

THE BALLAD OF HOW MACPHERSON HELD
THE FLOOR

SAID President MacConnachie to Treasurer MacCall:
"We ought to have a piper for our next Saint Andrew's Ball.
Yon squakin' saxophone gives me the syncopated gripes.
I'm sick of jazz, I want to hear the skirling of the pipes."
"Alas! it's true," said Tam MacCall. "The young folk of to-day
Are fox-trot mad and dinna ken a reel from a Strathspey.
Now, what we want's a kiltie lad, primed up wi' mountain dew,
To strut the floor at supper time, and play a lilt or two.
In all the North there's only one; of him I've heard them speak:
His name is Jock MacPherson, and he lives on Boulder Creek;
An old-time hard-rock miner, and a wild and wastrel loon,
Who spends his nights in glory, playing pibrochs to the moon.
I'll seek him out; beyond a doubt on next Saint Andrew's Night
We'll proudly hear the pipes to cheer and charm our appetite."

Oh lads were neat and lassies sweet who graced Saint Andrew's
Ball;
But there was none so full of fun as Treasurer MacCall.
And as Maloney's rag-time band struck up the newest hit,
He smiled a smile behind his hand, and chuckled: "Wait a bit."
And so with many a Celtic snort, with malice in his eye,
He watched the merry crowd cavort, till supper time drew nigh.
Then gleefully he seemed to steal, and sought the Nugget Bar,
Wherein there sat a tartaned chiel, as lonely as a star;
A huge and hairy Highlandman as hearty as a breeze,
A glass of whisky in his hand, his bag-pipes on his knees.

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"Drink down your *doch and doris*, Jock," cried Treasurer Mac-
Call;

"The time is ripe to up and pipe; they wait you in the hall.
Gird up your loins and grit your teeth, and here's a pint of
hooch

To mind you of your native heath—jist pit it in your pooch.
Play on and on for all you're worth; you'll shame us if you stop.
Remember you're of Scottish birth—keep piping till you drop.
Aye, though a bunch of Willie boys should bluster and implore,
For the glory of the Highlands, lad, you've got to hold the
floor."

The dancers were at supper, and the tables groaned with cheer,
When President MacConnachie exclaimed: "What do I hear?
Methinks it's like a chanter, and it's coming from the hall."

"It's Jock MacPherson tuning up," cried Treasurer MacCall
So up they jumped with shouts of glee, and gaily hurried forth.
Said they: "We never thought to see a piper in the North."

Aye, all the lads and lassies braw went buzzing out like bees.
And Jock MacPherson there they saw, with red and rugged
knees.

Full six feet four he strode the floor, a grizzled son of Skye,
With glory in his whiskers and with whisky in his eye.
With skelping stride and Scottish pride he towered above them
all:

"And is he no' a bonny sight?" said Treasurer MacCall.
While President MacConnachie was fairly daft with glee,
And there was jubilation in the Scottish Commy-tee.
But the dancers seemed uncertain, and they signified their doubt,
By dashing back to eat as fast as they had darted out.
And someone raised the question 'twixt the coffee and the cakes:
"Does the Piper walk to get away from all the noise he makes?"
Then reinforced with fancy food they slowly trickled forth,
And watched in patronizing mood the Piper of the North.

Proud, proud was Jock MacPherson, as he made his bag-pipes
skirl,

And he set his sportran swinging, and he gave his kilts a whirl.
And President MacConnachie was jumping like a flea,

And there was joy and rapture in the Scottish Commy-tee.

"Just let them have their saxophones, wi' constipated squall;
We're having heaven's music now," said Treasurer MacCall.

But the dancers waxed impatient, and they rather seemed to fret
For Maloney and the jazz of his Hibernian Quartette.

Yet little recked the Piper, as he swung with head on high,
Lamenting with MacCrimmon on the heather hills of Skye.

With Highland passion in his heart he held the centre floor;

Aye, Jock MacPherson played as he had never played before.

Maloney's Irish melodists were sitting in their place,
And as Maloney waited, there was wonder in his face.

"T'was sure the gorgeous music—Golly! wouldn't it be grand
If he could get MacPherson as a member of his band?

But the dancers moped and mumbled, as around the room they
sat:

"We paid to dance," they grumbled; "but we cannot dance to
that."

Of course we're not denying that it's really splendid stuff;
But it's mighty satisfying—don't you think we've had enough?"

"You've raised a pretty problem," answered Treasurer Mac-

Call;

"For on Saint Andrew's Night, ye ken, the Piper rules the Ball."
Said President MacConnachie: "You've said a solemn thing.

Tradition holds him sacred, and he's got to have his fling.

But soon, no doubt, he'll weary out. Have patience; bide a wee."

"That's right. Respect the Piper," said the Scottish Commy-tee.

And so MacPherson stalked the floor, and fast the moments
flew,

Till half an hour went past, as irritation grew and grew.

Then the dancers held a council, and with faces fiercely set,

They hailed Maloney, heading his Hibernian Quartette:

"It's long enough we've waited. Come on, Mike, play up the
Blues."

And Maloney hesitated, but he didn't dare refuse.

So banjo and piano, and guitar and saxophone

Contended with the shrilling of the chanter and the drone;

And the women's ears were muffled, so infernal was the din.

But MacPherson was unruffled, for he knew that he would win.

Then two bright boys jazzed round him, and they sought to play
the clown,

But MacPherson jolted sideways, and the Sassenachs went down.

And as if it was a signal, with a wild and angry roar,

The gates of wrath were riven—yet MacPherson held the floor.

Aye, amid the rising tumult, still he strode with head on high,

With ribbands gaily streaming, yet with battle in his eye.

Amid the storm that gathered, still he stalked with Highland
pride,

While President and Treasurer sprang bravely to his side.

And with ire and indignation that was glorious to see,

Around him in a body ringed the Scottish Commy-tee.

Their teeth were clenched with fury; their eyes with anger
blazed:

"Ye manna touch the Piper," was the slogan that they raised.

Then blows were struck, and men went down; yet 'mid the ris-

ing fray

MacPherson towered in triumph—and he never ceased to play.

Alas! his faithful followers were but a gallant few,

And faced defeat, although they fought with all the skill they

knew.

For President MacConnachie was seen to slip and fall,
 And o'er his prostrate body stumbled Treasurer MacCall.
 And as their foes with triumph roared, and leaguered them about,
 It looked as if their little band would soon be counted out.
 For eyes were black and noses red, yet on that field of gore,
 As resolute as Highland rock—MacPherson held the floor.

Maloney watched the battle, and his brows were bleakly set,
 While with him paused and panted his Hibernian Quartette.
 For sure it is an evil spite, and breaking to the heart,
 For Irishmen to watch a fight and not be taking part.
 Then suddenly on high he soared, and tightened up his belt:
 "And shall we see them crush," he roared, "a brother and a
 Celt?"

A fellow *artiste* needs our aid. Come on, boys, take a hand."
 Then down into the *mêlée* dashed Maloney and his band.

Now though it was Saint Andrew's Ball, yet men of every race,
 That bow before the Great God Jazz were gathered in that
 place.

Yea, there were those who grunt: "Ya! Ya!" and those who
 squeak: "We! We!"

Likewise Dutch, Dago, Swede and Finn, Polack and Portugee.
 Yet like ripe grain before the gale that national hotch-potch
 Went down before the fury of the Irish and the Scotch.
 Aye, though they closed their gaping ranks and rallied to the
 fray,

To the Shamrock and the Thistle went the glory of the day.

You should have seen the carnage in the drooling light of dawn,
 Yet 'mid the scene of slaughter Jock MacPherson playing on.
 Though all lay low about him, yet he held his head on high,
 And piped as if he stood upon the caller crags of Skye.

His face was grim as granite, and no favour did he ask,
 Though weary were his mighty lungs and empty was his flask.
 And when a fallen foe wailed out: "Say! when will you have
 done?"

MacPherson grinned and answered: "Hoots! She's only ha'f
 begun."

Aye, though his hands were bloody, and his knees were gay
 with gore,

A Grampian of Highland pride—MacPherson held the floor.

And still in Yukon valleys where the silent peaks look down,
 They tell of how the Piper was invited up to town,
 And he went in kilted glory, and he piped before them all,
 But he wouldn't stop his piping till he busted up the Ball.
 Of that Homeric scrap they speak, and how the fight went on,
 With sally and with rally till the breaking of the dawn.
 And how the Piper towered like a rock amid the fray,
 And the battle surged about him, but he never ceased to play.
 Aye, by the lonely camp-fires, still they tell the story o'er—
 How the Sassenach was vanquished and—MacPherson held the
 floor.