimited combinations and mixing ratios, that can infinitely be varied. Thus, it is an open approach that supposedly knows no exclusion, no outside, no boundaries.”⁹
(Gugenberger 2011, 20) [transl. M.S.]

Related to this is the drop of a static notion of culture in favor of a dynamic, variable, process-oriented view of (music) cultures (Bhaba 1994, 36–39; Welsch 1995, 39–44). Their transformative and permeable nature is inseparable from the process of globalization (Holzinger 2002, 256). Global flows (goods, technologies, political, economic and artistic principles and ideas etc.) have always existed in varying extent, degree of severity and speed (Sweers 2009, 61). But their dynamics have but increased, especially through the proliferation of broadcasting, advances in transportation and infrastructure through the development of new communication technologies such as the Internet and related forms of interaction toward a true spatial and temporal dissolution, which also carries the potential for musical creativity.¹⁰

Cultural hybridity arises at contact zones, but is more than a mere mixing of two or more forms of cultural expression. In the hybridization process, cultural symbols (e.g., musical traditions or languages) will be renegotiated and provided with meanings that are oriented towards specific, collective as well as individual intentions and needs of interpretation and orientation¹¹ and are contextualized both spatially and temporally and culturally.

Musicology has dealt with processes of inter- and transculturalization and the reciprocal impact on the cultures involved, too. In his model of (musical) cultural interaction and acculturation Max Peter Baumann describes different gradations of the mix, which correlate with a specific degree of openness of representatives of culture A (e.g. musicians, cultural politicians) towards 'foreign cultures' (B, C ...) (Baumann 2004). Reactions to the cultural contact can range from negative / dismissive to selective / transformative to positive and complete acceptance or complete adoption. Thus the direct impacts of these attitudes range from reculturation or purism (preserving a cultural / musical tradition) to deculturation, that is, the 'loss' of traditions by the complete mergence of the own culture with the 'foreign' culture(s). The compromise between these two extremes is described by Baumann as transculturation or fusion which is characterized by the selective adoption of specific elements of cultures B, C etc. (e.g. instruments, musical styles, arrangements) in the own culture. Following Baumann, this leads to three possible forms of cultural fusion gradually merging into each other: a) *compartmentalization* in which there is practically no mixing and the cultural elements exist separately side by side, b) *syncretism* (a term, that has been taken over from the religious studies, and that was originally used to describe the mixing of religions and beliefs, for example, in the course of proselytization), a synthesis of elements of different cultures, which are being reinterpreted and put into a new context, and c) *transformation* which leads to a complete fusion of the original elements and a creative transformation into something new (e.g., Samba or Rai music). Often the original elements are no longer recognizable as such but only for the expert (Baumann 2004). However, the question then arises whether it is still a form of hybridization (a process in which the focus is being placed on the aspect of difference [Tschernokoshewa

2011, 14–16]), if “it [is] no longer consciously perceived as such by the cultural community”¹² (Schneider 1997, 21) [transl. M.S.].

Another attempt at a categorization of hybrid forms of music has been made by the cultural scientist Wolfgang Holzinger. His elaborate classification depending on style hierarchy and degree of mixing within the hybrid form of music is intended to represent an abstract model and is, in his eyes, only a first step towards a comprehensive typology, that required further analysis on the object (song) scale (Holzinger 2002, 270; 290). However, though it is quite useful for a descriptive analysis of processes of hybridization, some of the methodological aspects and views Holzinger expresses are indeed to be criticized. This mainly concerns an apparently hierarchical structure of music in his thinking with Western art music at the top of an imaginary pyramid. According to Holzinger, this kind of music shows the elaborate hybrid form of *coalescence*, whereas popular music and traditional music are located on the lower levels, where the most commonly observed form of hybridization is that of *combination*, which at the same time has the lowest degree of interweaving. Holzinger explains his assumptions with different demands of creativity on the individual categories of hybridization. Traditional music is even assigned an inevitably passive part in the process of hybridization (Holzinger 2002, 293). This ideological notion must decisively be contradicted, since it neither serves the scientific analytic process, nor the field of musical hybridization which is often accompanied by an ideologically charged discourse, anyway (purity vs. mixing, purism / traditionalism vs. innovation).³⁰ It is the firm opinion of the author that only an open mind allows sound and unprejudiced deal with the process of musical hybridization (for criticism of Holzinger’s categorization model see also Havenstein 2012, 16–27).

The hybrid treatment of Gaelic psalms in the songs *Gaelic Psalm Tune (Capercaillie)* and *An Ubhal As Àirde (Runrig)*

The track *Gaelic Psalm Tune* is on the album *Glenfinnan (Songs of the '45)*. The songs on the album were recorded in 1995 for the BBC TV documentary *Raising the Standard* on the occasion of the 250th anniversary of the unsuccessful Jacobite rebellion of 1745, in the course of which Charles Edward Stuart tried to force the return of the Catholic Stuarts to the throne of England and Scotland. The uprising began on Loch Shiel at Glenfinnan, when the standard of the Stuarts was raised on August 19th, 1745.

Gaelic Psalm Tune by Capercaillie is based on the historical recording of a Gaelic psalm singing from the archives of the School of Scottish Studies¹³, which was published on the CD *Gaelic Psalms from Lewis* by Greentrax Records in 1994, being the sixth part of the “Scottish Tradition Series”. On this recording one can hear the precentor Donald MacLeod and his congregation singing together the first two verses of psalm 46 to the tune “Stroudwater”. As the music of *Gaelic Psalm Tune* progresses this audio recording is embedded in an accompaniment of synthesizer pads and drum and percussion samples.

The beginning of the piece is dominated by a soft synthesizer pad. The synthesizer begins on the fifth F_3 - C_4 . With the tonal material A_3 flat, B_3 flat, C_4 , E_4 flat and F_4 it indicates a pentatonic melody that unfolds in a minimalist way over the sustained note F_3 , creating a low drone sound. Eventually, the sampled sound of falling rain is mixed into the sound structure. Through the use of a strong reverb effect in conjunction with a slow attack and long decay¹⁴ of the synth pads, the sound design is given a big space. At the same time a dense mood is created, that maybe is to simulate the almost meditative atmosphere arising during the singing of Gaelic psalms. Furthermore, the synthesizer anticipates a few notes of the precentor’s singing subtly leading to his cue and simultaneously provides the harmonic framework of the piece. Through the use of nature sounds (rain) and the focus on creating atmosphere Capercaillie draw the musical connection to ambient music, a genre that is mainly determined by electronically generated instrumental music aimed at creating specific (mostly

quiet) moods. Iridescent sound structures are given preference over melodic lines. In the liner notes to his album *Music for Airports / Ambient 1* Brian Eno states, “ambient music is intended to induce calm and a space to think” (Eno 1978). This also means a reflection on oneself. Thus, at a higher intentional level the connection to Gaelic psalm singing is made in such a way as that this form of collective singing also induces space in the religious sense, a space for the praise of God. With regard to tempo and individual ornamentation, the singing is also a highly subjective act.

As the song continues, the recording of the recontextualized psalm singing is clearly at the center, but was not used in its full length. After the end of the third line of verse two the song is faded out. However, there hasn’t been any editing concerning pitch or speed. Nevertheless, it has been positioned to the rear in terms of surround sound. Thus, not only the impression is being given that the singing resembles ‘an echo from a time long ago’, the strong reverb effect leads to a merging with the synthesizer sounds. The singing of the original recording is used as another ‘instrument’, so to speak, and therefore it consistently fits in the stylistics of ambient music. With the beginning of the second line of the first verse, hesitantly at first, bass drum samples (sampling, both in terms of sound synthesis as well as the collage-like use of samples in tunes and songs, can be considered as form of musical / technical hybridization in itself) in addition to the synth pads blend into the sonic fabric of the song, that is gradually condensed, to unfold an extended drum and percussion accompaniment from the third line of verse. The meter and the constant accompanying rhythmic structure support the meditative mood and simultaneously form an exciting contrast to the free heterophonic singing of precentor and congregation. The expanded form of psalm singing is emphasized by a minimalist, almost static harmonic structure in which the synthesizer pads mostly remain on the tonic F minor (i), and change to the submediant D flat major (VI) and Subtonic E flat major (VII) in only a few places until they fall completely silent with cue of the precentor on line two of the second verse. The accompaniment is then supported only by drums and percussion until the end of the song.

How then to assess the musical hybrid form of the song? What is the degree of mixing actually? Supported by the reverb effect and the changing positioning in the surround sound, the singing of the psalm fits very well in the sonic fabric of the song, yet it is structurally isolated. The audio track of the song was used largely unedited. The added instrumentation is merely an accompaniment. The tradition of Gaelic psalm singing meets a typical instrumentation of rock / pop music, additionally the producers used effects of sound editing whose technological foundations are closely connected with the development of Anglo-American pop and rock music, but a real mixing does not happen. Following the opinion of Max Peter Baumann, *Gaelic Psalm Tune* therefore shows a form of compartmentalization (based on Holzinger's scheme, it is a case of "combination" with a "low degree of interweaving" [Holzinger 2002, 280]) on the structural level, that is, the music of the "host culture" is virtually unaffected by the musical elements of the foreign culture ("the music of the host culture survives practically untouched next to the other type of music". Baumann 2004). But through the use of an instrumentation that consists of elements from different cultures, it is – as Baumann suggests – a case of syncretism ("Instrumental ensembles place instruments from diverse cultures together. All kinds of musical instruments can be included, from the traditional *quena* [...] to the country-like jew's harp and synthesizer". Baumann, 2004). Considering the psalm singing (with specific technique, ornamentation and effect) as a separate instrument as suggested, Baumann's interpretation would apply. However, cultural syncretism involves more than the mere mix of instruments. The various elements have to be put in a new context of meaning, as it were to be 'reinterpreted'. This is done on the parent cultural level. Thus, in the liner notes to the album we find the following notice:

"These songs retrace the steps of those who came down from these mountains 250 years ago to follow Prince Charles Edward Stewart. Despite the attempted annihilation of a culture and a people – Gaelic endures." (Capercaillie 1998, 6)

A fight that originally was politically motivated to a large extent, has obviously been reinterpreted as a 'fight' for cultural recognition (see also note 11). Through their musical participation in the TV documentary *Capercaillie* serve the cause and contribute to a greater awareness of Gaelic culture, especially the Gaelic language. Not least, they achieve this goal via the hybrid nature of their music, which to most people should be more accessible than the Gaelic psalm singing in its original form.¹⁵ Through this re-contextualization a necessary condition for cultural syncretism is given. Therefore, the *Gaelic Psalm Tune* can be located in the continuum of forms of acculturation suggested by Baumann between compartmentalization and syncretism, depending on the level of interpretation and perspective used.

In comparison, the final chorus of the song *An Ubhal As Àirde* (The Highest Apple) shall be examined below. Like *Capercaillie*, *Runrig* have adopted the tradition of Gaelic psalm singing – but in a completely different way. *An Ubhal As Àirde* from the album *The Cutter and the Clan* provides the connection to the Gaelic psalms on the thematic level through its religious context. In contemplative absorption by observing nature the speaker recognizes itself as part of that and thus as part of God's creation. In the second verse this insight is symbolized by a picture of the Garden of Eden that unfolds before his eyes. In the metaphorical language of the song "the highest apple" may symbolize the pursuit of religious or self-awareness the viewer hopes to gain for himself someday (Chorus).¹⁶ Calum Macdonald, who wrote the song together with his brother Rory, too, emphasizes the religious aspects of the song:

"An Ubhal As Àirde is just really about everything religion is about. It's about death, salvation and the hope for eternal life. The Chorus is inspirational and expresses spirituality. It's an expression of faith." (Runrig 2005a, 37:17–37:36)

In the verses of *An Ubhal As Àirde*, electric guitar, synthesizer, and the calm 'stretched' singing of Donnie Munro, again, create a meditative mood that is able to support the communication of the religious content of the lyrics very well.

However, the band wanted to feature the spiritual character of the piece more strongly, which is why they used a technical trick. The band members sang the chorus in the style of Gaelic psalms, that is, very stretched with individual vocal ornamentation. Using the tape recorder, several voice tracks in different recording speed were created. Playing the tracks, that had been recorded with accelerated speed, at normal speed led to a reduction of the pitch. The opposite effect was achieved with the slowed down tracks. In this way, low male voices and high female voices and therefore the singing of whole congregation was 'simulated' (Macdonald and Macdonald 2000, 51). The voices, however, were not sung in unison, as is typical for the Gaelic psalm singing, but in vocal harmonies.¹⁷ In addition, the section of a Gaelic psalm singing was mixed in the background of the recording, which becomes particularly evident at the end of the song when the voice of the precentor merges with the last notes of the song, surrounding them an octave higher. Furthermore, as with the *Gaelic Psalm Tune*, a generously used reverb effect as well as the synthesizer pads induce a large spatial width.

While in the Capercaillie track the instrumentation serves only as accompaniment to the exposed recording of the psalm singing, in *An Ubhal As Àirde* the style of a musical tradition is simulated through the singing itself, especially with the help of specific studio equipment. In this case, there is a form of syncretism already on a musical level – also through the adapted polyphony. It is not evident, however, that it is the tradition of Gaelic psalm which is referred to in the chorus. In contrast to *Gaelic Psalm Tune* where it is already indicated by the titling of the piece, it is possible only with appropriate knowledge.

By their work, especially with the song *An Ubhal As Àirde*, Runrig, like Capercaillie, have bestowed an increased national and international visibility and awareness on the Gaelic language and music in general and the Gaelic psalm singing in particular.¹⁸ This was reflected, for example, in a joint performance of the song with a Baptist congregation in Harlem / New York, which indirectly celebrated the transatlantic connection through a shared musical tradition (Runrig 2005b, 26:18-29:00) (see also note 2), but above all by

the fact that *An Ubhal As Àirde* was the first Gaelic song to place in the UK Top 20 (with number 18 as the highest chart position), after it had been popularized in a complete non-religious context – by the use in a TV commercial for the brewery group Carlsberg (McClure 2008).¹⁹

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¹ It is said in the *Directory of Publick Worship* of 1645: "But for the present, where many in the congregation cannot read, it is convenient did the minister, or some other fit person appointed by him and the other ruling officers, do read the psalm, line by line, before the singing thereof." (Westminster Assembly 1645).

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- ² After discovering similarities between the ‘lining out’ in the singing of hymns in communities of Black Primitive Baptists and the Gaelic psalm singing in the Outer Hebrides, several years ago Willie Ruff, Professor of Music at Yale University, developed a theory, that the practice of ‘precenting’ had come to America with slaveholders of Scottish origin. Particularly in Scotland these assumptions produced an extensive media coverage. However, this hypothesis is disputed. In his deconstruction of this theory, Terry Miller states that both practices can be traced back to an English tradition that went into decline and eventually disappeared (Miller 2009, 243–259). In addition, John Purser suggests similarities to the vocal style of Coptic Christians in Ethiopia (Purser 2007, 39).
- ³ Compare for instance the melodies in the collections of Lachlan Macbean and Joseph Mainzer (Macbean 1887; Mainzer 1844).
- ⁴ How much in terms of language, the cultural self-confidence of the Gaelic community was damaged, became apparent in negative reactions to Runrig’s first appearance in Portree with a set of exclusive Gaelic originals. The audience expected cover-known folk and rock songs and didn’t know what to do with the Gaelic songs they were not acquainted with. The longtime singer and front man Donnie Munro recalls: “The reaction was terrible. [...] Everybody hated it. [...] They were actually songs in their own language and yet a lot of people were saying, ‘What on earth’s happened? What’s this all about?’” (Morton 1991, 43–44).
- ⁵ See also the statements of Runrig co-founder Calum Macdonald in Martin 2006, 10–12.
- ⁶ In this context the term (musical) “Revival” is to be understood as defined by Tamara Livingston, who understands it as a dynamic process with the objective “to restore a musical system [style, genre, performance practice, instrument] believed to be disappearing or completely relegated to the past for the benefit of contemporary society” (Livingston 1999, 66).
- ⁷ The words of the song have been transcribed by Kenneth MacLeod, the melody comes from the Isle of Mull. See liner notes of the LP *Cascade*. The song can be found as an art song arrangement for voice and piano under the title “The Bens of Jura” in Kennedy-Fraser 1909, 141–143.
- ⁸ Waulking songs (gael. Òrain Luaidh) belong to the genre of the Gaelic labour songs. They have a call-and-response principle and were sung by women in the Outer Hebrides during the process of fulling and softening of the Tweed cloth.
- ⁹ “positive und sogar wünschenswerte Entwicklung gesehen, die den Keim des Neuen in sich birgt. [...] Vom Prinzip her lässt das Hybridkonzept unbegrenzte Kombinationsmöglichkeiten und Mischungsverhältnisse zu, die unendlich variiert werden können. Damit ist es ein offener Ansatz, der vermeintlich keinen Ausschluss, kein Außen, keine Grenzen kennt”.
- ¹⁰ How much media and “commodity flows” do influence the process of musical development is also apparent from the descriptions of Rory Macdonald, who

tells that electric guitars were rarely available on the Isle of Skye in the 1960. He also emphasizes the influence of the programmes of *Radio Luxembourg* on his own musical socialization, through which he has intensely come into contact with both Scottish and Irish traditional music and American rock'n'roll music (Morton 1991, 19–20). Another example of the temporal and spatial dissolution through the Internet is the establishment and expansion of digital archives, such as the *Tobar at Dualchais - Kist o Riches* project (<http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/>) which provides researchers, musicians and the interested layman 'instant' access to the sound archives of the School of Scottish Studies among others. Online platforms like YouTube do promote the creative use of art and musical traditions, as well.

- ¹¹ This, for example, can be cultural resistance, but also – as seen in many of the songs of the bands Runrig and Capercaillie – the struggle for cultural recognition and visibility in the area of tension between (cultural) center and periphery. Not least, musicians must position themselves and their art in a field of (cultural) politics that is characterized by certain hierarchies and structures, though many musicians are not aware of their political statements or even consider themselves apolitical as Max Peter Baumann points out (Baumann 1996, 71).
- ¹² “sie von der Kulturgemeinschaft nicht mehr bewusst als solche wahrgenommen [wird]”.
- ¹³ The archive of the School of Scottish Studies (University of Edinburgh), founded in 1951, contains thousands of hours of material that has been systematically recorded by field researchers like Calum I. MacLean, Francis Collinson or Hamish Henderson. It features a unique and diverse picture of the oral tradition of Scotland.
- ¹⁴ The attack time indicates how quickly a sound reaches its amplitude after the initiation (short attack time = fast attack), while the decay time defines the period of time a sound needs to fade away (long period of time = long decay).
- ¹⁵ In this context Baumann speaks of the ability of musical syncretisms (such as folk rock, or electric folk) to transport local or regional idioms to a general level of understanding. They use a regional dialect (musical attributes of a specific tradition) but an international language (for example, Anglo-American pop and rock music) (Baumann 1996, 81).
- ¹⁶ “Seididh gaoth is dearrsaidh grian / Tro mheas nan croabhan linn gu linn / Ach thig an là is thig an t-àm / Airson an ubhal as àirde / Air a'chraobh a bhuain” [The winds will blow and the sun will shine / From generation to generation through the trees of the garden / But the day and the hour will surely come / To take the highest apple from the knowledge tree].
- ¹⁷ Part singing and singing in several voices respectively is alien to Gaelic song (MacLeod 1996, 129). Thus this practice can also be considered as hybrid, as a form of syncretism which leads to a mixture of elements of Western art music and the tradition of Gaelic song.

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- ¹⁸ This is confirmed by the fact that the song that, as has been shown, has its roots in the Gaelic music tradition of the Highlands & Islands, for example, is now played at weddings in the Scottish Lowlands (Anderson 2000, 9).
- ¹⁹ Interestingly enough, the producers didn't use the refrain but the third verse for the 42-second spot. Possibly the chorus of the song seemed too 'strange', not having enough 'mass appeal'.