Our knowledge of Scottish music in the 17th and early 18th centuries is still quite fragmentary. Received wisdom has been that Scotland went through something of a cultural slump after James VI took the royal court to London in 1603; an alternative view is that between that point and the Union in 1707, so much musical material was being shared across the border that it makes sense to talk about a British musical repertoire, before Great Britain had even come into being. Historians of Scottish music have tended to ignore material found in both nations as not being sufficiently Scottish to consider seriously.

Strictly speaking, Ramsay didn’t leave us any music books, but he did provide us with an enormous list of early 18th-century Scottish musical material, simply by giving the titles of the tunes for his songs, whether they are in the *Tea-Table Miscellany*, or *The Gentle Shepherd*. The fact that giving only the title was enough tells us that to a large extent these were common knowledge amongst his audience, so he is a valuable witness to the tunes that people knew, and the songs that they sang, even if he changed the words to make them more appropriate for his middle class customers. His tune titles can be compared with the rich scattering of other material surviving from the period: fiddlers’ notebooks, arrangements of tunes and songs for the lute or other plucked instruments, commonplace books and teaching material, to build up a sense of the music that Ramsay’s folk called their own. Also, the way he expands the use of song in the revisions of *The Gentle Shepherd* has a lot to tell us about the development of music in early Scottish theatre.

The success of Ramsay’s books led to many others providing printed music, for those readers who didn’t already know the tunes. Some of these music books, such as the 1730 book of harpsichord arrangements by his Edinburgh contemporary Adam Craig, acknowledged their connection with Ramsay and his work. Others, such as William Thomson’s lavish 1725 London collection *Orpheus Caledonius*, simply stole his material and dressed it up with their own arrangements.

Some of the music that Ramsay drew on still survives in traditions today, in airs and song tunes, quite distinct from the dance music repertoire of strathspeys and reels which developed in the later part of the 18th century. For example, the finale from Ramsay’s *The Gentle Shepherd*, ‘Corn Rigs are bonny’, remains a popular tune and song, familiar from the later version by Robert Burns.

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