

AULD REIKIE

Poems of Robert Fergusson for Chorus and Piano

1. Toot aff Your Horn	2
2. On the Music Bells Playing	6
3. The Lee-Rigg	9
4. The Author's Life	14
5. On Seeing a Lady Paint Herself	17

NOTES

Robert Fergusson (1750-1774) was born in Edinburgh and educated at St. Andrew's University, Scotland, at a time when the Scots dialect was held in little regard by poets. Fergusson took his native dialect and fashioned it into a vibrant literary language, demonstrating that colloquial Scots could be turned into a powerful poetic medium. Combining his University learning with his knowledge of common life, Fergusson wrote verse in which a Latin phrase could fit comfortably with homely Scottish expressions. Fergusson's work had a profound influence on Robert Burns.

Fergusson's verse is full of keen, and sometimes critical, observations of 18th century Edinburgh, from his disgust at the drunken parties that were held on the very spot of public executions to his wry bemusement with the simple vanity of mankind. Fergusson's major work is an unfinished poem entitled "Auld Reikie" whose title is an old playful nickname for Edinburgh. The present collection of settings bring together five short poems of Fergusson which all comment upon life in Fergusson's city, "Auld Reikie."

The Horace Ode ("Toot aff Your Horn") is Fergusson's very Scottish version of the "carpe diem" poem wherein he urges us to enjoy life while we may. The full title of "On the Music Bells Playing" is "On the Music Bells Playing Yesterday Forenoon, Prior to Brown and Wilson's Execution, on the Deacons Being Presented to Council" and refers to the public execution of two murderers. Fergusson's poem is more cynical than contemporary newspaper reports of the same execution which noted that the two condemned men, who had tried repeatedly to escape from prison, were at the last brought to pious repentance by the good work of the deacons and even made a short, moving speech before they were hanged. Fergusson's poem focuses more on the celebrating crowd that attended these public spectacles. The lady painting herself, in the poem of that title, is of course busily applying make-up to her own face.

Auld Reikie was written during a residency at the Patrick Allan-Fraser of Hospitalfield Trust in Arbroath, Scotland in October 2000. The residency was supported by grants from the Institute for the Arts and Humanistic Studies, the Global Fund, and the College of Arts and Architecture at the Pennsylvania State University.

Auld Reikie is dedicated to the Arbroath Choral Society and their conductor, Helen Addison.

GLOSSARY

1. *Ne'er fash your thumb*, not be put out

weird, fate

cantrup, magic spell, trick

kittle, tricky, difficult, uncertain

spier, ask

lippen, trust, expect

dowy, gloomy, sad

mair, more

canker'd, ill-tempered

weel, well

geyzen'd, dried out

waas, walls

couthy, snug, cosy

blaws, draughts, drinks of liquor

lat, let

owrgang, outrun

eild, old age

thraldom, bondage, care

gash, bright

toot aff your horn, drain the cup

yae, one

strae, straw

2. *roast*, poetic form of roost

3. *gang owr*, go over to

lee-rigg, grassy ridge

ain, own

sae, so

thornie-dike, hawthorn hedge

birken-tree, birch tree

daff, make merry, be silly

scug ill een, hide evil eyes

frae, from

nae, no

herds, herdsman, shepherd

kent, shepherd's staff

colly, sheep-dog

fear ye, scare you

lav'rocks, larks

world's gear, worldly goods, possessions