

# WORLD MUSIC

## SCOTLAND

### FINGAL'S CAVE

#### MUSIC BACKGROUND:

Even before Mendelssohn and Coste (see under Classical Music – *Fingal's Cave Overture* & *Fingals Höhle*), Fingal's Cave was the source of inspiration for a yet earlier composer. John Gow (1764-1826), the son of the famous Scottish composer and fiddler Neil Gow, composed a reel called, "Fingal's Cave," around 1802. (Kuntz 1996-2007) The portrait of Neil Gow is by Sir Henry Raeburn, 1787.



This tune is known by several names – *Cave*, *Cuilfhionn*, *Fingal's Cave March*, *Fingal's Weeping*, *Fingals Cave*, *Gul Fhin*. (Anon. n.d.) However, only those recorded versions with "cave" in the title will be considered here.

The music arranged here by the Cunningham brothers is based on another piece of traditional music, entitled "Fingal's Cave," according to *The Fiddler's Companion*. (Kuntz 1996-2007) What follows are eight different versions of the tune first arranged and recorded by the Cunningham brothers.

There is even one version of the tune, arranged and played on cello by Abby Newton, taken from the Fingal's Cave strathspey, that was recorded inside Fingal's Cave in 2000 (see below [WD-SCOT-FG8](#)).

Fingal's Cave ranks worldwide as the cave most celebrated in music with the most number of different compositions written in its honor.

See the other compositions inspired by Fingal's Cave: the celebrated overture by Mendelssohn (under Classical Music –Orchestral – Fingal's Cave Overture [CL-FG-Parts 1 to 5](#)); a classical guitar piece by Johann Kaspar Mertz (under Classical Music [CL-GT1 to 4](#)); one background music piece (see Library Music – [FL-L#](#)); one traditional Celtic piece by Anne Wylie (see below [WD-SCOT-FG11](#)); plus a rock number by Pink Floyd (under Rock Music – Psychedelic [RK-PY#](#) ) and rock arrangements of Mendelssohn's music (under Rock Music [RK #](#) ).



**Ref:** Anon. n.d., Fingal's Cave Strathspey, [thesession](#)

Baptic, David 1894, *Musical Scotland*

Fingal's Cave, Description, [Wikipedia](#)

Fingal's Cave (2), Musical Notation, [tunearch](#)

Kuntz, Andrew 1996-2007, Fingal's Cave (1) & Fingal's Cave (2), *The Fiddler's Companion*, [ibiblio](#)

MacCulloch, Donald 1975, *Staffa*, London, p. 111

#### VARIOUS VERSIONS OF

#### FINGAL'S CAVE

In chronological order

WD-SCOT-FG1 United Kingdom 1980

## FINGALS CAVE \*

WD – Celtic – Traditional – Instrumental

**Comp:** (Traditional)

**Arr:** John & Phil Cunningham

**Rts:** Highway Music

**Perf:** John & Phil **CUNNINGHAM**

Johnny Cunningham (fiddle & bouzouki)

Phil Cunningham (piano)

Gordon Jones (bodhran)

**Prod:** John Zollman

**Rec. Co:** R.E.L. or Craighall Studios; Edinburgh

**Rec. Eng:** Douglas Bogie

**Rec. Date:** Nov. 1979

**Time:** 3:50

A. British **LP:** AGAINST THE STORM

Highway SHY 7011

12" 33rpm (Sd 2 – Bd 1)

B. American **LP:** AGAINST THE STORM

Shanachie SHAN-79017

12" 33rpm (Sd 2 – Bd 1)

**Notes:** The Cunningham brothers, two founding members of Silly Wizard, perform here by themselves.

If Mendelssohn's overture seems to conjure up images of Fingal's Cave in violent, stormy weather then this piece, on the contrary, depicts it on a bright, sunny day under calm, favorable skies, which is the way most of us get to see the cave. With a forward-driving force, right from the start the fiddle and piano play an air carrying you up and over the lilted waves across those 8 miles that separate Ulva Harbor from Staffa. When you arrive the tempo picks up gaily and the bouzouki and bodhran come in with a march where we can all join in and enjoy this extraordinary musical encounter with one of the world's most majestic sea caves.

**Ref:** John & Phil Cunningham, Against the Storm LP, [Discogs](#)

John & Phil Cunningham, Against the Storm, Silly Wizard, [nigelgatherer](#)

Johnny Cunningham, Biography, [Wikipedia](#)

Phil Cunningham, Biography, [philcunningham](#) & [answers](#)

Talk: Fingal's Cave (2), Data, Tune Properties, & Standard Notation, [tunearch](#)



Drawing from Back jacket Cover LP

WD-SCOT-FG2 United Kingdom 1985

## FINGAL'S CAVE \*

WD – Celtic – Traditional – March – Instrumental

**Comp:** (Traditional)

**Arr:** Eileen Monger

**Rts:** Matchbox Music

**Perf:** Eileen **MONGER** (Celtic harp)

Jenny McLeod (Uilleann pipes)

George Monger (dulcimer)

Mike Bilinge (bodhran)

**Prod:** Gef Lucena & David Wilkins

**Prod. Co:** Saydisc Records; Wotton-Under-Edge,  
Gloucestershire, UK

**Rec. Co:** Valley Recordings

**Rel. Loc:** The Meeting House, Frenchay, Bristol

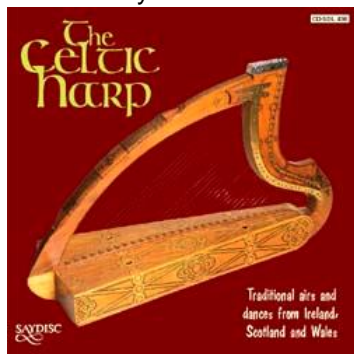
**Liner Notes:** (12-page Booklet in English, French, & German)  
Eileen Monger



**Time:** 3:03

A. British Releases:

1. **LP: THE LILTING BANSHEE**  
Saydisc SDL 348
2. Reissue on **CD: THE LILTING BANSHEE: TRADITIONAL AIRS AND DANCES FOR CELTIC HARP** (1995)  
Saydisc CD-SDL 348 (Tk 11)
3. Reissue on Compilation **CD: THE CELTIC HARP** (1999)  
Saydisc CD-SDL 430 (Tk 15)



B. American **LP: THE LILTING BANSHEE** (1985)  
Musical Heritage MHS 7448

**Spec:** (Nos. A1 & B) 12" 33rpm (Sd 2 – Bd ?)

**Notes:** Eileen Monger writes about this piece – “A tune George and I learnt several years ago from the Scottish ‘Kerr’s Collection of Merry Melodies for Violin’ (Vol. 1). We were later told that it was originally a Highland pipe lament, but we play it as a march.” (Liner notes)

One critic remarked – “Another altered tune is ‘Fingal’s Cave,’ originally a Highland pipe lament that is here successfully performed as a march.” (Ditzel, n.d.)

A nice arrangement of the piece where the harp sets out the tune then the pipes join in and all run through the theme a few times backed by the bodhran and dulcimer. Regarding the Uilleann pipes, *Uilleann* is Irish for elbow, referring to the fact that these pipes -- much softer sounding than Highland bagpipes -- are pumped by a bellows under the elbow.

**Ref:** Eileen Monger, *The Lilting Banshee*, [Discogs](#)

Eileen Monger, *The Lilting Banshee*, [arkivmusic](#)

Ditzel, Peter n.d., Review, [Allmusic](#) (◀AUDIO SAMPLE)

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**WD-SCOT-FG3** United Kingdom 1989

## **FINGAL'S CAVE** \*

WD – Celtic – Traditional – Instrumental

**Comp:** (Traditional Source) Kerr’s Collection of Merry Melodies for the Violin

**Perf:** **Andrew CRONSHAW** (electric flute)

Ric Sanders (violin)

Micky Barker (percussion)

**Prod:** Andrew Cronshaw & Ric Sanders

**Prod. Co:** Topic Records; London

**Rec. Co:** Moor Green Studios; Rock, Worcestershire

**Liner Notes:** (8-page Booklet)

**Time:** 2:05



1. **LP: THE GREAT DARK WATER**

Waterfront WF 009

2. **CD: THE ANDREW CRONSHAW CD** (1994)

Topic TSCD 447 (Tk 7)

**Notes:** The liner notes here give the source of this traditional tune as Kerr’s *Collection of Merry Melodies for the Violin*. This is the very same tune that was recorded by John and Phil Cunningham and later by two other groups.

It begins with a long energetic drum solo, followed by the violin playing the tune. The pounding drums continue as backup joined by various other percussions as the violin goes through the tune a few more times. Ric Sanders was a long-time member of Fairport Convention

and he sat in on recordings with many other artists.

**Ref:** Andrew Cronshaw, Biography, [cloudvalley](#)

Andrew Cronshaw, *The Great Dark Water*, [cloudvalley](#)

Andrew Cronshaw, *The Great Dark Water*, [musicme](#) (◀COMPLETE AUDIO SAMPLE)



Ric Sanders, Biography, [Wikipedia](#)

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**WD-SCOT-FG4** United States 1990

## **FINGAL'S CAVE \* (LIVE)**

WD – Celtic – Traditional – Instrumental

**Comp:** (Traditional Source)

**Perf:** **SAN FRANCISCO SCOTTISH FIDDLERS**

Alasdair Fraser (fiddle)

Pate Thomson

**Mus. Dir:** Alasdair Fraser

**Prod. Co:** Culburnie Records; Nevada City, CA

**Time:** (Medley)

1. **CD:** SAN FRANCISCO SCOTTISH FIDDLERS IN CONCERT

Culburnie SFS 001 (Tk 3 – Part 1 of 3)

2. Compilation **CD:** SAN FRANCISCO SCOTTISH FIDDLERS ON TOUR

Culburnie SFS 002 (Tk 4 – Part 1 of 2)

**Notes:** A live fiddle rendition of the piece, which was released as a three-part medley on the first CD with “Skyedance Reels” and “Puir a Beul” and as a two-part medley on the second CD. It is assumed that the concert recording of this medley is the same version as the one released on the tour CD.

The San Francisco Scottish Fiddlers formed in 1986 to play traditional Scottish fiddle music.

**Ref:** Alasdair Fraser, Biography, [culburnie](#)

San Francisco Scottish Fiddlers with Alasdair Fraser, [culburnie](#)

Presenting the San Francisco Scottish Fiddlers, [Amazon](#)

San Francisco Scottish Fiddlers, [sfscottishfiddlers](#)

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**WD-SCOT-FG5** Canada 1991

## **FINGAL'S CAVE \***

WD – Celtic – Traditional – Instrumental

**Comp:** (Traditional)

**Perf:** Buddy **MacMASTER** (fiddle)

John Morris Rankin (piano)

**Prod. Co:** Buddy MacMaster

**Time:** 2:03 (Medley – + 4:05)

**CD:** GLENCOE HALL

Buddy MacMaster BM-91 (Tk 5 – Part 1)

**Notes:** This Cape Breton, Nova Scotia fiddler performs this air as the first part of a four-part medley. The sheet music of this piece can be found at the ncsu.edu Website. This is a difficult album to find and this piece was not heard.

Regarding the album title – “The tiny Glencoe Mills [Cape Breton] parish hall has become a mecca for Celtic music and dance enthusiasts from around the world.”

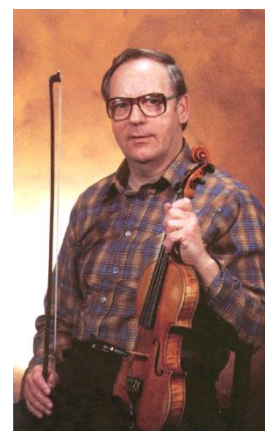
**Ref:** Buddy MacMaster, Glencoe Hall (Cassette), [cbfiddle](#)

Buddy MacMaster, Glencoe Hall, The Rankins Website, [islandviewcreations](#)

Fingal's Cave, Musical Notation, Buddy MacMaster, Glencoe Hall, p. 2, [ncsu.edu](#)

MacDonald, Paul 2000, Buddy MacMaster, Biography, [atlanticartists](#)

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**WD-SCOT-FG6** Ireland 1998

## **FINGAL'S CAVE \***

WD – Celtic – Traditional – Instrumental

**Comp:** (Traditional)

Arr: Matt Molloy & Natalie MacMaster

Perf: **THE CHIEFTAINS**

Natalie MacMASTER (fiddle & step dance)

Dave MacIsaac (acoustic guitar)

Paddy Moloney (uilleann pipes)

Matt Molloy (flute)

Sean Keane & Martin Fay (fiddles)

Derek Bell (harp)

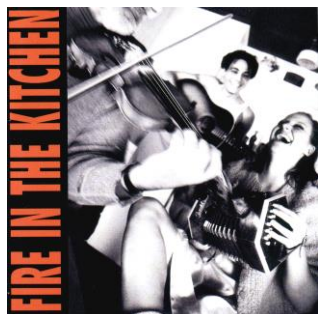
Kevin Conneff (bodhrán)

Prod: Paddy Moloney

Rec. Co: CBC; Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada

Liner Notes: (8-page Booklet) Paddy Moloney

Time: 5:45



1. CD: FIRE IN THE KITCHEN

Wicklow 09026 63133 2 (Tk 7)

2. German CD: FIRE IN THE KITCHEN (1998)

Unisphere 09026 63133 2 (Tk 7)

**Notes:** A very energetic, bouncy jig coming from Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, which will have you up dancing despite yourself. This is the same traditional tune that the Cunningham brothers recorded in 1979.

The fiddle carries the tune then the mix brings in other fiddle renderings in a higher octave. The tempo picks up and the fiddle continues backed by guitar, then the tempo raises another notch. Amazing what can be done on a mixing board.

The Chieftains are a Grammy winning Irish musical group founded in 1962 (Dublin, Ireland), known for performing and popularizing Irish traditional music. The band has recorded many albums of instrumental Irish folk music, as well as multiple collaborations with popular musicians of many genres.

"The second album to appear on Paddy's 'Wicklow' label. This album was recorded by Paddy and the Chieftains over a month (October 1997) spent in Halifax and Cape Breton Island, Canada, and features the unique vocal and instrumental styles of some of Canada's finest musicians." (Anon. n.d.)

For another piece by The Chieftains see under World Music – Ireland – *Treasure Cave*.

Ref: Anon. n.d., The Chieftains, Fire in the Kitchen CD, Official Website, [thechieftains](http://thechieftains.com)

The Chieftains, Biography & Discography, [Wikipedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Chieftains)

The Chieftains, Fire in the Kitchen CD, [Amazon](http://www.amazon.com) (◀AUDIO SAMPLE)

The Chieftains, Fire in the Kitchen CD, [thesession](http://thesession.com)

The Chieftains, Fire in the Kitchen CD, [zero-games.ru](http://zero-games.ru)

Natalie MacMaster, Biography, [Wikipedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natalie_MacMaster)

Natalie MacMaster, Official Website, Biography, [nataliemacmaster](http://nataliemacmaster.com)

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WD-SCOT-FG7 United States 1999

## FINGAL'S CAVE \*

WD – Celtic – Traditional – Folk-Rock – Instrumental

Comp: (Traditional)

Arr: WOLFSTONE

Perf: **WOLFSTONE**

Duncan Chisholm (fiddle & vocal)

Andy Simmers (piano)

Stuart Eaglesham (guitar)

Wayne Mackenzie (bass guitar)

Tony Soave (drums)

Prod: Wolfstone & R. Rankin

Prod. Co: Green Linnet Records; Danbury, CT

Rec. Co: CAVA Sound Workshops; Glasgow

Liner Notes: (6-page Foldout)

Time: 6:13



Photo by Ernest Black

**CD: SEVEN**

Green Linnet GLCD 1198 (Tk 11)

**Notes:** A rather lackluster folk-rock rendition of a great Highland tune performed by "Scotland's hard-hitting Highland rockers." The fiddle repeats the theme over and over without feeling and almost puts you to sleep. Due to the mix the only musician awake seems to be the all-present drummer. The spoken vocals are inaudible – "Wonder what it's like..." etc.

**Ref:** O'Brien, Jamie n.d., Review, Rambles, [rambles](#)

Wolfstone, Biography, [wolfstone](#)

Wolfstone, Fingal's Cave (6;14), [YouTube](#) (◀COMPLETE AUDIO SAMPLE)

Wolfstone, Seven, [Amazon](#) (◀AUDIO SAMPLE)

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**WD-SCOT-FG8** United Kingdom 2001

**FINGAL'S CAVE \***

WD – Celtic – Traditional – Strathspey – Instrumental – Recorded in Cave

**Comp:** (Traditional)

**Perf:** Abby **NEWTON** (cello)

David Greenberg or Mairi Campbell (fiddle)

Corrina Hewit or Kim Robertson (clarsach – Celtic harp)

**Prod:** Abby Newton

**Prod. Co:** Redwing Records

**Liner Notes:** (10-page Booklet) John Purser & Abby Newton

**Time:** (Medley – 7:32)

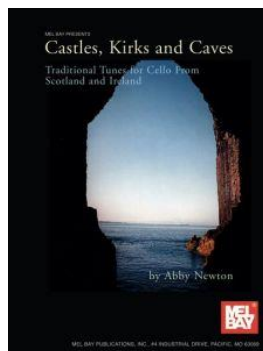
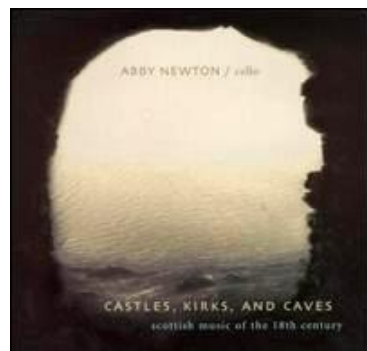
**CD:** CASTLES, KIRKS, AND CAVES

Redwing RWMCD 5410 (Tk 3 – Part 2 of 3)

**Notes:** The American cellist, Abby Newton, went to Scotland on two occasions to study Scottish music of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and to record cello pieces in natural settings around the country. This traditional tune "Fingal's Cave" she recorded in Fingal's Cave itself together with two other tunes.

She tells the story – "From there we were off to the Island of Mull and Fingal's Cave. Ian Morrison took us out in his in his orange rubber boat over the unusually calm waters of the North Atlantic to the Island of Staffa and Fingal's Cave. The cello bounced on the waves that struck the bottom of the boat but it was packed into two sleeping bags and well-protected. We motored far into the cave, docked and unpacked the cello." [Oldham records Fingal's Cave as 231 feet (77m) long.] She continues – "Fingal's Cave is well-known for its acoustics. In the liner notes for the CD John Purser mentions that its Gaelic name is actually "Uamh Bhin" meaning musical or sweet sounding cave. It was a thrill to hear the sound of the cello reverberating around me. I felt as if I was playing within a bigger and more glorious instrument. (Newton ca.2003)

It's quite incredible to think how the musicians managed to get big string instruments like the cello and the clarsach into the back of that cave.



The three-part medley is as follows: "Fingal's (sic) Lamentation/ Fingal's Cave/ Wha'll Be King But Charlie." Purser notes that – "Fingal's Cave is a splendid strathspey also known as *Miss Guthrie's*...In fact the proper name of the main cave on Staffa is 'Uamh Bhin' meaning musical or sweet-sounding cave. It is a misinterpretation of this which led to its being called Fingal's Cave, with whom it has no associations." (Liner notes) A strathspey is "a type of dance tune in 4/4 time. It is similar to a hornpipe but slower and more stately." (Anon., n.d.)

This is a slow moving rendition of the tune on bowed cello with fiddle and clarsach (Celtic Harp) accompaniment. It runs for 2 minutes from 3:49 to 5:55. It's quite incredible to think how the musicians managed to get big string instruments like the cello and the clarsach into the back of that cave.

The CD cover photo is a view looking out of an arched entrance to gently rolling moors and the perfectly placid waters of the sea This is definitely not Fingal's Cave. On the right it looks like the ruins of a stone wall.



In 2009 Abby Newton compiled a book of Celtic tunes that she had arranged for cello, including the ones on this CD. The photo of Abby Newton is by Donald Van Hook.

For more information see under Recorded in Natural Caves – United Kingdom.

**Ref:** Abby Newton, Biography, [abbynewton](#)

Abby Newton, Castles, Kirks and Caves, [CDBaby](#)

Abby Newton, Castles, Kirks and Caves, Fingal's Cave portion, [Allmusic](#) (◀AUDIO SAMPLE)

Anon. n.d., Strathspey (dance), [Wikipedia](#)

Newton, Abby n.d., Castles, Kirks and Caves, Real Player Sample, [abbynewton](#) (◀AUDIO SAMPLE)

Newton, Abby ca.2003, Comments on *Castles, Kirks and Caves*, Thistle and Shamrock, [thistleradio](#)

Newton, Abby 2009, *Castles, Kirks, and Caves – Traditional Tunes from Scotland and Ireland*, Mel Bay Publications  
Oldham, Tony 1975, *The Caves of Scotland*, Bristol, p. 53-58

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**WD-SCOT-FG9** United Kingdom 2004

## **FINGAL'S CAVE \***

WD – Celtic – Traditional – Instrumental

**Comp:** (Traditional)

**Perf:** Paul **ANDERSON** (fiddle)

George Donald (piano)

Tony McManus (guitar)

**Prod. Co:** Champion

**Time:** 2:26

**CD:** GRANITE

Champion 04 (Tk 9)

**Notes:** One reviewer says of this album – “A beautiful collection of marches strathspeys airs and more from Paul Anderson who is indeed a master fiddle player. With material drawn from composers like James Scott Skinner, etc.”

**Ref:** Anon. n.d., Paul Anderson, Granite, [footstompin](#)

Paul Anderson, Granite, [Allmusic](#)

Paul Anderson, Granite, [thesessions](#)



**WD-SCOT-FG10** United Kingdom 2005

## **FINGAL'S CAVE \***

WD – Celtic – Traditional – Instrumental

**Comp:** (Traditional)

**Perf:** Dougie **PINCOCK** (Highland bagpipes)

Mariearead GREEN (small pipes & accordion)

Innes WATSON (fiddle)

Jack EVANS (synthesizer, guitar, & whistle)

**Prod. Co:** Greentrax Records; Cockenzie, East Lothian

**Time:** (Medley)

Compilation **CD:** A HIGHLAND JOURNEY IN MUSIC FROM  
SCOTLAND – CELTIC COLLECTIONS VOL. 8

Greentrax CDGMP 8008 (Tk 3 – Part 3)

**Notes:** Another version of this traditional Highland piece and the last of a three-part medley including “The Sound of Mull” and “Leaving Lismore.” The use of synthesizer seems out of place for traditional music.

A 30-second audio clip allowed only the first piece of this medley to be heard and here the synthesizer provided the sound of waves under the music of the pipes. This sample is no longer available.

Dougie Pincock attracted international acclaim as a member of the Battlefield Band from 1984 until 1990.

**Ref:** Anon. 2005, Music in Scotland Newsletter, June 2005 [musicinscotland.blogspot](#)

Dougie Pincock, Biography, [answers](#)

Highland Journey in Music from Scotland, Greentrax Records, [greentrax](#)

Highland Journey in Music from Scotland, [allcelticmusic](#)

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# FINGAL'S CAVE

WD-SCOT-FG11 Germany 2001

## **FINGAL'S CAVE \***

WD – Celtic – Vocal

**Comp:** Anne Wylie

**Arr:** Anne Wylie, Florian King, & Henrik Mumm

**Rts:** Vollton Musikverlag GmbH

**Perf:** Anne **WYLIE** (vocal)

Maike Mohr (piano)

**Prod:** Friedemann Witecka & Anne Wylie Band

**Prod. Co:** Vollton Musikverlag GmbH; Bollschweil

**Rec. Co:** (Any one of five studios listed either in Germany or Norway)

**Liner Notes:** (16-page Booklet) Anne Wylie

**Time:** 5:56 (5:33)

**CD:** ONE AND TWO

Biber 76721 (Tk 8)

**Notes:** This is an original chant composed by Anne Wylie in the Celtic tradition, but with no relation to the traditional instrumental piece listed above. Once again this “musical cave” has inspired someone to make music.

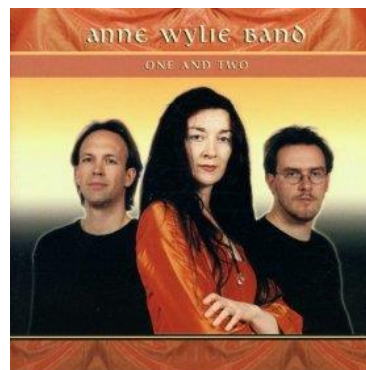
She writes in the liner notes – “In 1996 I took a boat to Staffa Island off the West Coast of Scotland, a few miles away from the Island of Iona, where I was staying. Staffa is a very remote place and is uninhabited. After arriving there, I went into Fingal’s Cave, a cave into which the wild sea comes and goes, so that you can’t walk into it normally. It can be entered along a ledge. Its color is aubergine. Its mood is wild and dangerous. I was overcome by a tremendous urge to sing, and this composition is based on what came out of me then. The island of Iona was, in pre-Christian times, a religious centre for the sun-worshipping Druids. Some time later I heard that Staffa Island had been used for initiation rituals and that as part of the initiation, three days and three nights had to be spent alone in Fingal’s Cave. Then I began to understand the energy that gripped me there. I’ve tried to capture the mood of Fingal’s Cave by singing into the Grand Piano.” (Liner notes)

Short high-pitched piano phrases introduce a haunting, repetitive chant, where Wylie prolongs each word she sings, increasing the strangeness, as her voice rises and descends in a lonesome wail. She is possibly singing in Gaelic, but it sounds more like she is just chanting different unintelligible words. Halfway in, the piano returns and introduces a few backing chords and phrases. The tempo and intensity picks up slightly and then all fades to silence.

**Ref:** Anne Wylie, One and Two, [Amazon](#) (◀AUDIO SAMPLE)

Anne Wylie, One and Two, [musicme](#) (◀AUDIO SAMPLE)

Anne Wylie, One and Two, Review (in German), Biber Records, [vollton](#)



[caveinspiredmusic.com](http://caveinspiredmusic.com)