

Tunes 2001: 65 tunes from Laura Risk

Extended liner notes

Note: these liner notes were written in 2001, when cassette tapes were still in everyday use!

After making (at a rough count) close to a hundred copies of various repertoire tapes for my students over the last few years, only to find that the tapes were plagued with distortion and would often play back at the wrong pitch, I decided to join the Information Age and make these CDs.

How did I choose these particular tunes? This is a teaching CD, so I picked the tunes I like to teach. These tunes are memorable, fun to learn, fun to play, and for the most part, well-known in the greater world of fiddling. Many of them offer a particular technical or stylistic challenge. Many of them are particularly well-suited to beginning-level fiddlers. On these CDs, I play each tune fast and then slow (unless it's a slow air -- then I just play it slow).

These CDs are meant to be used in conjunction with private or group lessons, so I haven't provided much commentary. Here's an example of what you'll find in these notes:

5-6 Soldier's Joy

5-6 means that this tune, Soldier's Joy, is on tracks 5-6 of the CD. On track 5, I play the tune at tempo. On track 6, I play it slow.

D major reel; Shetland/Scotland/New England

'D major reel' means that this tune is a reel in the key of D major. 'Shetland/Scotland/New England' is where you'll find this tune played, and the sort of sessions you might want to play it in. It is often also the origin of the tune, but not always.

A simple, catchy, and very popular tune. It emphasizes D arpeggios and scales. Try improvising or composing a more complex version. Start by adding pickups and go from there.

In the comments, I've focused almost exclusively on practical, technical, and stylistic concerns. If you're curious about the history of the tune, ask me or do some research in the library, the record store, or on the Internet.

Check out the version on Scottish Tradition CD #4, 'Shetland Fiddle Music'.

I've listed all recorded versions of these tunes that come to mind. I'm sure I'm missing quite a few -- please let me know if you find other recordings of these tunes and I'll update these notes.

Also, I've included words for a few of the tunes -- if you're into words, I've got more! More verses, more alternate versions, words to more songs. Legitimate words and made-up words... Just ask me...

What are these parts all about?

I've divided the tunes into four Parts. If you've just started playing the fiddle and you're looking for technically easy tunes, check out Part 1. Parts 2 and 3 are Intermediate level tunes. Part 3 ranges into some more difficult keys and offers some opportunities for more complex ornamentation and bowing. Part 4 is still more intricate -- many of those tunes are ones I teach with specific bowings or ornamentation.

Within each part, the tunes are in no particular order. The tunes at the end of Part 3 are a bit harder than those at the beginning of it; on the other hand, tunes like 'Devil in the Kitchen' and 'Smith's a Gallant Fireman' almost made it into Part 4. As a result, there's no reason to try to learn the tunes in order. Just pick the ones you like and go for it...

11 Things to do with the CDs

1. Listen -- to the whole CD, and then to the track that you want to learn -- over and over and over.
2. Sing along.
3. Clap, tap, and snap along with the tune.
4. Walk around the room, singing the tune along with the CD and matching your steps to the beat of the tune.
5. Play along (start by playing along with the slow version). It might help to put the track on repeat.
6. Play a rhythmic drone along with the CD.
7. Compose a bassline (a low, simple harmony part) to the tune. Now play that along with the CD.
8. Compose a more complex harmony part and play that along with the CD.
9. Figure out the chords of the tune and play them along with the CD, using double-stops.
10. If you can, figure out some of the ornaments or bowings.
11. Transcribe the tune once you've learned it by ear.

And one very important thing to do without the CDs...

Find other folks who know the same tunes. Get together and jam. Then try some of the same harmony ideas: drones, basslines, etc.

The Tunes

CD #1 -- PART 1

1 Tuning A

2-3 Off She Goes

D major jig; Scotland/New England

Watch out for the D arpeggios and broken thirds.

4 Tha Mi Sgith (Ha Me Skee)

A modal; air/song; Scotland

Tha me sgith means 'I am tired' in Gaelic. A version of this tune is the well-known strathspey 'Cutting Ferns'. Look for the internal repetition when you're learning it.

5-6 Soldier's Joy

D major reel; Shetland/Scotland/New England

A simple, catchy, and very popular tune. It emphasizes D arpeggios and scales. Try improvising or composing a more complex version. Start by adding pickups and go from there. Check out the version on Scottish Tradition CD #4, 'Shetland Fiddle Music'.

7 Skye Boat Song

G major air/song; Scotland

This song commemorates Prince Charlie's escape from Scotland. Flora Macdonald took Bonnie Prince Charlie, disguised as a serving maid, from Uist to Skye in a small boat.

The hardest part of this one is the string crossings at the beginning of the B part.

Here are some of the words:

Chorus

Speed bonnie boat, like a bird on the wing,

Onward, the sailors cry.

Carry the lad that's born to be king

over the sea to Skye.

Loud the winds howl, loud the waves roar,

Thunderclaps rend the air,

Baffled, our foes stand by the shore,

Follow they will not dare.

8-9 Highland Laddie

A major march/song; Scotland

This is a fairly simply march. Try some ornaments and double-stops.

10-11 Stool of Repentance

A major jig; Scotland

Before playing this tune, be sure you can play the A major scale and the A major and B minor arpeggios. In the third bar of the B part, put your first finger down on the A and E strings simultaneously.

12-13 Reel St-Joseph

D major reel; Québec

This memorable tune is technically very easy. Look for repeated phrases and bits of scales. It's also a nice introduction to syncopation. Also known as Reel St-Stanislas.

14 Star of the County Down

A minor waltz; Ireland

This is a good tune to learn the key of A minor.

15 Lea Rig

A major air/song; Scotland

A beautiful Scottish air. It's also played in G major. Listen to Alasdair Fraser and Jody Stecher play this on "The Driven Bow".

16-17 Mrs McLeod

A major reel; Scotland

This is one of the best-known Scottish reels. It's also played in Cape Breton, New England, Ireland (with the parts reversed and in G major), and Appalachia (where it's called Uncle Joe). The Appalachian version of this tune is on the soundtrack of 'Ride with the Devil', starring Jewel.

18-19 Fairy Dance

D major reel; Scotland

Composed by Nathaniel Gow.

This tune is all scales and broken thirds. Hanneke Cassel recorded this on "My Joy", and Alasdair Fraser recorded it on "Legacy of the Scottish Fiddle, Vol 1."

20 Southwind

G major waltz; Ireland

This is a good tune to learn more about the key of G major.

21-22 My Love She's But a Lassie Yet

D major song tune; Scotland

Lots of D arpeggios and broken thirds. Learn the words first:

My love she's but a lassie yet,
My love she's but a lassie yet,
We'll let her stand a year or two,
She'll no be half sae saucy yet.

I rue the day I sought her O
I rue the day I sought her O
Wha gets her needs na say he's woo'd,
But he may say he's bought her O.

23-24 Happy A Polka

A major polka; Ireland

Get another fiddler to play this melody and try to compose a harmony part.

25 Aran Boat Song

E minor air/song; Scotland/Ireland

If you liked Skye Boat Song, here's another one in the same vein.

PART 2

26-27 Reel Sherbrooke

G major reel; Québec

Try the chord at the beginning. Also, look out for the chromatic line in the turn-around. This is a very well-known reel in Québec. In New England, it's sometimes called Reel de Montréal.

28-29 Mug of Brown Ale

A minor jig; Ireland

Try slurring over the beat, and look out for the 4th finger ornaments in the B part.

30-31 Willa Fjord

D major reel; Shetland

This tune is a nice introduction to syncopation. You can also do some shuffle bowing at the ends of the phrases. Figure out the chords to this tune and then play back-up as someone else plays the tune. Check out the version on Scottish Tradition CD #4, 'Shetland Fiddle Music'.

32 Margaret's Waltz

A major waltz; English

Composed by Pat Shaw.

Try slurring the repeat of the B part in pairs -- over the beat!

33-34 Lay Dee at Dee

D major reel; Shetland

This is a great example of D and A arpeggios at work. It's also a good tune to practice shuffle bowing.

35-36 Mucking of Geordie's Byre

D major jig; Scotland

Once you've got Off She Goes, try this jig.

37 Mist-Covered Mountains

A minor air; Scotland

Here are the words to the chorus of this well-known tune:

Oh, roe, soon shall I see them, oh, hee-roe, see them, oh see them.

Oh, roe, soon shall I see them, the mist covered mountains of home!

38-39 Glencoe March

D major march; Cape Breton

Marches are good tunes to practice your ornaments. Try putting an ornament on almost every beat. (Count the tune with 4 beats to the bar.)

40 Lochaber No More

A modal air; Scotland

Practice your pipe ornaments. Lochaber is in the western Highlands.

PART 3

41-42 Sailor's Wife

D minor jig; Scotland/New England

This is a great tune to introduce you to D minor. Watch out for the F naturals. I recorded this on 'The Merry Making'.

43-44 Stella's Trip to Kamloops

A major march; Cape Breton

Composed by Pat Chafe

Double-stop with your 4th finger on the A string and your open E string at the beginning.

Kamloops is in British Columbia.

45-46 Brenda Stubbert's

A minor reel; Cape Breton

Composed by Jerry Holland

This is a good tune to practice playing bowed triplets. Notice how the tune is made up of only four different phrases. Brenda Stubbert is a Cape Breton fiddler and pianist. This tune was a huge hit about ten years ago and has been recorded many times.

47-48 Andy de Jarlis

E major jig; Cape Breton

A good tune for learning E major. Practice your E major and D major arpeggios first. At the very beginning of the tune, put your first finger down on both the D and A strings and leave it there until you play the open D note in bar 4. This tune was recorded by Jerry Holland and by Altan.

49 The Hills of Lorne

D major air; Scotland

Watch for the hold before the last phrase. Think about phrasing, tone, and expression.

50-51 High Road to Linton

A major reel; Scotland

The trickiest thing about this tune is the third part. Watch your rhythm! Check out the version on Scottish Tradition CD #9, 'The Fiddler and his Art'. Alasdair Fraser recorded this on "Return to Kintail."

52-53 Sean Ryan's

A minor jig; Ireland

Try some rolls. Martin Hayes plays a beautiful version of this in F on his self-titled CD. I recorded this on 'Greenfire.'

54-55 Braes of Mar

D major strathspey; Scotland

This is a great tune and a very popular strathspey. The children's words are as follows:

A part:

Some say the deil's dead, the deil's dead, the deil's dead,
Some say the deil's dead and buried in Killarney.

B part:

Some say he rose again, some say he rose again,
Some say he rose again and joined the British army.

The C and D parts of the tune were added later. Try writing words to them...

56-57 Margaree Reel

A major reel; Scotland/Cape Breton

Try accenting the off-beats. Also, use your 4th finger to double-stop the E. Alasdair Fraser recorded this on "The Driven Bow".

58 Lament for the Reverend Archie Beaton

G major air; Scotland

Composed by John Mason

Slow airs offer an great opportunity to explore ornamentation, phrasing, and dynamics. Be expressive! And make sure you know the G arpeggio before trying this tune...

John Mason, the composer, was a lawyer and fiddler from Orkney.

59-60 Devil in the Kitchen

A modal strathspey; Cape Breton, Scotland

This tune has back-to-back bowed triplets. Practice playing triplets starting on a down-bow and on an up-bow. Alasdair Fraser recorded this on "Return to Kintail."

61-62 The Smith's a Gallant Fireman

D major strathspey; Scotland

There is an excellent recording of this on Alasdair Fraser's new CD, "Legacy of the Scottish Fiddle, Vol 1". You'll probably need to practice the G B G B F#A F# A passage slowly and carefully -- try doing the string crossings without the left hand, and then try playing that passage and slurring it all in one bow. The try it normal, but slowly.

CD #2 -- (PART 3 continued)

1-2 Stan Chapman's

A major jig; Cape Breton

Composed by Jerry Holland.

Try some rolls on the E and B. Listen to Alasdair Fraser's version of this on 'The Road North.' (He calls it 'Willie's Trip to Toronto.')

3-4 Julia Delaney's

D minor reel; Ireland

Eileen Ivers recorded a wild version of this on her eponymous CD.

5-6 Old Favorite

G major jig; Ireland

Listen to Martin Hayes play this on 'Under the Moon'.

7-8 Captain Campbell

A minor strathspey; Cape Breton

Listen to Alasdair Fraser play this on 'The Driven Bow.'

9-10 Barrowburn

D major reel; Scotland

Composed by Addie Harper.

Try composing some variations for the B part. I recorded this on 'Greenfire'.

11-12 Rights of Man

E minor hornpipe; Ireland

Check out Paddy Canny's version of this on his CD, 'Paddy Canny: Traditional Music from the Legendary East Clare Fiddler.' He plays it in D minor.

13-14 Drummond Castle

A minor jig; Cape Breton, Scotland

Try starting the B part with two up-bows. James IV courted (and maybe secretly wed) Margaret Drummond here. The gardens are famous and appear at the end of the movie "Rob Roy".

15-16 Stirling Castle

D major strathspey; Scotland

Try to get the bowing in the first few bars.

17-18 St Kilda's Wedding

A major reel; Scotland

St. Kilda's is an island off the west coast of Scotland that was abandoned by its last residents in 1930. It's now an army radar station. Try accenting the offbeats and driving the up-bows.

19-20 Cullen House

F major jig; Scotland/Cape Breton

A good tune for working on F major. Practice the F arpeggio first.

21-22 Calliope House

E major jig; Scotland

Composed by Dave Richardson.

Listen to Alasdair Fraser's version of this on 'The Road North'.

23-24 Dinkey's

A major reel; Ireland

A great tune for triplets. This tune was made famous by the Irish band Altan.

25-26 Scarce of Tatties

A modal jig; Scotland

This is a pipe jig -- try some pipe ornaments. I recorded this on 'Host of the Air'.

27 Hector the Hero

A major air; Scotland

Composed by J.S. Skinner.

Good practice playing on the G string. There is a beautiful version of this played by Hanneke Cassel and Ryan McKassen on 'The Wee Hours' (a hard CD to find!)

28-29 Paddy's Trip to Scotland

D major reel; Ireland

Try shuffle bowing in the B part.

30-31 Braes of Castle Grant

A major pipe march; Scotland

As pipe marches go, this one isn't so hard. Try singing it first. Then add some pipe ornaments and drones.

32-33 Miss Drummond of Perth

A modal strathspey; Scotland

Learn your A major and G major arpeggios before trying this tune. Keep your fingers down wherever possible in the G arpeggio sections.

34-35 Marquis of Huntly's

G minor strathspey; Scotland

Watch out for the alternating F naturals and F sharps in the B part. Alasdair Fraser recorded this on "Return to Kintail."

PART 4

36-37 Macarthur Road

E major reel; Scotland/Ireland

Composed by Dave Richardson

Shift to third position in the B part. This is a great tune for improvising. I recorded this on "Greenfire." Dave Richardson plays in The Boys of the Lough.

38-39 Cliffs of Moher

A modal jig; Ireland

I've drawn heavily on Kevin Burke's version as played on the first 'Celtic Fiddle Festival' album.

40-41 Ewie with the Crooked Horn

G minor strathspey; Scotland

Alasdair Fraser recorded this on "Return to Kintail." I recorded it on "Journey Begun." Natalie MacMaster recorded it on "My Roots are Showing."

42-43 Mrs. Mary MacDonald

G minor reel; Scotland

I recorded this on 'The Merry Making'. This is my own version of this tune, and is slightly different from the version published in the Athole Collection.

44 Father John McMillan of Barra

A major pipe march; Scotland

This is a typical 4-part pipe march. The 3rd and 4th parts are variations on the 1st and 2nd parts. Marches like this can be hard to learn, so I'd suggest you listen to the CD many times and really get the melody in your head before trying to play it. Once you've got the tune, try some pipe ornaments.

45-46 Tulchan Lodge

A major strathspey; Scotland

Composed by J. Scott Skinner

J. Scott Skinner was a renowned fiddler and composer who lived at the turn of the last century. Check out his autobiography sometime. I recorded this on 'Host of the Air'.

47-48 Reconciliation

A major reel; Scotland

Look out for the triplets.

49-50 The New Fiddle

E major jig; Cape Breton

Great for learning your E major and D arpeggios. Try improvising.

51-52 Charlie Lennon's

B minor reel; Ireland

Lots of rolls...

53-54 Golden Eagle

G major hornpipe; Ireland

Try to figure out the chords in the B part. Also, try composing a parallel harmony part.

55 Sunday River

F major waltz; United States

Composed by Pete Sutherland.

I recorded this on 'The Merry Making'. The Sunday River is in Maine.

Liner notes ©2001 Laura Risk. All rights reserved.