

Sources for the chamber music of William McGibbon

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Introduction

William McGibbon, 1696–1756, was a leader in musical life in Scottish society in the mid-eighteenth century, yet he is remembered now primarily for his collections of Scottish tunes with variations.¹ Copies of his other compositions are deteriorating and practically inaccessible, and this has prevented a proper study of his music. His work is of especial interest to flute players because his first set of trio sonatas, *Six Sonatas for two German Flutes, or two Violins, and a Bass*, published in 1729, was the first publication of Italian-style music by a Scottish composer printed in Scotland (Johnson 2000, p. 189).

The sources for the music of William McGibbon, and the relevant reference guides, are in complete disarray. No complete copy of any of the trio sonatas survives; single parts are in libraries in the United Kingdom and United States. Adding to the confusion, those library catalogues are unclear as to what they actually own. The Library of Congress's copies have gone missing from time to time, and have suffered water damage.² Copies of the trio sonatas

¹ This study, and resulting edition of music, would have been impossible without the hard work of Allan Wright to triple-check my work and make sure the figured bass lined up properly, and my cousin, Alex Ford, who devoted three weekends to sitting in a reading room at the Library of Congress, scanning and photographing scores when the library staff deemed them too fragile to reproduce. Music cannot be assessed without being played. Allan Wright and Aaron McGregor were invaluable in playing each sonata, lending me their respective expertise on the continuo and violin parts, and making suggestions as to what in the sources might be misprints. I must acknowledge the Musica Scotica Trust for making Kenneth Elliott's papers available for my consultation, and John Purser, for sharing with me David Johnson's unpublished notes on McGibbon.

² The two books containing parts to McGibbon's trio sonatas at the Library of Congress are in very fragile condition. The paper is deteriorating and the binding

were so scarce by the mid-twentieth century that Henry Farmer was only aware of the solos and had only seen the flute duets (Farmer 1947, p. 332). I have, for the first time in at least a century, collected all the extant editions of his Italian-style music and determined the state of his publications. The resulting edition³ makes a large and significant chunk of Scottish flute and violin repertoire available and accessible and also preserves the music, which is in danger of being lost. The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the state of the sources for the chamber music of William McGibbon, eliminate confusion regarding what and how much music he composed, and to lay the groundwork for re-evaluating his music and reappraising his reputation.

Biographical background

Any study of the compositions of William McGibbon must rely heavily on the work of David Johnson, the only writer since William Tytler to give his career and his activities other than as a composer of Scottish fiddle tunes more than a passing mention. William McGibbon, (1696-1756), was probably the son of the violinist Duncan McGibbon of Glasgow. This is, however, a relatively recent re-assignment of his parentage, based on bond investments made by a Duncan McGibbon, violer, of Glasgow (Johnson n. d., Grove). All biographical study of William McGibbon seems to have begun with William Tytler's 1792 essay 'On the Fashionable Amusements and Entertainments in Edinburgh in the Last Century,' in which he says that the oboist Matthew McGibbon was the father of the William (Tytler p. 508-510). Tytler's essay, which scholars have tended to rely on uncritically, contains much misinformation, especially

disintegrating. They are not a priority for conservation, and are not readily available for consultation.

³ The edition of McGibbon's twenty-four sonatas will not accompany this article.

regarding the history of the transverse flute in Scotland. Peter Holman, in his article ‘An Early Edinburgh Concert,’ points out many details that Tytler inaccurately reported, including the date of the St Cecilia’s Day concert Tytler describes as the subject of his essay (Holman 2004). If Tytler cannot be relied upon to accurately report dates, we should not assume that this was the only area in which he was inaccurate. David Johnson identifies Matthew McGibbon as Malcolm, and he was William’s uncle, not father (Johnson, Unpublished Notes). Johnson makes a further speculation that the McGibbons may have been descended from the English Gibbons family of musicians, but presents no evidence to support this supposition (Johnson 2000, p. ix).

William McGibbon went to London around 1709 where he studied with the violinist William Corbett, possibly joining him to travel to Italy (Johnson 2000, p. ix; Grove). William Corbett was absent from England between 1715 and 1724, when he may have been in Rome spying on James Francis Edward Stuart (Edwards n. d., Grove). It is possible that McGibbon travelled with him; Alexander Campbell thought that he had, and he may have had access to information that either existed only in oral tradition or is now lost (Campbell p. 13). By 1726, McGibbon was in Edinburgh, where he was employed as a violinist by the Edinburgh Musical Society until his death. Evidently he was a popular figure in Edinburgh as Johnson described his funeral as a great civic occasion (Johnson 2000, p. ix). He was buried in Greyfriars cemetery, and Robert Fergusson referred to him in a poem⁴ nearly twenty years after his death, writing:

Macgibbon’s gane, a’ waes my heart:

⁴ Fergusson’s ‘Elegy on the Death of Scots Music’ bemoans that Scottish composers were writing music outside of the traditional Scottish idiom. McGibbon is the only composer mentioned by name, and Fergusson was apparently unaware that half of his compositional output was in the Italianate style.

The man in music maist expert,
 Wha could sweet melody impart
 And tune the reed
 Wi' sic a slee and pawky art,
 But now he's dead. (Ferguson, ed. Robertston 2007, p. 56)

McGibbon's reputation

McGibbon and his music have been neglected since the eighteenth century, but for David Johnson, whose work relies heavily on William Tytler. Kenneth Elliott aspired to edit and publish more than the fifth sonata from the 1734 set of trios, but the work on the others is incomplete.⁵ McGibbon was one of the earliest and most prolific Scottish composers writing Italian-style music for flute (or violin). Of the Scottish composers who wrote for flute he produced the most music, and, with the exception of General John Reid, who was himself a flautist, his music shows an unparalleled understanding of what the one-keyed flute of the early to mid-eighteenth century could do well. That flute players were interested in his music is supported by the number of known or suspected flute players on the subscribers' lists, as well as the dedication of his 1734 trio sonatas to the flute-playing Countess of Eglinton. That flute appears before violin on the title pages suggests that the music was targeted to flute players, and was popular with them.⁶

Printed music in the eighteenth century was expensive; consequently copying popular music into manuscript books was a common way to share and preserve music, and manuscripts offer insight into what music was popular where, when, and with whom.

⁵ I was granted access to Kenneth Elliott's papers by the Musica Scotica Trust.

⁶ Not all the subscribers' lists survive, but those that do list the flute players Sir Gilbert Elliott of Minto, Lord Robert Kerr, Alexander Bruce, Francesco Barsanti, James Oswald, and the 1734 trio sonatas were dedicated to the flute playing Countess of Eglinton. Other musicians on the subscribers' lists include Adam Craig and David Foulis.

There is manuscript evidence of McGibbon's popularity, including a minuet in Montagu Music Collection Manuscript 8,⁷ a manuscript including works by McGibbon at the University of California, Berkeley, the MacFarlane Manuscript at the National Library of Scotland, and what may be an additional set of trio sonatas in manuscript at the Library of Congress. The MacFarlane manuscript, NLS 2084-5, and Montagu Music Collection manuscript 8 ('Hundriwood') pre-date the publication of McGibbon's Scottish tune collections. Johnson takes this as a sign that printing was not necessary for transmission of McGibbon's Scottish tunes, although the pieces attributed to McGibbon in the manuscripts in question are not Scottish tunes, but minuets, sonatas, and his ornamented versions of Corelli's sonatas (Johnson 2003, p. 114).

McGibbon's sonatas resemble Italian music of the early eighteenth century. He knew and admired the music of Corelli, creating embellishments to Corelli's violin sonatas and titling one trio sonata (1734/5) 'In imitation of Corelli.' Unlike the later compositions of John Reid and James Oswald, McGibbon's music does not have any overtly Scottish elements. Although McGibbon is said to have been an excellent violinist, his music does not necessarily give this away, except for the violin part of the sixth sonata of the 1729 set, which is athletic, and quite possibly an example of how McGibbon played; this sonata is the only one that does not seem to have been written for the amateur market. He used publishers in Edinburgh and London, suggesting he had a market in England as well as Scotland.

David Johnson portrays McGibbon as a composer who excelled more at arranging Scottish tunes than composing Italian-style sonatas.

⁷ The Montagu Music Collection is a large collection of early manuscript and printed sources, primarily related to Scottish music, owned by the Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry, located at Boughton House, his Northamptonshire home.

Johnson's original depiction of McGibbon as barely competent, lazy, and unoriginal has prevailed because of a lack of alternative perspectives. Johnson later changed his mind about McGibbon, and described him in the preface to the second edition of *Music and Society in Lowland Scotland in the Eighteenth Century* as a 'major-sized composer, whose music has not only variety and range, but a distinct and compelling personality,' (2003, p. xv) but the damage and condescension sticks, especially as he did not edit his original text:

What is known of his music is disappointing; he seems incapable of writing counterpoint which is also good harmony, and vice-versa, and one's overall impression is of a talent undeveloped through simply not having done the requisite amount of hard work (2003, p. 61).

Indeed, even after his recantation, Johnson continued to damn McGibbon's compositions. In *Scottish Fiddle Music in the Eighteenth Century*, which explores Scottish tunes written or arranged in the eighteenth century and their place in chamber music, Johnson describes him as a 'second-rate composer of Italian music,' but concedes that his Scottish tune settings are 'the crowning achievement of the period' (Johnson 2005, p. 37). John Purser is unusually vague in his assessment of McGibbon, describing his style as 'fluent rather than characteristic,' whatever that might be taken to mean (Purser 2007, p. 206). Peter Holman, in the preface to his edition of three of McGibbon's trio sonatas, is more guarded in his assessment, saying:

McGibbon could not always handle the harmonic patterns of the Italian style with assurance, and on occasion the part-writing is sometimes weakened by a use of consecutive fifths and octaves. Yet his sonatas are often surprisingly forward-looking for the 1730s, and contain much fresh and inventive melodic writing (Holman, 1991, p. vi).

McGibbon's sonatas form a large and significant portion of the repertoire for the flute in eighteenth-century Scotland. Like most chamber music designed for the burgeoning amateur market, the sonatas are relatively easy to play well and while they follow the typical eighteenth-century pattern of being marketed for German flute and/or violin, most of the sonatas are better-suited to the flute than the violin, favouring keys more suitable, a gentle range, and passage work that easily falls into characteristic flute patterns, rather than having an interchangeable 'one size fits all treble instruments' top part, common to many eighteenth century sonatas.

Perhaps more significantly, for an instrument generally and almost universally believed to have been unknown in Scotland until 1725,⁸ the first chamber music published in Scotland by a Scottish composer was for the German flute only four years later in 1729. Rather, flute playing was popular in Scotland well before 1725, and McGibbon's first set of trio sonatas hit the market during a surge of popularity in flute playing among the Scottish upper classes.

McGibbon's published work includes eighteen trio sonatas, six solo sonatas, and six duets, all written for the flute, as careful consideration of the music clearly demonstrates. All previous studies of his music have been conducted by string players, who perhaps have been unwilling or unable to consider the possibility that McGibbon intended the flute, not the violin, as the primary instrument for his sonatas. This fiddle-centric view could also account for why his music has been so dismissed by modern scholars.⁹ Including the three sets of Scottish tunes with variations, which include arrangements specifically for flute, McGibbon was

⁸ The history of the flute in Scotland has suffered from a blindly uncritical reliance on the work of William Tytler, who was not good with dates.

⁹ I play the one-keyed flute, and consequently am in a much better position to know how the instrument works, and what music is suited to it.

responding to a consumer demand for flute music. With so much of the music now lost or ignored, knowledge of flute repertoire in Scotland has been limited.

Sources

McGibbon was active in the musical life of Edinburgh. He was loved and acclaimed as both a concert violinist and as a fiddler; Johnson describes him as the best of his generation at both of those two styles of playing (2005, p. 2). He published three volumes of Scottish tunes with variations, for either flute or violin. Johnson argues that these variations were picked up by musicians who were not musically literate and passed into the aural tradition of fiddle music to the point that most fiddlers would have known McGibbon's settings, but it is also possible that McGibbon simply wrote down variations that had long been associated with certain tunes (2005, pp. 6-7; 37-39). The tradition of playing a tune with variations existed in the seventeenth century and became more structured in the eighteenth. Some tunes were known with specific variations, sometimes with the fiddler's own added after the accepted ones. Alexander Murdoch recounts an occurrence of this with the fiddler Pate Baillie on the Leith Ferry in 1805. A man asked Pate to play the 'East Neuk o'Fife' with the ten variations, suggesting that the tune had to be played with specific variations. Pate did, and then added ten of his own. (Murdoch 1888, p. 59). Whether or not McGibbon was contributing new material to an existing tradition or publishing and possibly augmenting existing variations, his collections of Scottish tunes are more polished than similar publications, such as his colleague Adam Craig's *A Collection of the Choicest Scots Tunes Adapted for the Harpsicord or Spinnet and within the Compass of the Voice Violin or German Flute, etc.*

McGibbon also composed three sets of trio sonatas for German flutes or violins, one set of solo sonatas for flute or violin, sonatas based on Scottish tunes, a set of six flute duets, concertos now presumed lost, and unpublished minuets and marches. This list is compiled from the works list found in David Johnson's entry on McGibbon in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* and *Répertoire International des Sources Musicales* (RISM).¹⁰ The two lists do not always agree regarding what was published, when and where it was published, and where surviving copies are held. Because of these problems, determining which publication is which is challenging.

This is the list provided by Johnson in Grove, excluding Scots tunes and marches and dances in the McFarlane manuscript and other possible manuscript sources. I have assigned the J-numbers for ease of reference:

Number	Title	Date and place of publication	Comments based on Johnson
J1	Six sonatas for two violins or flutes and a bass	1727	The second violin part is missing, but the other parts are at the Library of Congress ¹¹
J2	Six sonatas, 1-5 for violin or flute and bass, 6 for flute or recorder, violin, and bass	Edinburgh, 1729	
J3	Six sonatas for two violins or flutes and bass	Edinburgh, 1734	

¹⁰ These publications are the two primary databases for music research.

¹¹ This is a manuscript, not clearly attributed to McGibbon.

J4	Sonatas on John come kiss me now and La folia for violin and bass ¹²	1735	Violin parts are located at the National Library of Scotland in the McFarlane Manuscript
J5	Six sonatas or solos for violin or flute and bass	Edinburgh, 1740	
J6	Six sonatas for two violins or flutes and bass	London, 1745	Only the first violin part survives
J7	Six Sonatas for two flutes	London, 1748	
J8	Concerti grossi and overtures		Lost; listed in Edinburgh Musical Society's 1765 catalogue

Table 1: Johnson/Grove

The list given in RISM is slightly different from Johnson's list:

RISM number	Title	Date and place of publication	Libraries with copies
M35	Six sonatas for two German flutes, or two violins, and a bass	Edinburgh, Richard Cooper, 1729	Library of Congress: flute I and bass
M36	Six sonatas for two German flutes, or two violins, and a bass	Edinburgh, Richard Cooper, 1734	King's College Cambridge: flute II and bass; Library of Congress: flute I and bass
M37	Six sonatas for solos for a German flute or	Edinburgh, Richard Cooper, 1740	Library of Congress; Stätsbibliotek, Berlin

¹² Original formatting is preserved, of both Johnson's list and the way tune names were commonly presented in the eighteenth century.

	a violin and a bass		
M38	Six sonatas for two German flutes or two violins with a thorough bass for the harpsichord	London, David Rutherford	King's College Cambridge: incomplete; Cambridge University Library: flute I; British Library: flute I
M39	Six sonatas for two German flutes	London, J. Simpson	Cambridge University Library; Edinburgh Public Library; National Library of Scotland; Edinburgh University Library; University of Glasgow Library
M40	Six sonatas for two German flutes, or two violins, and a bass		King's College Cambridge: flute II

Table 2: RISM

Interestingly, RISM follows McGibbon's publishers' practice of listing flute first in all the titles that could be played on either flute or violin, whereas Johnson places violin first. Perhaps Johnson harboured a bias against the flute. In the notes to the trio sonata from the 1729 set that he edited, Johnson says that even though McGibbon labeled the top part for German flute, his intention was that it be played on recorder, as the high notes on an eighteenth-century flute are 'pinched and strained' (2000 p. 189). The upper register of the one-keyed flute can be challenging, but competent musicians with decent instruments are able to overcome most of the instrument's idiosyncrasies. Both the top and bottom ranges of the instrument are fraught with challenges to tone and intonation, yet Johnson uses the lack of notes below a' to support his claim that

McGibbon intended the part for recorder.¹³ The top part of the sonata in question is, in actuality, perfectly suited for the one-keyed flute: the key of D major is the instrument's natural key, the range is not extreme and does not require any awkward cross-fingered notes (the usual source of intonation problems), and the writing is generally idiomatic for the flute. It is not nearly as virtuosic as the violin part, and would have been very playable by the gentlemen amateur musicians among whom the flute was fashionable and popular, and who were, most likely, McGibbon's primary markets.

The lists in Grove and RISM can be correlated as follows, with new identifying numbers:

Grove	RISM	New Identifying Number
J2	M35	F1
J3	M36	F2
J5	M37	F3
J7	M39	F4
J1	Unaccounted for in RISM	F6
J6	M40 or M38	F5
J4	Unaccounted for in RISM (only exists in manuscript)	F7
J8	Unaccounted for in RISM (believed to be lost)	F8

Table 3: Grove and RISM

¹³ Unfortunately this might be less clear to someone not intimately familiar with the various quirks of the one-keyed flute and recorder.

The confusion surrounding the sources for McGibbon's music comes from inconsistencies between the listings in Grove and RISM and the libraries said to hold copies of his works. The chart below shows the libraries RISM lists as having editions of McGibbon's chamber works, and what the libraries actually have, verified by correspondence with staff members at each of the libraries in question.

RISM Number	Library in RISM	Verified by Library	Notes
M35	Library of Congress	Yes: Flute I and bass	King's College Cambridge also has a copy of Flute II/violin; it was catalogued as M40. See below.
M36	King's College Cambridge Library of Congress	Yes: Flute II and bass Yes: Flute I and bass	
M37	Library of Congress Stätsbibliothek, Berlin	Yes Yes	
M38	King's College Cambridge Cambridge University Library British Library	Missing Yes: Flute I Yes: Flute I	

M39	University of Glasgow Library Cambridge University Library Edinburgh Public Library Edinburgh University Library National Library of Scotland	Yes Yes No Missing/not catalogued Yes	
M40	King's College Cambridge	Yes: Flute II	This is a mistake. The catalogue of Rowe Music Library, King's College Cambridge, confirms that they hold M40, but what they list as M40 is actually M35. ¹⁴

Table 4: Verification of RISM Libraries

The identity of M40 has an easy solution: it does not actually exist. The source for the British listings in RISM is the *British Union Catalogue of Early Music* (BUCEM). RISM and BUCEM show that King's College Cambridge has three different sets of trio sonatas. It may; the library's copy of M38 is missing, but it does not have the three sets of trio sonatas the reference guide indicate, as is illustrated by the chart below.

¹⁴ I determined this after ordering copies of all they had listed. I did not receive what I had expected, and upon getting back in touch with Gareth Burgess at the Rowe Music Library, established that there is a discrepancy between RISM, the library catalogue, and the BUCEM.

RISM King's College Cambridge	BUCEM King's College Cambridge	King's College Cambridge
M36/1734 trio sonatas flute II	1734 trio sonatas	Yes
M38/trio sonatas	1745 trio sonatas (not identical to 1734)	Cannot be found
M40/trio sonatas flute II	1750 trio sonatas	No
		M35/1729 trio sonatas

Table 5: RISM, BUCEM, and King's College Cambridge

The music that King's College Cambridge has catalogued as M40 is actually M35. Gareth Burgess, a librarian at the Rowe Music Library, believes that the confusion arose from a missing corner of a page in their copy of M35, which led to its having two entries in RISM.¹⁵ It can be determined from this oversight that there are three sets of published trio sonatas, not four.¹⁶

McGibbon's reputation has suffered due to confusion over the sources. Now that all the extant sources have been reunited, a proper study of his music can be attempted, his reputation and music can be reappraised, and a sizeable portion of Scottish chamber music has been saved from being lost forever.¹⁷

¹⁵ "I suspect you are right re the non-existence of RISM A/I, M 40. As you will have seen from the photos, our copy of M 40 (or M 35) has a cropped title page, and is listed in BUCEM (the source for much of RISM's information on items held in British libraries) with the suggested publication information of '[London, c.1750]'. The edition listed in RISM A/1 as M 35 is not listed in BUCEM as there are no copies in British libraries. Evidently when RISM was compiled, the editors did not notice that our copy listed as M 40 is in fact M 35 with a cropped title page, hence the two separate entries. I hope this seems a likely explanation to you. You have helped us to solve a mystery."

Personal correspondence, 24 June 2013.

¹⁶ David Johnson may have been aware of this problem. His list in Grove shows four sets of trio sonatas, one of which is the incomplete 1727 manuscript at the Library of Congress. Kenneth Elliott almost certainly knew of the confusion. Amongst his papers are parts to the 1729 trio sonatas with "Library of Congress" and "KCC" written in pencil at the top of the page. According to RISM, those libraries share the 1734 set. Elliott did not put dates on the music in his papers, but his pencil markings suggest that he was aware of the discrepancy.

¹⁷ It will be impossible to do so in this article without filling it with detailed musical analysis and examples, so the attempt will not be made.

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