

This issue, *The Bottle Imp* inflates its lungs, throws back its head, opens its mouth and belts one out—or rather, several, as we wax lyrical about Scotland’s songs. The bloodlines of Scotland’s music are long and complex, and not without controversy: some say there’s even a little bit of Gaelic singing down in the foundations of Soul.

Music and song are some of the great signifiers of Scotland and Scottishness. Think of bagpipes and an avalanche of tartan descends on you, despite their origins stretching back to at least the Hittites, some three thousand years ago. The forward march of progress can be measured by the retreat of the bagpipe, some say—although they tend not to say it to a bagpipe’s face. It was, after all, an instrument of war. Music to get the blood moving, one way or another.

Music, song and literature have always intertwined, of course, and nowhere more so than here: perhaps it’s the bardic tradition, or the close-grained friction between the oral and the written cultures. The poetry of Macpherson’s Ossian dragged Mendelssohn by the ear all the way to Staffa in the Hebrides; more recent crossovers have included the remarkable *The Ballads of the Book*, or this year’s mashup between Edinburgh, UNESCO City of Literature, and Glasgow, UNESCO City of Music, a startling piece of urban miscegenation that has produced the [Lets Get Lyrical](#) project.

Writers and musicians have been crossing over each other for a very long time: Sir Walter Scott was a great ballad-collector, and not above penning a few lyrics himself. Perhaps his greatest musical claim to fame, though, is the existence of a number—a large number—of opera versions of his novels and poems, mostly Italian. As the 19th century’s favourite author, this shouldn’t be surprising: this was the Hollywood of the day. Like Hollywood, too, the operas often lost something in the adaptation ... Douglas Gifford explores Scott’s Italian

popular—so popular, in fact, that they slipped from his grasp and fell into the general culture, despite his attempts to reclaim them for himself. Kirsteen McCue tells the tale in _____

Popular culture lost and found again is the subject of _____, by Anne Sinclair. Song as the carrier of popular history, in popular languages, is addressed by Marina Dossena in _____, where she traces the role of songs as the carriers of the voices of the people; and songs of protest, of dissent, indeed songs as thoroughly, deliberately and entertainingly offensive weapons—with numerous, highly contemporary overtones—are rattled out for all to see as Gordon McCulloch paddles out with _____. Also included are our regular columns and reviews.

NASA stuck a recording of various bits of music to the sides of the Voyager spaceprobes: none of it is Scottish. Yet if an alien visitor was to cup some analogue of an ear in our direction, there is one song the whole planet sings, in our billions, on the same night every year, each hour on the hour as the world turns. The tune is old, the lyrics Scots: *Auld Lang Syne*, humanity's own national anthem.

The Unreliable Narrator

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