

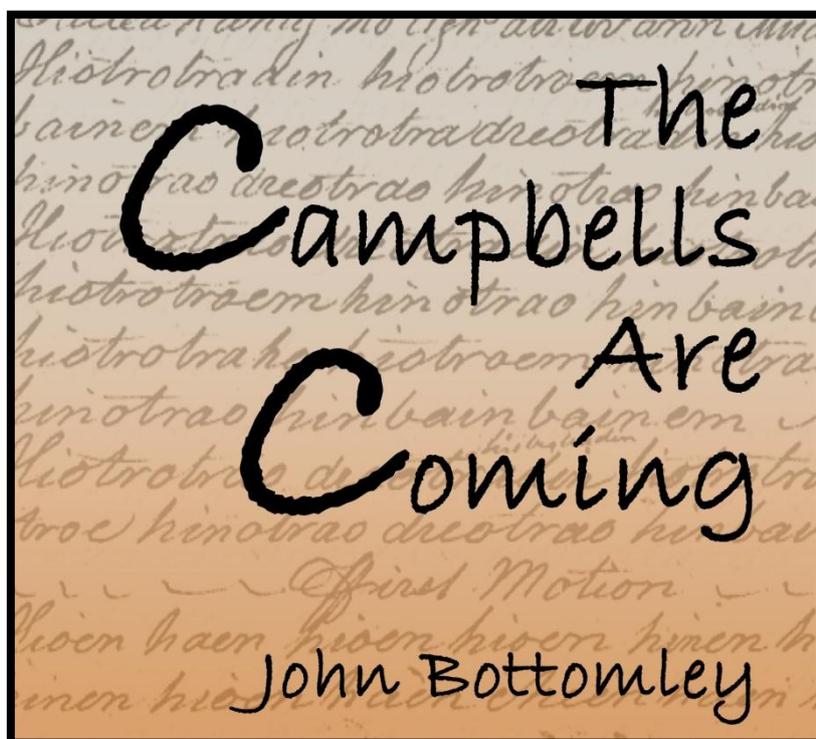
CD Review-“The Campbells are Coming” by John Bottomley

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There is no doubt that John Bottomley is an extremely accomplished piper and a very musical performer of Ceol Mor. He portrayed some very musical performances on his “*Back to my Roots*” album, and this one is no different. His Ceol Mor we are told comes from Jim McIntosh and Ed Neigh, but his own musical style and interpretation are very evident in his playing.

This album, aptly named “*The Campbells are Coming*” is John’s interpretation of a number of tunes from the Campbell Canntaireachd. This is a text of tunes written in syllabic form (as distinct from staff notation) by Colin Mór Campbell of Nether Lorn in Argyll, at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th Century. To transcribe the tunes and interpret them can be quite a time consuming and intellectual process. John admits, in the text accompanying the album that he has taken small liberties with the placement of some cadences, but kept generally to the traditionally excepted interpretations where he could. The results are however attractive and places this album in the category of a work of some importance beyond its obvious musical value.

The recording includes files of the tunes in staff notation. The actual Campbell Canntaireachd of the tunes is available on the Piobaireachd Society website, where you will also find John’s tune, “*The Lament for Liam*”. It is a great honour for any piper to have a tune posted on such a prestigious site.



CD Cover

The CD is well recorded with little obvious mixing and editing which gives a more raw and clean sound to the pipes than usually heard on recordings of this type. This is not at all unappealing but on some tracks it does not hide the harmonic disturbance that can be produced by some chanter's on the note E during recording. It is nice to hear drones striking in at the start of tracks, as albums often fade in on a fully blown note in recent years. Each track however tastefully fades during the repeat of the ground which seems very fitting for the structure of Ceol Mor.

The album contains two versions of *Clan Chattan's Gathering*, *The Battle of the Pass of Crieff*, *Gain in Hides and Corn in Sacks*, *My King has landed in Moidart*, *Lament for the Old Sword* and *The Marquis of Argyll's Salute*. This is certainly an attractive, varied and entertaining selection of great tunes.

In more recent years the opportunities for pipers to look into settings beyond those which have dominated competition over the past decades has been encouraged. We are now seeing settings from Donald McDonald, McArthur settings and even Campbell Canntaireachd tunes in competition lists, which will make this a valuable album for some as a reference. John's efforts to present commonly played tunes from a rarely used source is to be commended. He indicates where he varies from the source such as adding an a'mach variation where none is shown in the canntaireachd source within the tune "*Gain in Hides and Corn in Sacks*", or the variation of cadencial E's in the "*Clan Chattan*" version 2.

John's own playing betrays his musical heritage with the double low G in his Low G Taorluath and Crunluath movements, it is uncommon that these are not accompanied by the heavy version of the D throw, but John's technique is very clear, strong and masterly. The tunes, technique and bagpipe are all very pleasant to listen to.



John Bottomley in action

It has been a pleasure to get an early sample of John's latest work and we are confident it will be a very successful project and a valuable inclusion in the collection of any enthusiast of our "Great Music".

In summary, this is indeed an intelligent, well thought out album, with attractive pieces, good contrast and performances that are well worth hearing. It is a great reference (especially considering that manuscript is included), and a good example of well educated and well thought out musical interpretation of these tunes. It is available from: <http://www.johnbottomleybagpipes.com/>

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