



University  
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***Scottish Ballads. An Interactive CD-ROM featuring sound, images, lyrics and commentary.* Directed by Ted Cowan. Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 2004. £10.**

*Scottish Ballads* is a valuable addition to the growing number of digital ballad resources now available (most notably the recently published *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, ISBN 0 9724471, as well as on-line resources such as <http://www.childballads.com>). Produced by a University of Glasgow team, under the direction of Ted Cowan, with research assistance from Lizanne Henderson and the technical expertise of Jim Devine, it reflects the erudition, and hard work, of the production team: this deserves celebration.

The ballads themselves are elegantly packaged. Useful headnotes, following Child's standard practice, introduce each text, including summaries of the plot-lines, and background historical information where appropriate. Complete texts of the featured songs are combined with audio versions by leading Scottish performers, like Adam McNaughton and Gordeanna McCulloch. In addition, there are images associated with the texts, showing places, and people, mentioned within the songs.

The audio feature is particularly helpful. In addition to pieces from the singers mentioned above, there are fine performances by Alyne Jones, Maggie Anderson and John Eaglesham. Anne Neilson's assured performance of 'Rantin Laddie' immeasurably enhances a reading of the text, as does Bob Blair's spirited 'James Harris. Demon Lover'. As well as sung versions, there are recitations, including Cowan's darkly resonant 'Lads o Wamphray'.

The package was very well laid out with obvious icons allowing for easy navigational shifts between the main index, help features, texts and supporting information. It was easy to load too. System specifications are fairly standard. Macintosh Classic users must have a power PC processor running OS 8.6 or later; at least 64 MB RAM; a hard disk with 55 MB of free space; a CD or DVD-ROM drive; a monitor with resolution of 640 x 480, and Quicktime 4 or later. For Windows, the minimum requirement is Windows 98SE, Me, NT4.1 (Service Pack 6), 2000, XP; an Intel-compatible Pentium 90 or faster processor; at least 64 MB RAM; a hard disk with 110MB free space; a CD or DVD-ROM drive; a monitor with resolution 640 x 480.

Less positively, the images, as far as I could tell, did not seem to be labelled where they appear; it's possible I didn't fully understand the referencing system but I found this quite frustrating as a user. The index to the texts, too, is by Child number which, while pleasing to ballad enthusiasts, makes it time-consuming to locate individual texts by name. While a map shows the distribution of the ballad texts – an interesting idea – equally, this was not developed (as far as I could see) to link with the texts themselves; if this had been done, the package would have been much more useful to users from outwith Britain. Equally, for the purposes of this review, I was not able to locate the quicktime videos of ballad locations which are linked to some of the

texts; I had seen this fascinating feature demonstrated by Jim Devine at the launch of the CD itself and it undoubtedly enhances the users' experience of ballads. Another irritation was that, on my PC monitor at least, the CD displayed at approximately half the size of the screen, which meant that the visual elements were not seen to their full potential.

Despite these reservations, though, the CD-ROM is very well worth consulting. Its combination of strong visual and audio images with thoughtful and well-supported texts, along with the accompanying, and rich, bibliography, would make this an extremely useful purchase for any song scholar or enthusiast.

**Valentina Bold**

*University of Glasgow, Crichton Campus, Dumfries*