

Modernism in Ireland and its cultural context in the music and writings of
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ABSTRACT

PREFACE

Twentieth century Irish art music was until recently *terra incognita* as regards that other mostly untapped area, musicological research in Ireland. However, lacunae once found, are quickly filled, and activity in and around this subject has risen exponentially compared to past endeavour. Joseph Ryan's unpublished dissertation, *Nationalism and Music in Ireland* (1991), with its comprehensive treatment of early-mid-twentieth century Irish art music is a most important contribution which, with Axel Klein's comprehensive study, *Die Musik Irlands im 20. Jahrhundert* (1996), and the latter's role as co-editor (with Gareth Cox) of the forthcoming seventh volume in the excellent *Irish Musical Studies* series (devoted to twentieth century Irish topics), stands testament to the above observation. Together with Harry White's anthology of essays, *The Keeper's Recital: Music and Cultural History in Ireland 1770-1970*, and *To Talent Alone: The Royal Irish Academy of Music 1848-1998*, edited by Richard Pine and Charles Acton (both of 1998), these works are long overdue and much needed forums for critical consideration of Irish art music of this century, from the unique vantage point at the dawn of the next.

Nevertheless, in musicology, as other matters, there is always room for manoeuvre: Klein's aforementioned book, as commented on its back-cover, 'describes ... representative works from various genres and places them in the context of Irish cultural history and European musical development'. This dissertation, admittedly, has much the same aims but with the distinction that it describes representative composers (i.e. the pioneers of its title) and places their backgrounds and careers, both collectively and individually, in a similar context. In doing this, their works are

then (as a matter of course) considered likewise, but from the point of view of their determination to ‘express, through the international language of music, an Irish viewpoint’, to paraphrase Boydell below. Their efforts to achieve this amidst blinkered official ignorance and pitiful all-round conditions, in a country that was, ironically, for a long time both enriched and enslaved by its ethnic tradition, is the focus of this current study.

In regard to presentation, it should be noted that most twentieth century Irish art music, even that of the present, remains largely unpublished. Therefore most of the musical examples below are taken from their composers’ MSS and apologies are made here for their variable quality.

This thesis conforms to the house style of the Department of Music, National University of Ireland, Maynooth.

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I dedicate this thesis to my partner, Miriam Wright and our daughter, Caoimhe, for their unfailing support throughout its preparation.

The following abbreviations are used in the text:

BBCCO	British Broadcasting Corporation Concert Orchestra
BBCSO	British Broadcasting Corporation Symphony Orchestra
<i>d</i>	died
CMC	The Contemporary Music Centre, Dublin
LPO	London Philharmonic Orchestra
NCH	National Concert Hall
RCM	Royal College of Music
RDS	Royal Dublin Society
RÉ	Radio Éireann
RÉSO	Radio Éireann Symphony Orchestra
RIAM	Royal Irish Academy of Music
RNCM	Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester
RTÉ	Radio Telefís Éireann
RTÉSO	Radio Telefís Éireann Symphony Orchestra
TCD	Trinity College Dublin
UCC	University College Cork
UCD	University College Dublin

What is lacking ... in the entire nationalist movement in our music is awareness of the fact that genuine national character comes from within and must develop and grow out of itself, that it cannot be imposed from without, and that, in the last analysis, it is a byproduct, not an aim, of artistic expression.

(Roger Sessions, *Reflections on the Music Life in the United States* (New York: 1956), 151)

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: 'THE [REAL] LAND WITHOUT MUSIC ...'

When Fergal Tobin wrote that 'Ireland is a very peripheral part of the western world, whose enthusiasms it has not always been in the habit of sharing',¹ he penned as good a précis of the status and concomitant stasis of Irish cultural life for the greater part of the twentieth century as any other commentator. This insular climate was symptomatic of the more separatist elements of the Gaelic (or Celtic) Revival of the 1890s, whose dominant nationalist ideology Ireland inherited in the early years of the Irish Free State. However, a study of the situation after independence, and the atrophied state of music in particular, must be prefixed by a brief consideration of that re-animation of 'Gaelic' ideas in the later nineteenth century, and how its more negative aspects came to dominate Irish political and intellectual thought and cultural (non-) practice into the twentieth century. Harry White, in discussing antiquarianism and politics in the later nineteenth century, places this pre-revolutionary cultural mindset into perspective when he writes:

The contingent relationship between music and Irish political and cultural history in the nineteenth century was of such intensity that it may be said to have determined the central aesthetic difficulties of music as an emancipated art in Ireland. ... The art tradition collapsed into mediocrity or silence. In its stead, the preoccupation with an identifiably 'Irish' music was such that a bifurcated development (music as folklore, music as political propaganda) endured in the Irish mind to the extent that the Celtic Revival of the 1890s for the most part accommodated not music *per se*, but music as a symbol of renascent Irish culture.²

¹ Tobin: *The Sixties*, 1.

² White: *The Keeper's Recital*, 53.

It is now something of a truism to state that the growth and stimulation of art music in Ireland was (and to some extent, still is) hampered by two obstacles: one, the lack of an organisational superstructure and two, its historically-perceived position by the majority as the domain of the Anglo-Irish elite. However, it was precisely this latter perception that deemed it wholly irrelevant to the political (and cultural) concerns sparked by romantic nationalism and fanned by twentieth-century independence via revolution. To paraphrase Tobin, the principal strain in Ireland's political history – the nationalist struggle to break free of dominance by Britain – had caused it to regard the outside world with suspicion, because the outside world was usually imported through the medium of the English language.³ Thus a separatist rhetoric, often of a polemical nature, abounded in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Irish writing, epitomised by the tendentious and vitriolic criticism of journalist D. P. Moran⁴:

Ireland will be nothing until she is a nation, and, as a nation is a civilisation, she will never accomplish anything worthy of herself until she falls back on her own language and traditions,

³ Tobin: *The Sixties*, 1.

⁴ D. P. (David Patrick) Moran (1871-1936), journalist. Born in Waterford, Moran was educated at Castleknock College, Dublin, before founding *The Leader* newspaper in 1900, of which he was also editor; in its first decade, this widely-circulated weekly was a prime influence in drawing the public into the national movement. Moran was also the author of a collection of essays, *The Philosophy of Irish Ireland* (1905) (after Moran, David Patrick', *A Dictionary of Irish Biography*, ed. Boylan, 3rd edn, 285).

Another figure sympathetic to Moran's views (but not their sectarian trappings) was Douglas Hyde (1860-1949). Co-founder of the Irish Literary Society in London, 1891; president of the National Literary Society in Dublin, 1892; co-founder and president of the Gaelic League 1893-1915; playwright; professor of modern Irish at UCD 1909-1932 and President of Ireland 1938-1945, Hyde shared Moran's fundamental intolerance of Anglo-Irish culture, as exemplified in his tract 'The Necessity for de-Anglicising Ireland' (1892). As Patrick Maume points out, 'Hyde's background [though Protestant] was almost as remote from metropolitan Unionism as those of Moran and Eoin MacNeill [his co-founder of The Gaelic League]. He was the product of a dying provincial Toryism distant from the English mainstream and in everyday contact with the peasantry: the world of the country clergymen [referring here to Hyde's father, Rev. Arthur Hyde] and backwoods squireens who went to Trinity to vote against Carson as too liberal and Lecky as irreligious' (quoted from Maume: *D.P. Moran*, 54).

Moran, Hyde and W. B. Yeats (the pro-genitor of the anglophone Irish Literary Renaissance) comprised the three different strains of cultural nationalism in early twentieth century Ireland of which Moran's (Catholic, populist and suspicious of Protestants) gained most currency in the emerging state.

and recovering there her old pride, self-respect and initiative, develops and marches forward from thence. ...⁵

It is scarcely necessary to point out that of the things which go to the making of a nation, some such as art, practically do not exist in Ireland; others, such as the language we speak and the literature we read, are borrowed from another country. If one were asked to sum up the present condition in one epigram, he might say that our activities spring from a foreign inspiration, and that we only preserve a national colour about the manner in which we don't do things.⁶

Patrick O' Mahony and Gerard Delaney, following John Hutchinson, assert that the Gaelic Revival was 'primarily an educational movement attempting to build a new pedagogy of the nation-to-be'; indeed, its ideology became more defined in the early twentieth century as it moved from an urban to a rural idyll (although, in organisational terms, it was still predominantly of the former).⁷ With its vision of society as an 'aesthetically transformed totality, it progressively moved into a more intimate relationship with Catholicism' and in creating a nationalist cosmology, 'the building of appropriate norms drew heavily on the re-interpretation of history'.⁸ Through such 'mechanisms of cultural reproduction, a particular version of the collective memory, and thus a particular sense of national and cultural identity, [was] produced'.⁹ As Lévi-Strauss once opined: 'History is never only history *of*, it is always history *for*'.¹⁰

Margaret O' Callaghan asserts that after independence 'the cultural question, while fundamental to the state's policy in education and its symbolic paraphernalia, was not

⁵ Moran: *The Philosophy of Irish Ireland*, 112-113.

⁶ *ibid.*, 2

⁷ O' Mahony and Delaney: *Rethinking Irish History*, 78.

⁸ *ibid.*, 78-79.

⁹ Clampin: ' "Those blue remembered hills ...": National Identity in English Music (1900-1930)', *National Identity*, ed. Keith Cameron (Exeter: Intellect, 1999), 69, quote from Morley & Robins: 'Spaces of Identity: Communications Technologies and the Reconfiguration of Europe', *Screen xxx* (4/1989).

¹⁰ View ascribed to Lévi-Strauss by White, Hayden: *The Tropics of Discourse*, 104, quoted in Southgate: *History: What and Why?*, 48.

predominant in a cabinet more concerned with the substance than the forms of liberty'.¹¹ In general terms, 'insecurity was the overriding factor in the cultural history of [those] first years ... ; a society that had fought for independence in defence of a notion of separate nationality found itself ... confronting fundamental questions about what constituted that nationality, ... not some mythic final struggle between Anglo-Irish and Gaelic culture ...'.¹² Although 'the battle between two civilisations' may have been over-exaggerated in hindsight, cultural life in the new state was, nevertheless, dominated by a largely contrived, inherited vision of Ireland 'projected by artists, poets and polemicists, despite the fact that the social reality showed distinct signs that the country was adapting to the social forms of the English-speaking world and that conditions in rural [and indeed urban] Ireland were hardly idyllic'.¹³ Frank O' Connor's retrospective comments on the Civil War period brings a picture of harsh reality into focus:

What neither group saw ... was that what we were bringing about was a new establishment of Church and State in which imagination would play no part, and young men and women would emigrate to the ends of the earth, not because the country was poor, but because it was mediocre.¹⁴

Thus 'mediocrity, mendacity and materialism'¹⁵ were seen by critics as the hallmarks of the new order. 'Irish Ireland' curbed 'the acknowledged social-psychological power of the arts as developed in the tradition of modernism' and deemed it corruptive, especially the experimental internationalism of James Joyce who, in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), wrote prophetic words for the first generation of Irish modernist composers:

¹¹ O' Callaghan: 'Language, nationality and cultural identity in the Irish Free State', 241.

¹² *ibid.*, 244.

¹³ Brown: *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History*, 2nd edn, 98.

¹⁴ Quoted in Cairns & Richards: *Writing Ireland*, 132.

I will tell you what I will do and what I will not do. I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland or my church; and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I will allow myself to use, silence, exile and cunning.¹⁶

The political architect of cultural isolationism in mid-twentieth century Ireland was Eamon de Valera. Starting as:

a constitutional radical, [he] gave short shrift to those features of Anglo-Irish relations which were not to his liking. Eventually he replaced the Free State constitution with one closer to his heart. And Mr de Valera's heart – into which Mr de Valera once announced that he looked whenever he wanted to know what the Irish people were thinking – was full of admiration for the romantic rural Ireland of the Gaelic image makers.¹⁷

De Valera's vision of a 'Gaelic Eden' was thus a social and cultural adjunct of his policy of economic protectionism; even as late as 1943 (i.e. during World War Two, or 'the Emergency' as it was known in neutral Ireland) he was still perpetuating the arcadian notion of 'an ideal ancestral Gaeldom'¹⁸ in his oft-quoted St Patrick's Day broadcast of the same year.

That Ireland which we dreamed of would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis of right living, of a people who were satisfied with frugal comfort and devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit; a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with the sounds of industry, the romping of sturdy children, the contests of athletic youths, the laughter of comely maidens, whose firesides would be the forums of the wisdoms of serene old age. It would, in a word, be the home of a people living in the life that God desires that man should live.¹⁹

Ten years earlier another speech by de Valera (although probably prepared) 'offered a public declaration of what was considered by officialdom to be significant in Irish

¹⁵ *ibid.*, 132.

¹⁶ Benson, Ciarán: 'A psychological perspective on art and Irish national identity', 324. This link between Joyce and the triumvirate is adverted to below in n. 3, chapter 2.

¹⁷ Cairns and Richards: *Writing Ireland*, 4.

¹⁸ Benson: 'A psychological perspective', 323.

cultural history'.²⁰ 'Ireland's music', he professed, 'is of singular beauty It is characterised by perfection of form and variety of melodic content Equal in rhythmic variety are our dance tunes – spirited and energetic, in keeping with the temperament of our people'.²¹ However, in mentioning music (as indicated by his reference to 'our dance tunes'), de Valera referred here to Irish traditional music, not art music which, in general, was officially considered by some as 'a Victorian form of educational recreation'²² and a throwback to colonial times. Indeed, the 1930s saw the elevation of the ethnic tradition to a position in official esteem second only to the Irish language, reflected in the following example of what was the prevailing staple cultural polemic.

The set of values which makes the Irish mind different looks out at us clearly from our old music – its idiom having in some subtle way the idiom of the Irish mind, its rhythms, its intervals, its speeds, its build have not been chosen arbitrarily, but are what they are because they are the musical expression, the musical equivalent of Irish thought and its modes. The Irish idiom expresses deep things that have not been expressed by Beethoven, Bach, Brahms, Elgar or Sibelius – by any of the great composers.²³

¹⁹ *Irish Press*, 18 March 1943, quoted in Brown, Terence: *Ireland: a Social and Cultural History*, 2nd edn., 146.

²⁰ Kennedy: *Dreams and Responsibilities*, 31. The speech was delivered for the opening Radio Éireann's Athlone station.

²¹ Eamon de Valera, quoted in *ibid.*, 31-32.

²² Department of Finance S 101/13/36, 'Symphony Orchestra and Concert Hall for Dublin: Report of Inter-Departmental Committee', 27 February 1937. A memorandum submitted by the Department of Finance (signed J.A. Scannell & S.P. O Muireadaigh) to the Department of the President, 21 May 1937 (from which this quote is derived) contained the following pronouncement:

Thirty years ago or more the case might possibly have been made for State subsidisation of public musical performances. At that time a piano in a drawing room or a squeaky phonograph in the parlour supplied the only satisfaction for the common man, unless he got the chance to attend an occasional concert. Nowadays musical talking films can be attended every night in the week in all parts of the country; Wireless sets and gramophones are widely distributed; even as he drives abroad a motorist can listen to the best music on his radio set. Accordingly although interest in music must have increased enormously, public attendances (*sic*) at Symphony concerts, and consequently the necessity for such public concerts, has become smaller and will continue to decline. Is it any part of the State's duty to resuscitate a Victorian form of educational recreation.

(Quoted in Kennedy: *Dreams and Responsibilities*, 43).

²³ Ó Gallchobhair: 'Atavism', *Ireland To-day* i (September 1936), 57, quoted in Brown: *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History*, 2nd edn, 147. Ó Gallchobhair (1906-1982) was a composer, broadcaster, conductor and critic. Educated in Dublin, he succeeded Frederick May as musical director at the Abbey Theatre and was subsequently assistant musical director at Radio Éireann. He was a frequent commentator on music from the mid-1930s onwards, and was in trenchant opposition to the level of artistic emancipation

Indeed, according to Barra Boydell, ‘feelings of national identity ran high ... even in the most unexpected areas of life’.²⁴ He reveals how:

Jazz was causing great moral concern in some circles, including Co. Leitrim, where in January [1934] 3000 people marched under the leadership of the clergy and the Gaelic League with slogans such as ‘Down with Jazz’ and ‘Out with Paganism’. But the concern was not purely on moral grounds. The involvement of the Gaelic League on that occasion was not exceptional, for the Secretary of the League sent letters to Corporations and Councils throughout the country seeking endorsement of their objection to jazz being broadcast by the radio stations as being “contrary to the spirit of Christianity and Nationalism”.²⁵

Terence Brown places the general ideological climate into perspective when he details that:

the theme of Irish traditions was staunchly reiterated in reviews of plays, exhibitions and concerts. An attitude of xenophobic suspicion often greeted any manifestation of what appeared to reflect cosmopolitan standards. An almost Stalinistic antagonism to modernism, ... Surrealism, free verse, symbolism and ... modern cinema was combined with prudery ... and a deep reverence for the Irish past.²⁶

Seán O’ Faoláin’s image, like that of Joyce before him, was of the entire landscape of Ireland shrouded in snow: ‘under that white shroud, covering the whole of Ireland, life was lying broken and hardly breathing’.²⁷ And so the era of exclusivism, epitomised by an almost forty-year period of Draconian censorship,²⁸ largely continued through ‘the Emergency,’ although Kennedy, following Brown, asserts accurately that the period was ‘a watershed in modern Irish history’.²⁹

There were various signs that a new Ireland, an Ireland less concerned with its own national identity, less antagonistic to outside influence, less obsessively absorbed by its own problems to the exclusion of wider issues, was, however embryonically, in the making.³⁰

fervently evinced by May, Boydell and Fleischmann. As White comments, ‘his atavistic sense of Irish music was combined with an increasingly defensive attitude towards formal education and indeed towards the aesthetic of art music itself.’ (White: *The Keeper’s Recital*, 136).

²⁴ Boydell, Barra: ‘Impressions of Dublin - 1934’, *Dublin Historical Record* xxxviii (1983/1984), 89.

²⁵ *ibid.*, 89.

²⁶ Brown: *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History*, 2nd edn, 147.

²⁷ O’ Faoláin, Seán: ‘A Broken World’, *The Finest Stories of Seán O’ Faoláin* (London: Bantam Books, 1959), 81, quoted in Brown: *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History*, 2nd edn, 159.

²⁸ See *ibid.*, (especially 67-78) and Hepburn, A.C.: *The Conflict of Nationality in Modern Ireland* (140f) for a cogent summary of censorship and its stultifying effect on Irish literary life for the first four decades of independent Ireland.

²⁹ Kennedy: *Dreams and Responsibilities*, 44.

³⁰ Brown, Terence: *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History*, 1st edn, 225-226, quoted in *ibid.*, 44.

However, as Tobin has argued, 'All in all, the progress from the Irish Free State of the late twenties to the Republic of the late fifties ... involved the moving of very little national furniture'.³¹

And so, what of art music in this malaise? Irish composer Frank Corcoran found Dublin even in the late sixties as 'still in the de Valera doldrums': 'musically hopeless, stuffy, back in the old miasmic mist of Joyce's nineteenth century musical comfiness'.³² For the purposes of this study, a consideration of its cultural and aesthetic import begins most profitably with that era and the often problematic figure of Charles Villiers Stanford.³³

As White contends:

Stanford was 'the first composer to address in any significant way the resources of Irish music and yet his response to the ethnic repertory was circumscribed by a fundamental disengagement from Ireland, except as a province of the United Kingdom. ... He interposed a crucial distance between himself and Ireland, preferring instead to interpret the question of 'Irish music' as a matter of local colour within the spectrum of European music in general.

This 'essential dichotomy in Stanford's music ... [sharply] characterised [by George Bernard Shaw] as a conflict between the Celt and the professor' (in relation to the former's 'Irish' Symphony [Symphony No.3] of 1887),³⁴ identifies a problem in Irish music which in effect originated with Stanford:

his thorough absorption of the European aesthetic was delimited – and revived – by his imaginative debt to the German symphonic tradition. He also sustained an unprecedented

³¹ Tobin: *The Sixties*, 3.

³² Frank Corcoran quoted in Klein: 'Irish Composers and Foreign Education: A Study of Influences', 282; 276.

³³ Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924). Born in Dublin and educated there and in Cambridge, where he later became professor of music (1885). He achieved initial acclaim as a composer in London after a period of study in Leipzig and Berlin, and was appointed professor of composition at the RCM from its foundation in 1883, remaining there for over forty years. He was knighted in 1902 (taken from White: *The Keeper's Recital*, n.44, 195).

³⁴ *ibid.*, 106. Shaw's criticism of the 'Irish' Symphony ('a fearful record of conflict between the aboriginal Celt and the professor') was published, as White notes, in *The World*, 10 May 1893, and reproduced in *Shaw's Music*, 876-883.

commitment to the ethnic repertory, which enriched his own lyric impulse and determined the expressive range of a great deal of his instrumental writing. The difficulty is that neither element could be satisfactorily reconciled with the other. ... Stanford's music thus exemplifies] a crucial miscalculation ... : the assumption that ... traditional airs themselves (or edited versions thereof) could be absorbed into art music as the basis of an authentic *Irish* style.³⁵

However, Stanford can not be considered in any way a *nationalist* composer, as White continues:

he explored [the resources of the ethnic repertory] not to embody a definitive idea of Irish art music but to imbue his imaginative response to the European [essentially Teutonic] aesthetic with a sense of place. ... The 'suffocating burden of tradition' hardly existed for him in such terms. Stanford drew upon Brahms and the folk collections with the same uncomplicated gusto.³⁶

To summarise, Stanford was 'as Irish as he wished to be': as White details and Jeremy Dibble outlines, 'his appropriation of the folk repertory for his own artistic ends was designed, essentially, to furnish his music with a sense of colour and character.'³⁷ This was also allied to formidable commercial acumen and appreciation of the late nineteenth century vogue for Irish (and other 'ethnic') music in Britain and Europe.³⁸ Although based in England after 1870, Stanford was 'very much perceived as a patriarchal figure in Irish musical circles, and in consequence his views and attitudes, particularly in regard to the folk repertory, were deemed axiomatic'³⁹; thus 'Stanford's legacy was to

³⁵ White: *The Keeper's Recital*, 106.

³⁶ *ibid.*, 107.

³⁷ *ibid.*, 109; as most patently evident in the aforementioned 'Irish' symphony (1887), where unashamed quotation of actual melody occurred in the last movement; *Shamus O'Brien* (1896): 'the slick ("if not entirely memorable" [White: 109]) essay in nineteenth century English operetta replete with ... [now] cloying stage-Irishism' (Jeremy Dibble: 408); the choral setting *Phaudrig Crahoore* (also of 1896) and the *Six Irish Rhapsodies* (1902). In the later rhapsodies, actual quotation is complemented by assimilation of melodic types and contours found in the original thematic material, a feature that Dibble also notes of the opening cor anglais line in the second movement of the Sixth Symphony (1905). (Dibble: *The Composer in the Academy* (1) 1850-1940', *To Talent Alone*, 407-408; White: *The Keeper's Recital*, 108-109).

³⁸ Dibble: 'The Composer in the Academy (1) 1850-1940', 407. To be fair, however, despite his discussion of Stanford's 'unwavering unionist convictions,' it is important to note, as Dibble does, that Stanford was 'a proud Irish man with a deep love for his country and its culture, an attitude that evolved from the emerging antiquarian and cultural revival of his youth.' (*ibid.*, 407).

³⁹ Dibble notes that, according to its founder, Annie Patterson, Stanford played a significant role as adviser to the Feis Ceoil (see below) in addition to his role as vice-president (along with Charles Wood) of the

have reinforced the stultifying precedent of folksong as a hallmark of Irish art music.⁴⁰

White contends that:

it was a habit of mind which grew independently of Stanford's own cultural assumptions and beliefs: indeed it served for long afterwards as the definitive arbiter of a work's being Irish in any meaningful way. The reliance on folk song was to prove acutely burdensome not only because it engendered a creative cul-de-sac (in terms of structural development), but also because it betokened the redundancy of an art music thus circumscribed by the literal representation of the indigenous repertory. And if the cult of nationalism which attached itself to that repertory was to have any address upon art music, it would only be in terms of repudiation on the grounds of irrelevance.⁴¹

Indeed, 'the conscientious if ultimately unsuccessful essays in Gaelic opera' at the turn of the twentieth century (Butler's *Murgheis* (1903) and O'Dwyer's *Eithne* (1906)), both produced under the influence of the Gaelic League, gives credence to the view that 'the traditional idiom is unsuited as the basis for a school of extended composition'.⁴² Along with Carl Hardebeck and the above-mentioned Ó Gallchobhair, these figures were the advocates of an emergent, insular approach who sought to build on the work of the great collectors of the nineteenth century with the dual aim to preserve and to build from that tradition a characteristically national music.⁴³ Others took Stanford's line that national expression should find its voice in art music, but as White has explained, and Ryan has intimated, the way ahead was uncertain.⁴⁴ Thus the policy of the Feis Ceoil (the Irish

Irish Folk-Song Society, founded in 1904. Patterson's regular articles for the *Weekly Irish Times*, as Dibble asserts, exhibit the perceived pre-eminence of his standing (see *ibid.*, 409).

⁴⁰ White: *The Keeper's Recital*, 109.

⁴¹ White, *Keeper's Recital*, 109-110, quoted in *ibid.*, 409.

⁴² Ryan, Joseph J.: 'Nationalism and Irish Music' (article), 110.

⁴³ *ibid.*, 110.

Carl Gilbert Hardebeck (1869-1945) teacher, scholar, composer. Of German heritage and blind, Hardebeck studied in London and then moved to Belfast. Espousing acute nationalistic tendencies – it is reported that he once claimed to "believe in God, Beethoven and Patrick Pearse" – he learnt and became fluent in the Irish language and set about collecting folk songs, becoming the first (and only) Cork Corporation professor of Irish music at UCC from 1922-1923. According to Gareth Cox, Axel Klein asserts that through Hardebeck's 'recognition of Irish traditional music's intricate rhythmic irregularities and its relationship to the Irish language ... , and the recognition of the importance of the microtonal ornamentation, [he] can be regarded as [something] of a pioneer' (after Cox, Gareth: 'German Influences on Twentieth-Century Irish Art-music', 107-108 & Klein: *Die Musik Irlands*, 409).

⁴⁴ White: *The Keeper's Recital*, 109-110; Ryan: 'Nationalism and Irish Music' (article), 110.

music festival, founded in 1897) found itself balanced between those who wanted to promote more dogmatic, nationalistic terms of reference (partly based on the Welsh Eisteddfod) and those, such as Stanford, who wanted to see the festival encourage the wider cause of music-making in Ireland. That it took the latter course (and in so doing alienated and lost the support of the Gaelic League and the National Literary Society) was due largely to the perseverance of Michele Esposito.⁴⁵

Dibble comments that ‘Esposito’s role in the development of Irish art music at this time was an important one.’ As John Larchet noted, he settled in Dublin at a time when ‘the old order [of Joseph Robinson, R. M. Levey and Sir Robert Prescott Stewart] was passing’,⁴⁶ and after their deaths he assumed the role of Ireland’s most senior resident musician. Esposito’s role in Ireland was not insignificant as a composer either; having devoted himself to teaching at the RIAM from 1882-1897, his cantata *Deirdre* (prize-winner in its category at the inaugural Feis Ceoil) marked both his return to creative endeavour and what was to be a singular example of the composer’s response to Irish subject matter unencumbered by the ‘weight’ of the folk tradition. In his output after 1897, Esposito made a clear distinction between ‘classical’ works (notably his piano music and concerted chamber works) and those that ‘responded to Irish stimuli’.⁴⁷ The turning point was the decision in 1901 by the Feis Ceoil committee to offer a prize in the

⁴⁵ Dibble, ‘The Composer in the Academy (1)’, 410. Michele Esposito (1855-1929), Italian composer, pianist and teacher. After a spell in Paris from 1878-1882, Esposito became professor of pianoforte at the Royal Irish Academy of Music (founded in 1848 without the appellation ‘Royal’) and was founder and conductor of the Dublin Orchestral Society from 1899-1914.

⁴⁶ ‘Michele Esposito [: and appreciation]’, (1st broadcast Radio Éireann, 9/1955) quoted in *ibid.*, 411. For consideration of the careers of Robinson (1815-1898) and Stewart (1825-1894) see White, *Keeper’s Recital*, 99-104; for (Richard Michael) Levey (1811-1899), see *To Talent Alone*, 39 *passim*.

⁴⁷ Dibble: ‘The Composer in the Academy (1) 1850-1940’, 411.

1902 festival for a symphony or suite based on traditional airs: the successful entry that year was Esposito's *Irish Symphony* Op. 50. 'With the endorsement of the Feis, allied with Esposito's national cachet, this prescriptive approach to large-scale orchestral composition (which, if anything, considerably exaggerated the precedent of Stanford's 'Irish' Symphony) bolstered the view that a distinctive voice in art music could only exist in conjunction with the folk repertory'.⁴⁸ It was not until the tone poem *The Children of Lir* (1938) by Esposito's pupil Hamilton Harty that any distance between 'allusion and reproduction' was achieved.⁴⁹ White's comments on Harty illuminate this development:

Harty's first major essay in Irish music, the 1904 'Irish' Symphony, closely followed the model established by ... Esposito in the production of a work explicitly based on traditional airs. But his enforced professional exile (notwithstanding frequent visits to Ireland as an accompanist) liberated him from this obligation in two later works which drew him more closely to the inherent cultivation of a national style. *With the Wild Geese* (1910) and *The Children of Lir* (1938) are recognisably Irish works released from the imaginative constraint of folksong quotation. ... [While] The 'Irish' Symphony [emulated] the exotic nationalism cultivated by Stanford and Esposito, the tone poems escape the obligations of this nationalism (the traditional air as a conduit of authentic feeling) and instead absorb both poetic and mythic programmes of extra-musical significance by means of melodic and harmonic structures which express an affinity with the modal contour of the ethnic tradition. The crucial distinction between *With the Wild Geese* and the 'Irish' Symphony is thereby one which exists between arrangement and original composition: [thereby making] Harty's tone poem "a seminal work in the history of Irish music".

... *The Children of Lir* imbues the genre of symphonic poem with an essentially Irish (and highly personal) cast of mind in which Harty's own distance from the Celtic Revival is crucial. The work is absolutely free of that anxiety of influence that plagued the efforts of those who remained at home: it flies past the tense encounter of cultural debate and most especially the controversies over authenticity and style which remained irrelevant to Harty for the greater part of his professional career. If the work attracted international criticism it was not on account of its Irish subject matter. If Harty's romantic vocabulary seemed dated by 1939, how much more dated was the widespread failure in Ireland to respond musically in any way to a literary movement which was by then itself part of the cultural past?⁵⁰

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 411-412.

⁴⁹ White, *Keeper's Recital*, 117. (Sir) (Herbert) Hamilton Harty (1879-1941), Irish composer, conductor, organist and pianist. Settling in London in 1900, Harty won attention as a composer and brilliant piano accompanist before conducting duties took priority. He was permanent conductor of the Hallé Orchestra 1920-1933, during which time he re-established the ensemble as one of the finest in Europe and was knighted in 1925 (after Harty, [Sir] [Herbert] Hamilton', *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 4th edn., ed. Kennedy, 326.

⁵⁰ White: *The Keeper's Recital*, 116-117; he quotes Ryan: *Nationalism and Music in Ireland* (diss.), 316.

As adverted to by White above, ‘Ireland [in the early 1900s] ... was too preoccupied with the metaphor and potency of its own literary revival to recognise art music as a significant element of the nation’s cultural agenda’.⁵¹ Indeed, the English composer, Arnold Bax, who spent his formative years in Dublin in the first decade of the twentieth century engaged in literary and not musical pursuits (under the pseudonym Dermot O’ Byrne). Bax’s position (‘crucial in the cultural history of Ireland’) has been discussed elsewhere,⁵² but it suffices to state here that his claim ‘to have translated the “Hidden Ireland”⁵³ into musical terms was made in virtual abeyance of the ethnic tradition ... , with the result that he forged a musical idiom that managed to escape ... the enormous burden of the collections [functioning as a repository not merely of Irish music, but music *in* Irish], and hence the repertory itself’.⁵⁴ But the music he wrote in Ireland under its stimulus (most explicitly attributed to the existence of Yeats) could not find a place there, thus enduring in a cultural vacuum.⁵⁵

With the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922 and the realisation of many nationalist ideological aspirations, the general climate for music reflected similar impoverishment – but there were signs of improvement. One came in the form of the energetic Colonel Fritz Braze, a German conductor and director of the Army School of Music, who founded the Dublin Philharmonic Society in 1927. By ‘giving Dubliners a chance to hear orchestral music, [it] saved the city from complete mediocrity in musical

⁵¹ Dibble: ‘The Composer in the Academy (1)’, 414.

⁵² See *ibid.*, 118-124

⁵³ Bax, Arnold: ‘A Radio Self-Portrait’ [1949], *Farewell, my Youth and other Writings*, ed. Lewis Foreman (Aldershot: Scolar, 1992), 166, quoted in White, Harry: ‘The Preservation of Music and Irish Cultural History’, 133.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 133.

matters' while 'also [sponsoring] – albeit to a limited degree – the performance of works by Irish composers, including Stanford, Harty and Harold White (Dermot Macmurrrough).⁵⁶ However, 'the decisive advance in this respect' as White asserts:

came with the foundation in 1926 of a 'station orchestra' as part of the Irish radio broadcasting service, 2RN. Its steady growth from four to forty musicians (in 1942) was accompanied by an increase in public concerts which by the mid 1940s created a regular audience for the orchestral repertoire for the first time in independent Ireland. Radio Éireann was to prove seminal to the cultivation of music: it provided a stable platform for new composition, it ensured that the European repertoire became audible after years of silence, and it fomented a revival of interest in the collection and performance of the ethnic repertoire. The cluster of ensembles and regular programmes which grew around the principal orchestra consolidated the station's position as the foremost disseminator of music in Ireland, a role which it was to maintain throughout the 1950s and beyond. Radio Éireann would henceforward prove indispensable to the well-being of Irish music ...⁵⁷

In regard to composition however, 'the greater part of creative Irish music [still] succumbed to the dutiful presence of the air'.⁵⁸ There were, however, those who evinced a more moderate outlook, represented by the influential John F. Larchet who espoused 'an approach consistent with the goal of establishing an ideal national classicism'.⁵⁹ 'The aim' he declared 'has been to encourage students to adapt the native musical idiom to modern harmonic development and thus create a school of Irish composers which would be truly evocative of the Irish spirit'.⁶⁰ Although in his appropriately-entitled article 'A Plea for Music' he wrote that 'the Irish were once musical ... - they possess a heritage of folk-music, but *is it possible to live a healthy life on the tradition of the past* [?]' (my italics), his creative output reflects the familiar national preoccupation with native

⁵⁵ White: *The Keeper's Recital*, 124.

⁵⁶ Brown: *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History*, 208; White: *The Keeper's Recital*, 132.

⁵⁷ White: *The Keeper's Recital*, 133.

⁵⁸ White: 'The Preservation of Music and Irish Cultural History', 133.

⁵⁹ Ryan, 'Nationalism and music in Ireland' (article), 110.

John Francis Larchet (1884-1967), composer, music educator and conductor. Larchet was musical director at the Abbey Theatre from 1908-1934, professor of music at UCD (1921-1958) and senior professor of composition at the RIAM from 1920-1955, in succession to Esposito (after White: *The Keeper's Recital*, n. 15, 200).

material.⁶¹ As Dibble remarks, ‘W.H. Grattan Flood may have detected some promise in the polished arrangements of traditional airs and dances, but Larchet’s talents ended up being tailored to the inter-war context of Ireland’s national consciousness, in which music remained a conservative province’.⁶²

Thus it was against the background of this repressive cultural climate that Frederick May, Brian Boydell and later, Aloys Fleischmann, expressed the belief that the future of Irish composition lay in orientation towards contemporary developments in Britain and Europe. As Ryan notes, ‘what critically distinguishes ... [May and Boydell] is not only their courageous artistic stand, but that they were the first Irish composers of the modern era to study abroad and have the opportunity to be exposed to the most advanced current compositional approaches’. However, both ‘were to suffer from engaging in a medium that would find little understanding, not to mention sympathy, with an audience unversed in its language’.⁶³ Fleischmann, who also studied abroad in a rather conservative climate in Munich from 1931-1933, ‘demonstrated a progressive method moving from a path parallel with that taken by Larchet to an increasing espousal of the cosmopolitan outlook advocated’ by May and Boydell.

This determination, advanced in music, was also reflected in writing. Each was to contribute incisive articles to Irish periodical literature in publications such as *The Bell*

⁶⁰ Larchet, John: ‘Music and the universities’, *Music in Ireland*, ed. Fleischmann, 18, quoted in Dibble, ‘The Composer in the Academy (1)’, 416.

⁶¹ Larchet, John: ‘A Plea for Music’, *The Voice of Ireland: A Memorial of Freedom’s Day*, repr. in Maher: *The Harp’s a Wonder*, 121-126.

⁶² Flood, Grattan: ‘Larchet, John F.’, *Grove’s Dictionary of Music and Musicians* iii, 90-91, referred to in Dibble, ‘The Composer in the Academy (1)’, 416.

(founded in 1940 by Sean O' Faoláin), 'which cultural historians have inclined to recognise as exceptional in its liberal scepticism and freedom from the doctrinaire piety so embarrassingly abundant in postwar Ireland'.⁶⁴ The most decisive evaluation of the state of music, however, was *Music in Ireland*, a symposium edited by Fleischmann, with a foreword by Arnold Bax.⁶⁵ As White contends:

No other document has so comprehensively addressed the *status quo* of Irish musical life in any period, although the principal focus ... was the (then) present. Organised in three sections ('Music and the Institutions'; 'The Profession of Music'; 'Music and the Public') and prefaced with an historical survey, *Music in Ireland* surveyed the plural condition of music to one end: to establish that "the general organisation of music in Ireland was much behind that of other countries".

... *Music in Ireland* spoke to a country absorbed by economic depression, mass emigration and cultural stagnation. If the book has a slightly aggrieved tone, it does not whinge: the varied rhetoric of its individual contributors lends colour to the presentation of one prevailing concern, but the volume never lapses into self-pity or vapid fulmination.⁶⁶

While Fleischmann steered the stock-take that was *Music in Ireland*, May and Boydell were co-founders of the Music Association of Ireland in 1948, an organisation established to improve the lot and future of music in Ireland. Significantly, it provided a forum for composers but its principal aim was the securing of a state subsidised concert hall. It was precisely this triumvirate who were instrumental in spearheading musical modernism (and musical *modernisation*) 'during a particularly difficult time'.⁶⁷ This study sets out to document that time and their mission.

⁶³ Ryan: 'Nationalism and Irish Music', (article), 111.

⁶⁴ White: *The Keeper's Recital*, 133.

⁶⁵ See bibliography below for full details.

⁶⁶ White: *The Keeper's Recital*, 134-135.

⁶⁷ Klein: 'The Composer in the Academy (2) 1940-1990', *To Talent Alone*, 422.

CHAPTER TWO

'COMPOSITION AND THE FOLK IDIOM'

Many of the major works of contemporary Irish culture may be viewed as attempts to narrate the problematic relationship between tradition and modernity ... one might say that cultural narratives represent a dialogue of sorts, however conflictual, between various Irish minds and the tradition from which they derive, and which they often seek to transform and transcend.¹

Richard Kearney's above-quoted conception of what Harry White terms as 'transitional modes in Irish writing' of the 1970s and 1980s is of prime significance when applied to May, Boydell and Fleischmann.² As White argues:

Kearney's formulation of a "transitional narrative" in Irish culture derives from the perception of two dominant tendencies in modern Irish writing: a revivalism which gravitates towards tradition and the past (as in Yeats) and a modernism which resolves to "demythologise the orthodox heritage of tradition in so far as it lays constraints on the openness and plurality of experience" (as in Joyce). In the case of modernism, the myths of the Irish literary revival are deprived of political intelligence: they fade in the colder dawn of Europe. Before they disappear, as they do in Samuel Beckett, they are integrated with the very essence of modernist fiction through [Joyce's] *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake*.³

As the musical advocates of the literary modernism outlined above, it is precisely this avowed bi-culturalism, exemplified in their music and views, that makes this triumvirate fascinating figures in a study of what pivots on (to use White's term) "the cult of

¹ Kearney: 'The Transitional Crisis of Modern Irish Culture,' *Irishness in a Changing Society*, 79, quoted in White: *The Keeper's Recital*, 6.

² *ibid.*, 6. White effectively applies Kearney's notion to his description of Seán Ó Riada's 'predicament as a crisis of modernism' (see *ibid.*, 125-151).

³ Kearney: 'Transitional Crisis', 82, quoted in White: *The Keeper's Recital*, 5. White's reading of Kearney is especially instructive to my comparison between Irish modernist fiction and music. Though in no way an attempt to gainsay the literary fruits nor profound influence of Yeats and other exponents of the literary revival, I would argue that his group had their 'spiritual' parallel in those anti-European/modernist elements in Irish composition from the 1930s-1950s. Thus Joyce can be seen as the paradigmatic figure for May, Boydell and Fleischmann (May especially, though in his case, perhaps 'earlier' in the following quote should be substituted for 'later'): 'Joyce's modernism is distinguished by its reliance on that tradition of Irish history and myth which he repudiated and then reintegrated into fiction. His later works define the European avant-garde even as they are ineluctably Irish'. (White: *The Keeper's Recital*, n.17, 163).

revival”⁴. The subject of my initial focus will be this emphasis on their direct bypassing of (but indirect permeation by) the ethnic tradition that begs discussion in the context of these composers of what constitutes, and how one can interpret, the concept of the ‘Irish note.’ However, it should be remembered that for the most part, they did not make any conscious study of the ethnic repertory: it can also be assumed that they would not have had any sustained exposure to it during the course of their everyday lives. In short, *authentic* Irish ethnic music was at this time a rural phenomenon. Although, admittedly, Fleischmann’s relative proximity to Cúl Aodh (an Irish-speaking district in South Cork), his childhood trips to the Dingle peninsula, and his almost visceral need to identify himself with Ireland and things Irish may have exposed him to (or spurred him to acquaint himself with) the ethnic repertory, the same cannot be said of May or Boydell. Their interaction with it was probably only ‘second-hand,’ either through Larchet’s teaching (especially the former) or the orchestral arrangements of ethnic material by T. C. Kelly (especially the latter).⁵

On a more general note, it is important to realise the influence that such arrangements had on public perception and taste. Pre-television age Ireland’s concept of ‘modern’ art-music was fashioned by the prevailing, predominantly late Romantic idiom purveyed by Hollywood composers such as Erich Wolfgang Korngold and Max Steiner. As this music may have been decidedly ‘overblown’ for some, perhaps the couching of ethnic melodies in a symphonic guise would have been a more congenial alternative, especially

⁴ *ibid.*, 6. In line with White, I have used the terms ‘ethnic repertory’ and ‘ethnic tradition’ over ‘folk music’ in the course of my study, because, as he points out, ‘the last of these designations is so value-laden’. (*ibid.*, n. 21, 163).

in the way it provided a tangible, perceived representation of Ireland's 'unique musical heritage': before Ceoltóirí Cualann and the 'folk revival' of the sixties, this was one of the few opportunities that many people had (particularly urban dwellers) to hear (an albeit) hybrid form of distinctly 'Irish' music.

However, to return to the so-called 'Irish note': the recognition of such a phenomenon in music, nevertheless, presupposes at least rudimentary knowledge of what constitutes Irish music - in this case, the ethnic tradition. Thus attention will be then directed towards providing a brief synopsis (which should strictly be regarded merely as such) in order to elucidate points which will arise later during the course of this dissertation, when the more technical aspects of works in each composer's *œuvre* are discussed.

The mostly unsuccessful *rapprochement* between art music and the Irish ethnic tradition when approached purposely for reasons of either local colour (Stanford) exoticism (Harty) or nationalism (O' Brien Butler, O'Dwyer, Ó Gallochobair *et al*) brings us to what will be the last topic of discussion: a brief consideration of the contentious issue of 'folk music in art music' in early twentieth century musicology. The concept of an art music derived from the folk – though being, as Boydell points out, 'a product of nineteenth century romantic nationalism which has no place in [the twentieth century]'⁶ – gave some cause for concern to certain commentators in periodical literature. The general comments of the author's cited (one American and one British) should help place the whole concept of 'composition and the folk idiom' in context.

⁵ Conversation with Barra Boydell, 1 July 1999.

* * * * *

The 'Irish (or, arguably, Celtic) note' is best described in literature as pertaining to 'the rehousing of Gaelic structures and imaginings in English' (à la Yeats and Synge) as polarised by the cultural exclusivism of the Gaelic League.⁷ Although in music 'no such transition was available ('the difference between the literary revival and the musical revival in Ireland is that the latter was contained within one tradition, whereas the former moved ... between two'),⁸ a definite 'engagement' between art music and the ethnic tradition existed during the 'revivalist' era from Stevenson to Stanford.⁹ However, for the purposes of this study, the 'Irish note' will generally connote instances of the above-mentioned innate permeation of *elements* (as opposed to direct quotation/derivation) of the ethnic repertory in the works of my chosen composers. For May and Boydell, instances of what one might describe as 'Irish' are predominantly subtle but instantly recognisable. As Arnold Perris describes:

when we hear an old and familiar song that is familiar because it is part of our culture, even a fragment will arouse the established meaning. Words are not necessary, not even the title. They come to mind at once. ...

Music is doing something to everyone who hears it all the time. It is an art which reaches the emotions easily, often (always?) ahead of intellectual awareness.¹⁰

⁶ Boydell in 'Music and the Musician', prod. Jane Carty.

⁷ White: *The Keeper's Recital*, 5

⁸ *ibid.*, 7.

⁹ Sir John Andrew Stevenson (1762-1833), chorister and vicar choral of Christ Church Cathedral and St Patrick's Cathedral, both in Dublin; hon MusD (Dubl) 1791; knighted in 1803. He composed music for numerous theatrical productions in Dublin and countless separate songs, duets, glees and catches, but is best known for his 'symphonies and accompaniments' to Moore's *Irish Melodies* (after White: *The Keeper's Recital*, n. 46, 177).

Thomas Moore (1779-1852), Dublin-born Irish poet and self-taught musician. In 1802, Moore began writing the words and music of the songs that were published in 1807-1808 as his *Irish Melodies*. By 1834, ten sets of these melodies and folk-song arrangements had been published. Among the most enduring of his songs were *The Last Rose of Summer*, *The Harp that Once in Tara's Halls* and *The Minstrel Boy*, the words of which he set to traditional tunes (after 'Moore, Thomas', *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 4th edn., ed. Kennedy, 489).

¹⁰ Perris: *Music as Propaganda*, 6. The first quoted passage is particularly illuminating in consideration of what Axel Klein tentatively calls 'an Irish school of composition'. 'One can glimpse it through some lines

Perris's comments in regard to what he describes as 'musical nationalism' are also incisive to the overall issue in question here: the *perception* of the ethnic tradition in modern Irish music

A nonnative listener must acquire highly trained listening capabilities to recognise such aspects. This demands repeated listening and analysis to recognise what is there and what is not there. To be sure, we can simply listen, uncurious about the technical differences. For the native musician or listener, the distinctions are familiar and to be taken for granted. An American who is listening for the first time [to] Aaron Copland's 'Hoedown' from the ballet suite *Rodeo*, at once recognises his 'own' music. Why? The choices of particular rhythmic patterns, accents, repeated tones, and directions of tones are American. They are not German or Italian or Czech. Whether or not *Rodeo* could have been written *only* by an American is a moot point. Perhaps a contemporary Czech might successfully imitate Copland's folkish music, but the point is that Copland wrote a score about American ranch life that seems utterly convincing to the most critical audience: Americans. It is in the style, with the method and medium, of art music. A symphony orchestra was not heard on the Great Plains, but thus is irrelevant to the nationalistic identification of the work.¹¹

With regard to the ethnic Irish repertory, Perris's contention that 'the nonnative listener must acquire highly trained listening capacities to recognise such aspects' is debatable; what is necessary in our case, however, is the recognition on the part of the uninitiated (nonnative, or otherwise) of what Tomás Ó Canainn describes as 'what is peculiarly Irish in our traditional music'.¹²

* * * * *

As stated above, rather than aiming to be a comprehensive résumé of Irish traditional music, the following consideration principally concentrates on providing precedents for the numerous 'Irish' or 'Celtic' turns-of-phrase evident in the works of the composers in question. I also use the appellation 'Celtic' as there are features in the Irish ethnic tradition that have occurred due to cross-fertilisation with those of England and, in

of May's *String Quartet*, and one can hear the melisma in Boydell's *Violin Concerto*, both rather exceptional works, [as] seen from the stylistic view ...'. (Klein: 'The Composer in the Academy (2)', 424).

¹¹ Perris: *Music as Propaganda*, 32.

¹² Ó Canainn: *Traditional Music in Ireland*, 27. My account is indebted to this very readable and informative study

particular, Scotland. In short, what *sounds* Irish may not actually *be* strictly speaking Irish. Thus when Breandán Breathnach wrote: ‘Irish folk music is diatonic and mostly in the C, D, and A modes; hexatonic and pentatonic tunes occur much less frequently’, it does not gainsay May, Boydell or Fleishmann’s use of hexatonicism or pentatonicism, nor the fact that it possibly connotes the influence of another source or composer (e.g. Vaughan Williams, Warlock, Delius or even Debussy).¹³ Explicit references to particular works have been avoided in this discussion; it is envisaged that any questions which may arise in regard to the inherent origins of ‘Irish’ features in the composers’ outputs will be mostly covered here, thus leaving the opportunity for the reader to make cross-reference between this chapter and those that follow.

It is difficult to define and analyse the basic elements of the ethnic repertory in Ireland. Nevertheless, the music has certain features of melody, rhythm, style, structure and phrasing resultant of its oral process of transmission. As Ó Canainn puts it:

in an instrumental tradition where the tunes are not written down but are actually composed on the instrument itself and transmitted orally, it is clear that to a large extent they will carry something of the character of the instrument on which they were composed.¹⁴

Thus in the Irish context, the two most important instruments in the living tradition are the fiddle (a standard violin, which is invariably played in the first position, thus giving a

¹³ Breathnach: ‘Ireland: II. Folk music’, *The New Grove* ix, 317. The presence of hexatonic scales in the Irish ethnic tradition would appear to be something of a moot point: Kitty Fadlu-Deen (though not a recognised ‘expert’ in the field), in outlining ‘the melodic characteristics of Irish folk song’ for the purposes of highlighting their adaptation by Irish composers, asserted that melodies were ‘often modal and [show] extensive use of the ... hexatonic scale’. She then quoted an air entitled ‘Fair Nelly’ from the Costello collection (referring here to *Amhráin Mhuige Seola*, ‘a fine collection of some eighty western songs mostly collected in Mayo and Galway’ (Ó Canainn: *Traditional Music*, 24) by a Mrs E. Costello and published in 1923). Calling the quotation into service, she cited bars 205f of Boydell’s *Violin Concerto* (1957) as representing an example of adaptation, but the inference that the composer consciously adapted his ‘cultured’ melody to ‘strongly resemble the original song’ is misguided (See Fadlu-Deen: *Contemporary Music in Ireland* (unpublished MA diss.), 8.

range of just over two octaves) and the *uilleann* (pronounced 'ill-yun') pipes. While the influence of the harp on the tradition is unquestionable, it has ceased to be an integral part of it for the last two hundred years.¹⁵

However, it seems reasonable to agree with Ó Canainn when he asserts that 'no aspect of Irish music can be fully understood without a deep appreciation of *sean-nós* (old style) singing'.¹⁶ He explains:

the *sean-nós* is a rather complex way of singing in Gaelic, confined mainly to some areas in the west and south of the country. It is unaccompanied and has a highly ornamented melodic line. Ornamentation gives the movement between main notes a logicity and inevitability that it would not otherwise have: it smooths the musical texture and, while indispensable, its overall effect should be so subtle as to make the listener barely aware of it. Ornamentation is not confined to singing, of course ... : each instrument, however, tends to have its own style of ornamentation, though all of them will be influenced to some extent by the *sean-nós*.¹⁷

Irish music in the ethnic tradition, as Breathnach contends, is 'essentially melodic, [using] no form of harmony or modulation but [relying] for its effect on ornamenting melodic lines, achieved mainly by embellishment [by the use of one or more grace notes and by filling in intervals] and rhythmic variation'.¹⁸ Variation, either of a melody in successive verses of a song, or as a permanent change in the process of oral transmission, is an integral part of the ethnic tradition; although the traditional performer may appear to resort to using various clichés in variation or composition, he/she would regard them as essential to the art.

¹⁴ Ó Canainn: *Traditional Music*, 1.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, 2.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 49.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 3.

¹⁸ Breathnach: 'Folk music' (article), 322.

‘The jig and the reel, and their related group dances, ... the hornpipe and the various sets and half-sets [plus their attendant music] forms by far the greater part of the national repertory’.¹⁹ There are three general types of jig, mostly named after steps or movements characteristic of the dance involved with almost all forms having eight bars in each part: the double jig (in 6/8 time), the single jig (6/8 or 12/8) and the slip or hop jig (9/8).²⁰ The double jig consists of two groups of three quavers, while a crotchet quaver grouping and a dotted-crotchet-crotchet ending characterises single jigs. The slip jig, ‘with its three groups of three quavers (or their equivalents), is frequently circular in form and is the only class of jig in which the parts are not repeated’ in performance.²¹ The most prevalent dance form is the reel, whose basic rhythmic unit comprises two groups of four quavers: the first note is slightly prolonged, the odd-numbered notes being slightly longer than the even notes following them.²²

Although characterised by an overall air of freedom in execution, there are, nevertheless, some structural elements in the ethnic tradition that warrant brief investigation. In much of the dance music of the ethnic tradition there is a tendency, as Ó Canainn notes, to concentrate on a limited amount of notes of the available scale (depending on the instrument), and return to these continuously throughout the rendering of a tune. Particular notes can also be emphasised: i.e. those which are either extremely high or low in pitch, or that proceeded to by a leap. ‘The first emphasised note in a tune will

¹⁹ *ibid.*, 319.

²⁰ See *ibid.*, 320, for the exception to the ‘rule’ (in regard to the amount of component bars): the single jig in 12/8.

²¹ *ibid.*, 319-320.

²² *ibid.*, 320.

have more importance than later notes on strong beats, while a note which is much longer than the others must impress itself more firmly on the listener's mind'.²³

Melodic inflection is also a common feature of the Irish ethnic repertory. Ó Canainn's governing 'rules' in regard to this tendency are worth reproducing below, as it is one of the most characteristically 'Irish' features that occurs (in varying degrees, according to year/period composed) in the work of each of the composers in question:

1. The seventh is by far the most commonly inflected note, but the third and occasionally the fourth degree of the scale may be inflected.
2. If the inflectible note proceeds upwards by step, it is sharpened.
3. If the inflectible note is the highest note of a group, it is generally flattened.
4. In the [melodic] pattern 8-7-5, the seventh may be either flattened or sharpened, but it is more usually sharpened.²⁴

Finally, in some airs, a short melodic motif will recur continuously, either *verbatim*, inverted or by virtue of its rhythm being employed to support a different melody, often with the same interval pattern.

Having briefly introduced the Irish ethnic tradition, the attention will be now focussed towards the controversial role of it (and the ethnic music of other countries) in art music.

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²³ Ó Canainn: *Traditional Music*, 27-28.

²⁴ *ibid.*, 36.

In the concluding chapter of his 1971 book, *Folk Music and Dances of Ireland*,

Breandán Breathnach wrote:

It is strange that one should have to appeal to a people to become acquainted with its own music, and that folk music should have to fight for a hearing against art music.

There is one compelling reason why we should know our own music: it is our own. There are reasons, too, why we should be proud of it. Enough has already been said to indicate its sheer profusion, and make us marvel at the prodigal outpouring of what was [once] the most downtrodden and impoverished peasantry in Europe. In its variety it is startling, and it ranges from the stark archaic simplicity of its ancient marches to its riotously embellished airs that bear the words of our more lyrical love-songs. This exuberance is reflected physically in the dash and vigour of our dance music. And in form and structure, too, these airs and tunes are no less worthy of our admiration and study. In this great body of folk music we possess what should naturally be the basic musical language of the country. Students coming to a serious study of music should already have a knowledge of it. Without that knowledge, musicians in Ireland may compose music, and except in a purely geographical sense it is nonsense to hold that they can compose music.²⁵

His words and sentiments – ‘in (self appointed) defence of’ the Irish ethnic tradition – found their spiritual parallel some fifty-five years earlier in Stanford’s ruminations concerning:

the vital necessity of folk-song to a nation and of founding its creative output upon a basis of full knowledge of the characteristics and atmosphere of their style ... [:] in effect [applying] Verdi’s immortal dictum “*Torniamo all’ antico*.” There is no diet so life-giving and so life-preserving as the natural out-pouring of the songs of the soil.²⁶

Two years later (i.e. in 1917), American composer and ‘folk music’ enthusiast Henry F.

Gilbert similarly proposed that:

the collective folk-songs of the world’s peoples [is] the musical bible of mankind. It is only when the spirit of the folk is apprehended, added to, expressed and expanded by the magic power of genius that we get a piece of art-music of real work and significance.²⁷

²⁵ Breathnach: *Folk Music and Dances of Ireland*, 121. It is curious to note that this was not the bombastic rhetoric of an early century D. P. Moran/Gaelic League acolyte, nor an inter-war, de Valeran ‘Irish Ireland’ *apparatchik*, but the words of ‘one of the foremost authorities on traditional music in Ireland’, (*ibid.*, (rear cover)) and that his impassioned statement, as noted, was actually made in 1971. It is indicative of the mindset that endured (to a small but significant extent) characterised by cultural polarisation (the ‘colonial-ethnic paradigm’ (White: *The Keeper’s Recital*, 4) and the tiresome insistence that compositional endeavour in Irish art music should be wholly contingent on the ethnic repertory. However, the use of this quote here is not to advert to these facts, nor the currency (or the longevity) of the former’s presence in Irish cultural discourse (for such a discussion, see *ibid.*, 1-13). Its presence here is merely to elucidate the debate over the presence of ‘folk’ music in art music and *its* endurance, attested by the comparative proximity of Breathnach’s pronouncement.

²⁶ Stanford, Charles Villiers: ‘Some Thoughts Concerning Folk-Song and Nationality’, 237.

²⁷ Gilbert, Henry F.: ‘Folk-Music in Art-Music – A Discussion and a Theory’, 580.

However, Stanford's exuberant verbosity in regard to what he saw as the *ne plus ultra* of musical composition, and its practical examples, came under the scrutiny of a percipient British commentator in the 1930s, concerned over the fact that the 'process of "borrowing" [had assumed] wholesale proportions' in his country.²⁸ Indeed, both the object behind his investigation (Stanford), and the ramifications thereof, thus warrant closer scrutiny on our behalf in their obvious relevance to the contemporaneous Irish 'scene.'

Although admitting that 'as a composer and teacher, Stanford had great influence' and that 'the devotion which he lavished upon the music of his country [i.e. Ireland] was, beyond doubt sincere ..., performing what seemed to him a legitimate service to traditional music', Hull colourfully contended that:

so long as his activities were confined to the collection and arrangement of folk-songs, his research was of the first value. Unfortunately he sought to combine, but tended to confuse, this interesting task with the business of composition. ...

Having tasted the fruits of easy success which his ventures brought, Stanford, rather like certain children, went again to the cupboard. ... By the time that this process of systematic plunder was at an end, the cupboard, although not reduced to that unequivocal condition which faced Mother Hubbard, was beginning to look bare. According to the present speed with which it is being ravaged by certain of Stanford's successors, Mother Hubbard will soon be able to recognise the locker as akin to her own.³⁰

Hull's railings, in fact, have even greater resonance for the Irish 'scene' (and more particularly the subject-area of this study) than initially meets the eye, being approximately contemporaneous with Fleischmann's similarly-voiced concerns in *Ireland To-day*.³¹

²⁸ Hull, Robert H.: 'The Cult of Archaism', 367.

²⁹ *ibid.*, 367.

³⁰ *ibid.*, 367.

³¹ See p. 143f.

The indiscriminate use of folk-melody, and its imitations, in compositions offered as original, provides the gravest cause for apprehension. It may be that the nature of the cult is transitory, but at present its vigour is unimpaired. ...³²

Its vigour in Ireland was certainly unimpaired for some years to come: a notion that gained a much wider currency was the comment attributed by Gilbert to Glinka: 'that the nation must be considered as "creator" and the composer rather as "arranger" of the popular contribution'.³³ Thus it will be seen that 'composition and the folk idiom' was the theme underlying the variations in Irish composition, from the paucity of post-independence to the debate, continuity and new beginnings of the inter-war years and after. A reaction against this viewpoint was expressed initially by A.J.Potter³⁴ and subsequently to a greater extent by his contemporaries, the new Darmstadt-aware generation of the 1960s headed by Bodley, Victory and Kinsella.³⁵ But without the

³² Hull: 'The Cult of Archaism', 374.

³³ Gilbert: 'Folk-Music in Art-Music', 588-589.

³⁴ 'Archie' Potter (1918-1980), Irish composer and teacher. As Axel Klein explains: 'Potter remains known to many people as the composer who wrote probably the most entertaining music of the fifties and sixties. For a while, his name was virtually synonymous with the Radio Éireann Light Orchestra, for which he wrote unforgettable pieces like the *Overture to a Kitchen Comedy* (1950), the *Variations on a Popular Tune* (1955) and the *Concertino Benino* (1967) for trumpet and orchestra. As entertaining and as light as these piece may be, ... they very often concealed a more serious side to the composer ... : for instance, who would notice on hearing the *Variations* that this is the first piece of Irish music based on a twelve note row?' (Klein: 'The Composer in the Academy (2)', 425-426; see also *idem*, *Die Musik Irlands*, 457-458).

³⁵ Séoirse Bodley (1933-), Irish composer. After taking a music degree at UCD, Bodley studied composition in Stuttgart with Johann Neomuk David in the late 1950s and visited the Darmstadt Summer School from 1963-1965. His experiences prompted him to move away from his early tonal and chromatic style towards experimentation with 'free' serialism, as exemplified in his *Chamber Symphony* (1964). Bodley's espousal of the avant-garde was confirmed by the use of aleatoricism in his *String Quartet No. 1* (1968); indeed, the early 1970s saw further experimentation as he forged a unique synthesis between avant-garde techniques and certain elements of the ethnic tradition, particularly ornamentation and an expansion of its idiom in the use of notes foreign to the modes, epitomised by the orchestral work *A Small White Cloud Drifts over Ireland* (1972) (after Cox, Gareth: 'The Development of Twentieth Century Irish Art-Music', *Musik als Text*, 560-562).

Gerard Victory (1921-1995), Irish composer and conductor. Victory was a music producer in RTÉ (1948-1967) and director of music (1967-1982). His large and varied output included fifteen operas and operettas, and orchestral and chamber music (after 'Victory, Gerard', *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of*

crucial contribution of May, Boydell and Fleischmann in *establishing* twentieth century Irish music, their achievements, and that of their successors, would not have been possible

Music, 4th edn., ed. Kennedy, 766). His 'outspoken desire to entertain produced many lovable works that had nothing in common with contemporary music,' aligned him with Fleischmann and Potter (as discussed below on p. 135-136). (Klein: 'The Composer in the Academy (2)', 426; see also *idem: Die Musik Irlands*, 468-470).

John Kinsella (1932-), Irish composer. From a non-academic musical background, Kinsella's work is informed by his chamber music experience as a violist. After working as assistant director of music at RTÉ from 1979, Kinsella then succeeded Victory as director before leaving the post in 1988 to devote himself to composition. His music before 1980 is mostly of the avant-garde; since then he has espoused a more conventional outlook. His output includes six symphonies (to date), two violin concertos and literary-inspired rhapsodies for smaller orchestra (after Klein: *Die Musik Irlands*, 428-429).

In regard to the exigencies of the issue of 'composition and the folk idiom', and although Eve O' Kelly asserts that '[the successors of the above composers] in the 1970s ... were the first to be able to dispense with the weight of their Irishness ...', it is telling that in 1964, in discussing the (then) latest developments in the avant-garde, Bodley wrote:

In the past Irish composers have most often discussed the question of the relationship of folk-music to art-music. While this is worthy of consideration, the musical problems now being faced by "advanced" composers the world over are to a considerable extent our problems also. The use or non-use of material derived directly from Irish folk-music is to a large extent irrelevant ...

(after O'Kelly: 'Finding Our Voice: Music in Ireland Today', 98; Bodley: 'A Composer's View', 10).

CHAPTER THREE

‘OUR SIBELIUS *MANQUÉ*’

‘Frederick May led the way for so many of us’. Thus May’s contemporary, Brian Boydell, in the sleeve notes for the first commercial recording of the former’s String Quartet in C minor.¹ Although later acknowledged as the rightful candidate for the hypothetical title ‘the grandfather of Irish contemporary music’ by Boydell,² nowadays Frederick May is one of the most neglected of major twentieth century Irish composers. May’s significance lies in his role as the first Irish composer to evade the ‘folk-music trap’³; conversely, his music communicated through the grammar and syntax of the contemporary European idiom of his time: ‘an expression of strong feeling which was both highly individual, as well as being Irish in outlook’.⁴

Boydell’s respect and admiration for his great friend and colleague stemmed from his cognisance that May was a ‘like mind’ on his return to Ireland in 1939 after a virtual nine-year absence.

In the thirties and forties, this country was very much influenced by what I suppose you could call the de Valera attitude: we must keep out nasty foreign influences and develop this wonderful culture which we have buried in our own people. It was an inward-looking thing. If anybody brought in something from outside they were suspected of being something dreadful. The first person to break that was Mainie Jellett in painting [Boydell’s teacher, at one stage]. Freddie May was the first to do it for music.⁵

¹ Boydell, Brian: ‘Frederick May: *String Quartet in C minor*’, sleeve notes.

² This ‘title’ was first mooted for bestowal upon Boydell himself by Michael Dungan, in *New Music News* (February 1997), 11; however the former was quick to assert the right of his late contemporary to such an honour.

³ Donoghue, Denis: ‘The Future of Irish Music’, 111.

⁴ Boydell in ‘A programme commemorating Frederick May, who died on 9 September 1985 (*sic*)’.

⁵ Boydell in Dungan: ‘Everything except team games and horse-racing’, 11. Mainie Jellett (1897-1944), Irish painter. Educated privately, Jellett received her first painting lessons from Elizabeth Yeats (1868-1940, Sarah Cecilia Harrison (1863-1941) and May Manning (*d* 1930). She entered the Metropolitan

May was born in Dublin on 9 June 1911 and, like Boydell, into a Protestant family but was not of the Anglo-Irish self-styled 'gentry'; as regards denomination, he was of the Anglican Communion (Church of Ireland, in his case). Nevertheless, his address at 38 Marlborough Road, Donnybrook, (one of the most affluent suburbs in Dublin at that time, and indeed in the present day also) reflected his middle-class, professional lineage. His father, Frederick senior, was an employee of Guinness's Brewery while May's sister Sheila was, according to one observer 'almost as talented as he was'.⁶

He began his music studies privately under Dr and Mrs John F. Larchet before entering the RIAM, only advancing to the former's harmony class after a firm grounding. May attended there between 1923 and 1929, before taking an external MusB degree under Larchet's tutelage at TCD in 1931. However, Larchet's teaching was limited to classical harmony and counterpoint; his hegemonous position as the foremost musical educator in Ireland after Esposito (given that he was the occupant of the chairs in composition and music at the RIAM and UCD from 1920-1955 and from 1921-1958, respectively), and the fact that the school of music at TCD was at this time a 'mere examining body', meant that instruction in modern compositional techniques was thus not available, or at

School of Art in Dublin in 1914 and from 1917, she studied under Sickert in the Westminster School in London. In 1920 Jellett and fellow-Irish artist, Evie Hone, then studied under André Lhôte in Paris, before both turned instead for instruction to Albert Gleizes, with whom they worked at intervals for the next ten years. From 1918-1921, Jellett exhibited portraits and landscapes at the Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin, but by 1923, she had turned to a cubist idiom and was lecturing and publishing essays on abstract art, noting its affinity with Celtic art. Her later, larger paintings took a religious direction and in 1943, she was one of the founders and first chairman of the Irish Exhibition of Living Art, but she died before the first exhibition (after 'Jellett, Mainie', *The Dictionary of Art* xvii, ed. Turner, 472-473).

⁶ Acton, Charles: 'Frederick May: an appreciation', *Irish Times*, 10 September 1985. Acton wrote that 'those who were around in the Forties knew and loved her. She and Christopher Ferguson (National Secretary of the Workers' Union of Ireland) wrote a remarkably exciting political column in those days under the name of Akhnefton for *The Irish Times*.' Sheila was also the first wife of David Greene (1915-1981), scholar and professor of Irish at TCD from 1955-1967.

any rate, seemingly ignored.⁷ The latter statement can be validated by the fact that May's composition submitted for his primary degree in music, a string quartet in A minor, was commented upon by the examiners as being 'passable for its purpose' with the rider: 'promises more than it achieves'.⁸

Nevertheless, May's auspicious talent was proven by winning several prizes and scholarships for piano performance and harmony technique at the RIAM and the Feis Ceoil.⁹ He continued his musical studies at the RCM from 1932-1935 in theory, piano, conducting and composition, under the tutelage of Vaughan Williams and Gordon Jacob; it was for the former's music, in addition to that of Mahler and Sibelius, that May developed an abiding passion which permeated the greater part of his career. Although later unsympathetic to that which he felt he could never really understand - 'the doctrine of the Shonberg (*sic*) school'¹⁰ - May gravitated towards the music of the latter's pupil Alban Berg (1885-1935), whose innate romantic lyricism wrought a similar effect on the young composer as the music of Mahler.¹¹ A travelling studentship was awarded to May for the concise and accomplished *Scherzo for Orchestra*, written and premièred in London in 1933, which was to have enabled him to study with Berg in Vienna in 1936. However, Mahler's disciple died in December 1935 and May consequently studied for a short period under his colleague, composer and musicologist Dr Egon Wellesz, who

⁷ Klein, Axel: 'Irish Composers and Foreign Education', 273. However, Klein also notes that neither May or Boydell (nor, for that matter, any other Larchet 'past pupil') criticised him for his neglect of modern music and that both were quick to point out the qualities of his teaching in technical respects.

⁸ S., T. O.: 'Spring Nocturne - A Profile of Frederick May', 14, cited in *ibid.*, 272.

⁹ Klein: 'Irish Composers and Foreign Education', 273.

¹⁰ May in Kent: 'Kent talks to May'.

¹¹ Boydell: 'A programme commemorating Frederick May', 1.

lectured in music history at the University of Vienna and whose compositional temperament, up to that time, had reflected that of the Second Viennese School.¹²

On May's return to Dublin later in 1936, he succeeded his former teacher Larchet as director of music at the Abbey Theatre, a post that he held for some fifteen years. He also quickly established himself as an able broadcaster and writer on musical topics, in addition to his talents as a noteworthy pianist and accompanist, especially of *lieder*. However, it was during this time that May began to suffer intolerably with oto-sclerosis, an affliction that had become apparent in his late teens, and which had bred tinnitus and advancing deafness; he later compared himself to 'a dog with a tin can tied to its tail.'¹³

Although between 1933 and 1956 his output was highly distinguished (attracting the attention of such foreign luminaries as Adrian Boult, who conducted some of his works in both Britain and Ireland),¹⁴ May's ill-health made composition thereafter impossible. His anger and frustration at an appallingly 'prehistoric' musical infrastructure and lack of lasting creative stimuli, given such articulate vent in print¹⁵ and positively exemplified by his aforementioned co-founding of the Music Association of Ireland in

¹² Wellesz was to emigrate from his increasingly Nazi-controlled homeland to England, where he continued to compose but more notably forged a very successful career as a pioneering scholar in Byzantine chant studies. This interest in turn began to inform his works, which also saw a reversion to tonality compounded by an attempt to perpetuate Mahler's legacy in his symphonies. As Joseph Ryan notes, May's works after the *String Quartet in C minor* (it having been largely written before the latter's sojourn in Vienna) suggest Wellesz's influence in their abandonment of dodecaphonic tendencies in preference for a harmonic language that recalled Mahler and Reger (after Ryan: *Nationalism and Music in Ireland* (diss.), 412).

¹³ S., T. O.: 'Spring Nocturne', 10.

¹⁴ Burn, Sarah M.: 'Ceoltóirí Éireannacha: Irish Musical Portraits: 6. Frederick May'.

¹⁵ For the purposes of this study, I have consulted the following articles:

1948, later gave way to an insularity characterised by ‘a certain defensive uncouthness’ which made him ‘an uncomfortable person to know, particularly when he took more and more to drowning his misfortunes’.¹⁶ Later in life, he commented:

I did the best I could, for as long as I could, but with that racket torturing me all the time, and my anger at not being given a fair chance, it wasn't always possible to work and behave in a civilised fashion.¹⁷

However, ‘the burning sincerity of [May’s] fanatic heart, and the immense debt [Irish] composers owed him as a pioneer, as well as the great strength of the sympathy he felt for all those whose liberty of thought was threatened, endeared him to all his close friends’.¹⁸ One such associate, Garech a Brún, arranged the recording in 1974 of May’s monumental string quartet for his company, Claddagh Records, by the Aeolian String Quartet and its subsequent publication by Woodtown Music Publications (also a Brún’s), thus precipitating a revival in the composer’s artistic fortunes and an albeit brief resurgence of interest in his work. May’s omnipresent personal and financial management problems in later life were somewhat alleviated by his election as an inaugural member of *Aosdána*¹⁹ in 1981.

However, these positive developments were overshadowed by May’s continuing ill-health, both physical and psychological; his last years were marked, for example, by prolonged hospital stays in the Orthopaedic and Portrane hospitals. He died on 8 September 1985, unmarried and survived by his niece, Nicola.

May, Frederick: ‘Music and the Nation’, *The Dublin Magazine* xi, (July-September 1936), 50-56; ‘The Composer in Ireland’, *The Bell* xiii/1 1947, 30-36; ‘The Composer and Society’, *The Bell* xix/7 1954, 26-29; ‘The Composer in Ireland’, *Music in Ireland*, ed. Fleischmann, 164-177.

¹⁶ Boydell: ‘A programme commemorating Frederick May’.

¹⁷ Kent: ‘Kent talks to May’.

¹⁸ Boydell: ‘A programme commemorating Frederick May’, 2.

As commented on by Boydell, May ‘strove for the European avant-garde, or ... was at least fascinated by it intellectually’²⁰; thus he was quite unlike Fleischmann, who did not wholly eschew the national outlook and, as Boydell later noted, was ‘tottering on the brink for some time [until] Freddie and I dragged him into our camp!’²¹ Therefore, as noted, elements of the ‘Irish note’ permeate the bulk of his works in a most subtle fashion. As music journalist Fanny Feehan noted in 1975: ‘Fred May does not need folk music of this or any other country to upholster his imagination, because the mode is woven into the tapestry of the work and is integral to it’.²²

Leaving aside the prize-winning *Suite of Irish Airs* and *Three Irish Songs* (both of 1953), closer inspection of May’s lamentably brief catalogue would appear to validate Feehan’s statement; but even an early work, the *Irish Love Song* (1930) on a Hyde text does, nevertheless, contain certain musical elements befitting of its title. Contemplative in mood, the piece starts in the Dorian mode transposed to A with constant employment of fifths in melodic and harmonic contexts before ‘modulating’ to its pro-genitor from bar 9 to 21 (notwithstanding inflections). The accompaniment uses wide registral spans with a bare, but paradoxically rich, harmonic texture (perhaps to evoke the sonority of an Irish harp (bars 7-15f)), while a *sean nós* styled turn (bar 7) and brief pentatonic melisma (bar 13) give the vocal line an idiomatic character (Example 1).

¹⁹ A state-founded organisation of creative artists who are granted an annual *cnuas* (trans. ‘collection’; ‘hoard’) in order to fund work in their respective fields of endeavour.

²⁰ Klein: ‘The Composer in the Academy (2) 1940-1990’, 420.

²¹ Boydell in Dungan: ‘Everything except team games and horse-racing’, 11.

²² Feehan: ‘The Fiery Soul’, 34.

EXAMPLE 1

May: Irish Love Song, bars 1-23

Andante con moto.

Will you be as kind, Colleen, as you are
M.P.

con Pedale.

qui-et? Will you be with-out pit-ty

10

on me for ev-er? ?

Tempo rubato ed in.

Meno Mosso.

p.p. Listen to me, Nain-cen listen; a-nnon; Put feel-ing on... me

p.p.

Franzoni qui. a. mod.

Cresc. più agitato e accel.

p.

20

Tempo!

3 am on the lit-tle road That is dark and soon

M.P.

P. Rab. Hal.

M.P.

However, the naïve innocence of what is, essentially, a quite unremarkable piece of juvenilia can hardly be deemed representative of one of such penetrating vision. Indeed, it was May's next (and first major) work, the *Scherzo for Orchestra* (1933) that heralded his early compositional maturity.

Composed when still only a young man (of twenty-two), the work evinces an early understanding for colourful orchestration.²³ The introduction is a cataclysmic Allegro feroce, resplendent in texture with powerful cross rhythms driven by the percussion section while featuring prominent use of chromatic scales (bars 1-60). A short transitional section presages a dramatic *tutti* from bars 76-86 enunciating a clear pentatonic melody based in C minor which, along with its added rhythmic emphasis in May's imposition of two crotchets against three, supports Axel Klein's postulation that in comparison with his string quartet references to the composer's Irish heritage are more overt in this work as a whole (Example 2) (Please see following page).²⁴

²³ This could have been due to the influence of Gordon Jacob (1895-1984); some forty years later, the latter still remembered May: 'A small, rather schoolboyish figure packed with musical talent. His music had its own character even then, and his manuscript showed decision. He was certainly among my really talented pupils' (cited in T. O. S.: 'Spring Nocturne', 14). Jacob was an acknowledged authority on orchestration and its technique, and wrote several books on the subject (such as the primer *How to Read a Score* (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1944) during his forty-year tenure at the RCM (1926-1966).

EXAMPLE 2

May: *Scherzo for Orchestra*, bars 76-86 (strings only)

Handwritten musical score for strings, bars 76-86. The score consists of seven staves. The first staff has a dynamic marking of *mp*. The second staff has a dynamic marking of *f*. The third staff has a dynamic marking of *f*. The fourth staff has a dynamic marking of *f*. The fifth staff has a dynamic marking of *f*. The sixth staff has a dynamic marking of *f*. The seventh staff has a dynamic marking of *f*. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and slurs.

Handwritten musical score for strings, bars 76-86. The score consists of seven staves. The first staff has a dynamic marking of *p*. The second staff has a dynamic marking of *cresc.*. The third staff has a dynamic marking of *cresc.*. The fourth staff has a dynamic marking of *Dib. b#*. The fifth staff has a dynamic marking of *pp*. The sixth staff has a dynamic marking of *pp*. The seventh staff has a dynamic marking of *pp*. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and slurs.

²⁴ Klein: 'The Composer in the Academy (2)', 421.

The image shows a handwritten musical score for a string quartet, consisting of five staves. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and slurs. A prominent feature is a triplet of notes in the upper staves, marked with a circled '3'. Above the first staff, the word 'Rall.' is written in cursive. To the right of the staves, there are performance instructions: 'Mer' (likely 'More'), 'Dir.' (likely 'Dirigendo'), and 'FF' (fortissimo). The score is written in a style that suggests it is a working draft or a composer's sketch.

This yields to a lyrical, second major theme presented in the violins and answered by the first clarinet (bars 87-105). Although Ryan seems justified in pin-pointing the influence of Mahler at this juncture²⁵ (certainly in the opening of the first presentation of the theme (bars 89-/94)), Klein's above-mentioned assertion also holds fast, as evidenced in the second part of the theme and its clarinet answer, by their use of 'gapped' scales in bars 94-96 and 103-104, and in their various guises throughout. At a later point (bar 115), a similar pentatonic melody appears in the upper strings and woodwind, its Irish 'feel' again made prominent by use of a characteristic rhythm (bars 117-121); this also re-appears from bars 126-138 presented in the lower strings (not included in the example) (Example 3a and b).

²⁵ Ryan: *Nationalism and Irish Music* (diss.), 405.

EXAMPLE 3a

May: *Scherzo for Orchestra*, bars 89-105 (strings and clarinet I only)

The image displays two systems of handwritten musical notation. The top system consists of five staves. The first staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). It contains the handwritten text "in C, wood" and a dynamic marking of "MF". The subsequent four staves are for string instruments, with various notes and slurs. The bottom system also consists of five staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C), with the handwritten text "Clar" written on the right side. The second staff has a dynamic marking of "Cresc." and a "Dim." marking. The third, fourth, and fifth staves are for string instruments, with dynamic markings of "Cresc." and "MF" repeated across the staves. The notation is handwritten and includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, slurs, and dynamic markings.

EXAMPLE 3b

May: *Scherzo for Orchestra*, bars 115-/121 (strings only)

Handwritten musical score for strings, bars 115-121. The score is written on four staves (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass). The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#). The score includes dynamic markings such as *ff* and *sfz*, and performance instructions like *sva*, *Creac*, and *them*. The notation features various rhythmic values and articulation marks.

Handwritten musical score for strings, bars 115-121. The score is written on four staves (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass). The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#). The score includes dynamic markings such as *ff*, *pp*, and *FFF*, and performance instructions like *Rall*, *sva*, and *Piu Lento*. The notation features various rhythmic values and articulation marks.

The *Scherzo* was, in many respects, a 'supranational' piece - its thrilling yet foreboding introduction and conclusion could have originated from the pen of any talented European composer of the early 1930s - yet the distinctly 'ethnic' flavour of its core succeeded, notwithstanding the influence of Vaughan Williams and without recourse to pastiche or Stanfordsque stage-Irishness, in subtly representing its composer's cultural identity, without compromising his modernist stance. An even greater degree of refinement in this regard was achieved in May's next work, the avowedly internationalist String Quartet in C minor. The work was completed in 1936 but unperformed in Ireland until 1949; it had received its première in London by the New London String Quartet only a year previously. Although a sure indication of the state of Irish musical life and the level of interest of Irish musicians in the plight of their country's composers,²⁶ this was, perhaps, also symptomatic of the absence of a professional quartet in Ireland at that time. Hailed by Boydell as the 'first really significant composition by an Irish composer - certainly of the present century',²⁷ its revolutionary status was confirmed by the work's arresting opening which one could be forgiven for mistaking as an exercise in Second Viennese school-serialism (Example 4) (Please see following page).

²⁶ Klein: 'The Composer in the Academy (2)', 423.

EXAMPLE 4

May: String Quartet in C minor I, 1-8

Allegro inquieto



Note: All accidentals hold good throughout each bar as the music is nearly atonal in places.

²⁷ Boydell: 'A programme commemorating Frederick May', 1.

However, this approach is eschewed in favour of a less constrained atonality.²⁸ Although the work is renowned as his most international in character (as mentioned above), its innate ‘Irishness’ (as the product of a Euro-centric Irishman) shines through in the ‘brighter’ sections of the piece. The first motif of the third movement, as Klein has noted, ‘with its multiple variants in the course of the piece is a clear reference to his Irish heritage’,²⁹ without a hint of ‘hat-tipping’ (Example 5a). The same can also be said of a later, equally tranquil section which, more in intonation than construction, leaves one with a subtle scent of its composer’s nationality (Example 5b).

EXAMPLE 5a

May: String Quartet in C minor III, bar 477

The image shows a musical score for a string quartet, specifically Example 5a. It consists of four staves of music. The tempo is marked 'Lento espressivo' and the performance instruction is 'pizz.'. The first staff has a dynamic marking of 'mf'. The second staff has a dynamic marking of 'mf' and the instruction 'pizz.'. The third staff has a dynamic marking of 'mf' and the instruction 'pizz.'. The fourth staff has a dynamic marking of 'mf' and the instruction 'pizz.'. The music is in C minor and 2/4 time.

²⁸ Ryan: *Nationalism and Irish Music* (diss.), 412.

²⁹ Klein: 'The Composer in the Academy (2)', 421.

EXAMPLE 5b

May: String Quartet in C minor III, bars 570-576

The musical score is presented in four systems, each with four staves. The first system begins at bar 570, marked with a box containing the number 570. The tempo is indicated as "Poco meno mosso". The first staff of this system has a dynamic marking of *mp* and the instruction "tranquillo e cantabile". The second and third staves have a dynamic marking of *p*. The fourth staff has a dynamic marking of *p*. The second system continues the piece, with a dynamic marking of *p* in the second staff and *mp* "tranquillo (enhar.)" in the third staff. The third system begins at bar 575, marked with a box containing the number 575. The fourth system concludes at bar 576, marked with a box containing the number 576. The score features various musical notations including slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

This landmark in both May's canon and that of Irish composition is 'comparable in idiom to the middle quartets of Bartók ... reflecting the experiences of his foreign study, the deep impressions of Nazi Austria, the discovery of his growing deafness and ... a glimpse of his Irish home, perhaps nothing but a passing shadow of memory'.³⁰

May's forward-mindedness in composition was just as prevalent in his writings for various periodicals, which divulge a perspicacity symptomatic of one so open to other influences beyond the Irish sea. In the same year that May completed the quartet (1936) he penned an article which, in its perceptiveness and lucidity (as in the *Scherzo*), belied its author's young age but reflected his already experienced mindset. Pointedly and appositely entitled 'Music and the Nation,' its oft-quoted opening animates May's dramatic conception of, and real concern for, music in inter-war Ireland.

Anyone who reflects on the present state of music in Ireland is bound to be filled with the most profound depression.

We might have hoped that the quickening of life which began in the eighties of the last century with the inception of the literary revival, and which later imparted fierce energy to our policies, would have roused our musical consciousness to some slight activity; that the wave which bore forward a great literary and political movement would not have left music quite untouched. But the wave has broken and receded, leaving us as we were before, in a state of almost complete stagnation. [The arts] have been thought of as, at best a barely tolerable luxury, and there has been no vital connection between them and the life of the nation as a whole.³¹

It is telling that May wrote of the lack of a 'vital connection' and as the arts as 'at best a barely tolerable luxury'³² for in the case of Ireland:

after independence, creativity (and its control) was more important than performance. Therefore, if the mere performance of classical music was regarded as the purlieu of the Anglo-Irish (perhaps even the pro-Treaty) mentality and way of life, as personified in the audiences at the

³⁰ *ibid.*, 422.

³¹ May: 'Music and the Nation', 50.

³² May: 'Music and the Nation', 50.

RDS recitals, and therefore marginal to the “real Ireland,” the question of the production of Irish music became more strongly focused ...³³

Moreover, *what* type of music was produced was brought in to even greater relief by ideological disciples of the establishment, some of whom, as has been shown, betraying a quasi-Puritanical aversion to art music. Thus May’s adverting to Austria as ‘a country ... which has made such a rich contribution to our musical heritage’ where he saw, as in other countries, a division between ‘art and life’, compounded by ‘post-war lassitude and an over-powerful tradition’ can be viewed as an indictment of the nationalist agenda in his home country. Indeed, this is underlined by his contention that art, ‘instead of being made the cornerstone of the state, is ‘frequently flung upon the scrap-heap’.³⁴

The awareness of a ‘cleavage between art and life’, as Ryan has commented, ‘presaged a fundamental change in May’s attitude to composition, a change occasioned by the pervading nationalist sentiment’.³⁵ May’s ‘ascetic renunciation of [his] most technical innovations’, precipitated by musical and perhaps cultural experiences whilst in Vienna, was set down initially in this article.³⁶

An artist is not a self-sufficient being; he is at best when he knows himself to be a vital part of the life around him, when there is a mould into which his work can be poured. If society, for one reason or another, has no use for him, he takes refuge in a constricted individualism, and tries to shut out the bleak present by dreams of the future, and the promised land where he is never to dwell. His work becomes tenuous and perverse, and ceases to have any organic connection with the world of reality and experience: there is a multiplication of private languages, but no vehicle of communication. Instead of writing from the richness of life, there is an unhealthy preoccupation with technical problems, a sure sign of decadence, and such a confusion of means with ends can only take place when no noble end is in sight.³⁷

³³ Pine: ‘Maturity, 1922-1998’, 342.

³⁴ May: ‘Music and the Nation’, 50-51.

³⁵ Ryan: *Nationalism and Irish Music* (diss.), 412.

³⁶ *ibid.*, 412.

³⁷ May: ‘Music and the Nation’, 51.

However, the above quote also shows, on a more personal level, how he also may have perceived a continued advocacy of modernism as an act of self-imposed cultural isolation. Knowing *who*, *what* and *where* he was, as a voyage of self-discovery, was thus all-important; Richard Pine's adverting to 'a more accessible and more generally agreed view of the multiplicity of "Irishness"' in Irish composition today is most apposite when one considers that:

when May wrote in 1935 (*sic*) of cultural life and cultural practitioners being equally fragile and vulnerable, by virtue of the fact that a nation did not exist, that there was a "multiplication of private languages and no vehicle for communication", such a sense of identity was not available to him.³⁸

Thus May's semi-capitulation to nationalist constraints was tempered by both a change in aesthetic convictions (albeit possibly precipitated by a desire to assert his cultural identity) and the failure of that nation (and more pointedly, its government) to realise that the modern artist in an age devoid of aristocratic patronage was, as quoted above, 'not a self-sufficient being'. He commented on the life annuity for composition awarded to Sibelius by the Finnish government as a young man so that he 'grew into, and not out of, his native land; he has remained all his life untouched by contemporary fashions, and while others have been ranging the globe and producing international fruit-salads of surpassing futility, he has always found the best in things known to him; in securing him for herself'.³⁹ Thus May saw 'the most vital contemporary figures [as being] those who have been able to merge their own ego in the life of some larger whole'.⁴⁰ Perhaps this

³⁸ Pine: 'Maturity, 1922-1998', 345.

³⁹ May: 'Music and the Nation', 52.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 52.

was also paradigmatic of an outlook his country could have aspired to, certainly in regard to music.

May's constant awareness of the lack of tradition in Irish composition was underlined by his belief that 'such a tradition cannot be created self-consciously or by state decree' (surely a jibe at 'Irish Ireland' and its compositional toadies); 'it comes from the richness of life, and the most we can do is to help to bring this richness into being'.⁴¹ There followed a passionate 'plea for music', similar in vein to Larchet's of some ten years previously, which for the main part advocated a thereafter much called-for (and still hypothetical), all-embracing National Academy of Music. However, his constant reiteration of the title (and the concept) of this institution as being 'national' did not occlude the dogged determination of one who was still of a broad, if mildly mollified, cosmopolitan viewpoint. So while he paid lip-service to the creation of a section devoted to 'Traditional Irish Music and folk-music of other lands', he also hoped 'that the numbers studying counterpoint and composition would show a progressive increase', and that while the National Academy 'could not afford to scorn outside help, at all events in the initial stages, the only object of such help [would be] the full achievement of our own musical independence'.⁴² Such a sentiment would have appealed to the political establishment, but it did not achieve the desired result.

May's correlation between the 'period of political disillusionment [when] the national energy was unconsciously seeking a fresh outlet' of 1885 and, as he saw it, its successor

⁴¹ *ibid.*, 52.

in 1935, enabled him to strengthen his plea for music to be apportioned similar, if limited, support to that given to the so-called Anglo-Irish literary revival.⁴³ The significance of May's adverting to this fact is manifold, as Pine demonstrates:

Ironically, the fact that music production failed to achieve a momentum or definition comparable to that of literature meant that composers escaped most of the problems experienced by writers, and audiences were not given the difficult choices forced on the reading public by censorship. The point is vital because, even more so than in the eighteen-nineties, it explains why Irish composition did not develop ... [amidst] .. the cultural debate. ... Because that debate had not been resolved, it was still being pursued in the thirties, with the twin basic themes, 'What is Irish music?', and 'Whither Irish music?', continuing to make would-be composers doubtful of their cultural identity.⁴⁴

Indeed, to return to May's article, the following passage serves to bring in to focus the general cultural atmosphere that prevailed in the Ireland of the 1930s as it began to close its doors and become insular, in more ways than the obvious economic one:

Once again we are in a mood of disillusionment. Self-government has brought us many new problems, but the old fervid idealism has for the time being, deserted us leaving us listless and apathetic. But during the last year or so there have been various signs that we are becoming dissatisfied with ourselves, and casting around for fresh worlds to conquer. We have been attacking our theatres, our consciences have been roused by the evil of our slums, we have been striving for beauty in our architecture, and we have been protesting against the ugliness of our postage stamps; but what we really have been doing the whole time is criticising our own self-complacency. There is more than a superficial resemblance between the mood of 1935 and 1885, and perhaps the time is ripe for a new departure.⁴⁵

The innate suitability of music, even over literature, as a vehicle for national expression (though not in the narrow sense of the term) is the last point that May adverts to:

Though music is sometimes thought of as a thing withdrawn and apart from the world of every day, no art is so deeply intimate. Ireland would have a fuller and more whole-hearted pride in the growth of a musical movement that she has had in that of previous cultural movements, because there would be nothing in its nature which would wound, or stab, and it would touch the national life at a hundred points. ...

Ireland ... needs such a [national] movement to help her to inner peace and happiness. We are at present a little shy and self-conscious in our nationhood, and this shyness sometimes finds expression in savage outbursts against those whom we imagine to have hurt our feelings. ... But

⁴² *ibid.*, 53.

⁴³ *ibid.*, 54

⁴⁴ Pine: 'Maturity, 1922-1998', *To Talent Alone*, 342.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 55.

cynicism and corrosive satire are alien to the spirit of music, which is the abstract of all the arts, a revelation of pure beauty; and the greater our movement becomes, the greater will be Ireland's pride in her own achievement.⁴⁶

In common with his colleagues Fleischmann and Boydell, May was influenced not only by his cultural environment but also by the natural or physical one. Admiring Bartók's 'great feeling for the national and natural world',⁴⁷ one can posit, as Klein has done, that a British, or rather a Vaughan-Williamsian pastoralism ('a late romantic idiom with overtones of folk melody, occasionally tinged with modal harmony') pervades much of May's creative output in varying degrees, and was especially heightened in his last (compositional) years.⁴⁸ However, I would argue that May's sense of 'national' and 'natural' was that of his native country and was thus *intrinsically* Irish, notwithstanding obvious affinities with those of his former mentor.⁴⁹ This tendency is certainly prevalent in the works that followed 'Music and the Nation,' though they also display an understandably still-developing composer. The *Symphonic Ballad* (1937) is, according to Ryan, 'not among [May's] finest achievements and serves to point his erratic orchestral technique'.⁵⁰

Commenting on the above-mentioned lack of affinity that he felt (in later life) towards the Second Viennese school, May elucidated his point by highlighting one of his own 'pet loves' for compositional subject-matter:

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 55-56.

⁴⁷ Kent: 'Kent talks to May'.

⁴⁸ Klein: 'The Composer in the Academy (2)', 421.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 421-422. The influence of the elder composer on May's *Scherzo* is a case in point (see above, p. 46); however, I only half-agree with Klein's postulation (substituting 'British' for 'Irish') and more willingly concur with Ryan in asserting that May cannot be considered a pastoral composer in the 'classic' sense (such as Bax or Moeran) (after Ryan: *Nationalism and Music in Ireland* (diss.), 427.

⁵⁰ Ryan: *Nationalism and Music in Ireland* (diss.), 412.

It certainly produced some wonderful work, like Berg's *Wozzeck* and so on; but if you look at the subject matter, it was all of the most horrifying nature. There seemed to be no room in their work for anything joyful like the coming of Spring.⁵¹

It was this concern that fuelled his next and more successful piece: the *Spring Nocturne*, also of 1937. Subtitled 'An Idyll for Orchestra', it is scored for full orchestra, with the addition of cor anglais and celesta and is cast in one composite movement of distinct sections, similar to the quartet.⁵² The work was premièred on 24 April 1938 at the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin by the Radio Éireann Symphony Orchestra conducted by Aloys Fleischmann, and was later performed by the CBS orchestra in Canada under the baton of Brian Boydell.

Inspired by the Meath countryside, the composer inscribed on the score a line from an Irish poem translated by Frank O'Connor: 'Meadowlands and ploughlands lie in valleys far away'. The work begins impressionistically with a dark Winter setting which gradually brightens with the coming of spring. Although it is in no way (as with most of May's works) overtly Irish, there is an atavistic quality to the piece that gives credence to Klein's contention while adumbrating Feehan's.⁵³ Certainly the first enunciation of the main theme, a plaintive, wide-spanning melody in C major with a simple but effective use of the flattened third (incidentally a characteristic of Irish ethnic music) stands testament, perhaps, to May's apparent wish (like Fleischmann and Boydell) to write nationally (or rather naturally)-reflective, yet contemporary music (Example 6).

⁵¹ May in Kent: 'Kent talks to May'.

⁵² Ryan: *Nationalism and Music in Ireland* (diss.), 427.

⁵³ See above, p. 8-9.

May's next major work, the *Lyric Movement for String Orchestra* (1939) was first performed by its dedicatees, the Dublin String Orchestra under conductor Terry O' Connor, in the Royal Dublin Society in 1943. Fanny Feehan, although discounting the modernist effect of the composer's Austrian studies, quite justifiably contended that 'there is not in May's *Lyric Movement for Strings* any perceptible influence of this heady Viennese company (Schönberg (*sic*) Wellesz, etc.); it is most definitely related to Strauss or Mahler from the point of view of the richness of its string sonorities'.⁵⁴ It also contains 'Irish' allusions (rather than references) - one striking example is at the 'transition' into E flat, when the heretofore prevalent melodic characteristic of short, and mostly static, statements is temporarily alleviated initially from bars 111-117. Here the newly-emancipated melodic line converges with rhythmic nuances to give one a sense of its composer's national origin - note how the traditionally bucolic 6/8 rhythm is 'lifted' by the dotted fourth beat and the overall bowing instructions in the first violins while the second violins sport a quirky semi-quaver that effects a lively rhythmic counterpoint redolent of Irish ethnic dance music. More pointedly, the juxtaposition of 6/8 with 9/8 time and its constituent melody at bars 116-117 results in a distinctly 'Irish' turn of phrase (Example 7) (Please see following page).

⁵⁴ Fanny Feehan in MacDiarmid, Hugh: 'A Tribute to Frederick May', *May: String Quartet in C minor*,

EXAMPLE 7

May: Lyric Movement for String Orchestra, bars 108-117

The image shows a musical score for a string orchestra, consisting of ten staves. The score is divided into three measures by vertical bar lines. Above the first measure, the tempo marking *Pia Rall.* is written. Above the second measure, the tempo marking *Ad. Alzari* is written. Above the third measure, the tempo marking *All.* is written. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The dynamic markings include *pp* (pianissimo) in the first measure, *p* (piano) in the second measure, and *mf* (mezzo-forte) in the third measure. The notation is dense and includes many slurs and accents.

May's largest and most ambitious composition followed in 1941; *Songs from Prison* for baritone and large orchestra was largely based on a collection of poems by the revolutionary German poet and dramatist Ernst Toller entitled *Das Schwalbenbuch* (The Swallow Book).⁵⁵ The texts relate the story of a political prisoner who watches swallows building their nest outside his cell-window: to him, they are a reminder of the coming of Spring and symbolic of liberty. However, his happiness is cut short as the prison guards deliberately destroy the nest. Despite this, 'there remains confidence that Spring will come with its gift of freedom'.⁵⁶ May's settings were appended by a quasi coda by his friend, Erich Stadlen, in the guise of a final poem which linked the fate of the swallows with that of the millions persecuted by Hitler during the Holocaust.⁵⁷ May initially set Toller's original German text which was then translated by Nigel Heseltine, son of Philip (the latter was otherwise known under his pseudonym, Peter Warlock). As Ryan comments: '*Songs from Prison* ... is of a stature to rank alongside the quartet. Like *Sunlight and Shadow* [which followed in 1955], it explores the theme of rebirth first examined in *Spring Nocturne*⁵⁸ and the incidental music for the play 'Winterset', which was performed by the UCD Dramatic Society, around 1940.⁵⁹ But it goes beyond this and reflects its composer's sensitivity for human dignity and indeed his strongly held political convictions',⁶⁰ adverted to by May himself in 1974:

⁵⁵ Ernst Toller (1893-1939), German Expressionist playwright. Toller was born in Samotschin (now Szamocin, Poland) and educated at the universities of Heidelberg and Munich. After World War I, he became a political activist and was imprisoned for participating in the 1919 Communist uprising in Bavaria from 1919-1924; during incarceration he wrote *Das Schwalbenbuch*. After being forced to leave Germany by the Nazi regime in 1933, Toller lived mostly in the United States, where he committed suicide in 1939 (after 'Toller, Ernst', Microsoft®: *Encarta*® 98 *Encyclopedia*).

⁵⁶ Boydell: 'A programme commemorating Frederick May', 2.

⁵⁷ Feehan: 'Frederick May: The Forgotten Genius'.

⁵⁸ Ryan: *Nationalism and Music in Ireland* (diss.), 428.

⁵⁹ Boydell: 'A programme commemorating Frederick May', 2.

⁶⁰ Ryan: *Nationalism and Music in Ireland*, 428.

I chose these poems because I thought they had great relevance to the condition of humanity under Hitler. As I was studying in Vienna in the '30s, I was emotionally very involved with the whole Hitler menace.⁶¹

The obvious anti-Fascist resonance, confirmed by the choice of texts and main author, and the quote above, could also be interpreted as acting for May on a closer level also: 'the creative torpor, the dead weight of tradition, imprisons the compositional spirit in Ireland'.⁶²

The large orchestra and quasi-Wagnerian vocal histrionics required by this work has confined it to relative obscurity; premièred in 1943 by the BBCSO in London, it did not receive its first Irish performance until 22 December 1946, when Michael Bowles conducted the RÉSÓ with Brian Boydell as soloist at the Phoenix Hall, Dublin.⁶³ Unfortunately, it was fraught with 'balance problems', as Boydell later commented: 'there were also a number of very hairy moments in the orchestral part. I well remember making a secret pact with the leader, Nancy Lord, that whatever happened on the conductor's podium, we would at least stick together'.⁶⁴

⁶¹ May quoted in Kent: 'Kent talks to May'.

⁶² White: *The Keeper's Recital*, 136.

⁶³ Fanny Feehan wrote that *Songs from Prison* was banned in Ireland during World War II and could not be broadcast in case Irish neutrality might be compromised due to the addition of Stadlen's final poem. She also claimed that Sir Adrian Boult, who seems to have supported May's work (see p.6 above), rejected the *Songs* when they were brought to his attention while conductor of the BBCSO as being 'too gloomy'. Boult was principal conductor from 1931-1950, and although Brian Boydell gave the work's British première date as being 1943, this could have been undertaken by another conductor (after Feehan, Fanny: 'Living Irish Composers', *Ireland Today*, 7 May 1976, 6; Boydell: 'A programme commemorating Frederick May', 2).

⁶⁴ Boydell: 'A programme commemorating Frederick May', 3.

While somewhat comparable to Mahler's song-symphony *Das Lied von der Erde* (1907-1909) in the orchestral forces employed and its expressionism, the apparently internationalist character of the *Songs* are nevertheless coloured by occasional moments that reflect its composer's concern with nature, as subtly indicative of his nationality, as outlined above. This is validated by Klein's assertion that 'the most depressing parts of the *Songs from Prison* are relieved by such musical events, for instance at the point where the prisoner gains hope from watching a couple of swallows outside the prison building their nest' which contains an allusion to the earlier *Spring Nocturne*.⁶⁵

The forties and fifties saw May establish himself socially (with those of his ilk) in the words of one contemporary, as 'a well known figure on the Dublin scene, the friend of writers such as Brendan Behan, of dramatists, actors and of course, fellow musicians'.⁶⁶ May's acquaintance with Behan had begun in the late 1930s, and the tenor of their relationship went beyond that of mere friendship; his homosexual infatuation and limited relations with the often vociferous writer and playwright, and his occasional nocturnal visits to 'The Catacombs' in Behan's company, confirmed his 'different' lifestyle.⁶⁷ As

⁶⁵ Klein 'The Composer on the Academy (2)', 422.

⁶⁶ James Plunkett, quoted in Mac Diarmid: 'A tribute to Frederick May', [iv].

⁶⁷ 'Brendan's most exotic supporter was composer Frederick May . . . [who, twelve years his senior], had befriended him when he was fifteen. [May] remained one of his most loyal and devoted friends. A highly intelligent and sensitive man, Freddie May was homosexual. His almost obsessive devotion to Brendan at this time it just one indication that he was in love with him'.

'The Catacombs was a warren of basement rooms beneath a Georgian house at 13 Fitzwilliam Place. It opened after pub-closing and stayed open as long as the drink lasted, which might mean until the next morning, [and was guarded] by [an] English homosexual called Dickie Wyeman' (quoted from O'Sullivan, Michael: *Brendan Behan: A Life* (Dublin: Blackwater Press, 1997), 91; 134).

Michael O'Sullivan asserts, with regard to May's visits to Behan during the latter's imprisonment, and the former's general appearance:

The bearing of this highly intelligent aesthete with his exquisite manners, finely-tailored clothes and habitual white cotton gloves, could not have failed to make a striking spectacle against the grim background of prison visiting facilities.⁶⁸

His manner of dress and gesture suggested, to say the least, a sexual ambiguity, but the general Irish public gave no indication of noticing.⁶⁹

May continued to expound his views in *The Bell* as a self-elected but well-informed spokesperson, especially on the 'national v. international' debate that had wracked Irish music since the thirties; 'The Composer in Ireland', which appeared in *The Bell* in January 1947, evinced a further 'plea' while offering a cogent summary of May's position (and others like him). Criticising the lack of a 'cohesive policy or platform of ideas which would encourage Irish musicians as such to develop their latent talent', he contended that 'a composer can only come from a musical environment'. While applauding the Government-sponsored opportunity afforded that year (1947) at the Summer School of Music for composition students nation-wide to bring their scores to Arnold Bax for 'discussion and advice', for participants to take part in 'a wide variety of chamber music under the direction of Mr Henry Holst' and to experience the conducting course 'under the inspiring leadership of the famous French conductor, M. Jean Martinon',⁷⁰ he also adverted to the lack of a concert hall as being most injurious to the position of the composer, over that of the professional musician and the music lover.⁷¹

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, 92.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 136.

⁷⁰ May: 'The Composer in Ireland', *The Bell* xiii/1 (1947), 31.

Henry Holst (1899-1991), Danish violinist. Holst led a distinguished career as performer and teacher, most notably as the leader of the Berlin PO from 1923-1931 and as professor of violin at the RNCM 1931-1946 and 1950-1953. From 1946-1953, he occupied the corresponding chair at the RCM before returning to

May's consistent references to his periods of foreign study abroad (particularly that in Vienna) are not lacking in this essay. Indeed, he uses a comparison between the musical infrastructure of the aforementioned city and that of Dublin to telling effect, both to point to the lack of such in the latter, and to his sense of cultural isolation as an undernourished artist (both materially and musically) in a city (and country) that just did not seem to care:

Those nations which have accorded to music her rightful place in their hearts have always erected in her honour temples worthy of her. I remember how deeply I was impressed some years ago, when studying music in Vienna, at the contemplation of the great concert hall near the centre of the city, known as the Musikvereinsaal.

It is indeed irrational for a nation to protest its love for music, and then oblige its musicians to peddle their wares in cinema houses and theatres.⁷²

The (still prevalent) 'thinness' of music publishing in Ireland was another inadequacy that May felt needed to be addressed which, in addition to solutions to problems outlined above and elsewhere, would precipitate 'a great musical revival, comparable to the dramatic revival [... which] could halt the migration of some of our best musicians Ireland to England, and even hold out a practical inducement to many of them to return home'.⁷³ Thus, in order to solve this dilemma and create a musical environment, he maintained that the 'three-fold aim of education should be to produce composers, to

Denmark to the Royal Danish Conservatory from 1953. He gave the British première of Walton's violin concerto in 1941 (after 'Holst, Henry', *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music* 4th edn., ed. Kennedy, 345).

Jean Martinon (1910-1976), French conductor, violinist and composer. As a prisoner-of war for two years, Martinon wrote several works: on conducting one of these in Paris, he secured a post at Bordeaux from 1943-1945. Various subsequent posts included stints with the LPO (as Munch's assistant, [1947-1949]), the Radio Éireann Orchestra (1948-1950), the Chicago SO (1963-1969) and the Hague Residentie (1975-1976). Martinon was also the first Frenchman to win the Mahler medal (after 'Martinon, Jean,' *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 4th edn., ed. Kennedy, 458).

⁷¹ May: 'The Composer in Ireland', 31.

⁷² *ibid.*, 32.

⁷³ *ibid.*, 33.

produce performers, and lastly to produce a receptive and constantly expanding public'.⁷⁴ Devoid of such an environment, the composer is 'utterly helpless'⁷⁵ and one detects more than a hint of an apologia (compounded by his progressive deafness, to be sure) in what followed, quoted below.

If he cannot get encouragement and stimulation from his own people in his own day, his inspiration will tend to dry up at its source. It is a mistake to suppose that he fills pages and pages of music paper in order that he may receive a problematical recognition on some undetermined date in the far distant future.⁷⁶

May's addressing of the 'national question' in composition, with which the article ends, effected a most apposite and articulate response from one so intimately involved: 'It is doubtful if any nation with such a wonderful store-house of traditional music has made such a negligible contribution to art-music as we have, and it is high time we set about redressing the balance'.⁷⁷ The tenor of this statement indicated that May was beaten, but apparently not down in regard to aesthetic conviction. Furthermore, he highlighted what he saw as a blight on 'the progress of creative music in Ireland': criticism and the use of ethnic material as *sine qua non* of writing truly 'Irish' music.

Musical criticism must be creative, and not destructive, and one of the most destructive and useless types of criticism is one which starts out from an unwarrantable premise, such as that all good music must be demonstrably national in feeling, and then proceeds to chain down the unfortunate composer on this ready-made bed of Procrustes.⁷⁸

His embittered tone reflects one who had entered what was, unfortunately, the winter of his compositional career. His prime position as the leading composer of his generation still qualified him, nevertheless, for a revised version of the above-mentioned article for

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, 33.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 34.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, 34.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, 35-36.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, 36.

Fleischmann's *Music in Ireland*. However, five years had seen little development in the situation. In regard to the dearth of music publishing, despite the fact that through the enterprise of An Gúm (Government Publications) and of the sponsors of Foillseacháin Feis Átha Cliath a certain amount of Irish music published, it was 'chiefly arrangements of folk song' and thus 'little original music of a serious kind'.⁷⁹

May's continued adverting to the pitiful plight of the composer in Ireland, in comparison with 'certain enlightened countries, like Sweden and Finland, which set a proper value on culture' by '[granting] stipends to composers of exceptional merit' led him to grimly adduce that 'a composer, however, who tried to make a living by composition in Ireland would be inviting death by slow, or perhaps not so slow, starvation'.⁸⁰

An attendant lack in commissions for new works also raised May's ire. Commenting on the hopeless situation that arose from the introduction of £500 (and later £700) grants being made available for new works and arrangements of Irish folk music for performance by the Radio Éireann Orchestra, he lamented the abrogation of the former.

He also bewailed the fact that in the initial years:

when portion of the grant was used, the sum allocated to the composer for even a large-scale work was less than that which had to be allocated to the copyist ... , and even then the grant was based on the actual playing time of the composition, irrespective of nature ... - so that a composer of light music, who entered repeat marks generously at the end of the various sections of his score, could outdo the composer of serious work without any effort whatsoever Granted that there are not many composers in Ireland capable of writing music fit for a symphony concert, there are at least some whose work is worth encouraging, and no more retrograde policy could be imagined than the discontinuance of the practice of commissioning new works, apart from arrangements of folk song or dance music.⁸¹

⁷⁹ May: 'The Composer in Ireland', *Music in Ireland*, ed. Fleischmann, 166.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, 168.

While praising Radio Éireann for its recently-established prize competitions for new chamber music and orchestral works, May also pointed to another organisation that had always expressed an interest in music, but mostly that which was not Irish in origin: the Royal Dublin Society. As noted above, the RDS recitals and concerts always had been, and continued to be, attended mainly by the Anglo-Irish; by largely spurning indigenous talent in the pursuit of 'big names' the Society therefore alienated itself even further, thus entering into its own strain of 'splendid (cultural) isolation.'

May was well aware of the Society's 'substantial means' and proposed that it 'should secure first performances of works by recognised Irish composers, which in the hurly-burly of the musical scene in England have been unable to obtain a hearing'.⁸² The fact that two of his most important works (*Songs from Prison* and the quartet) were not heard in this country for some time after their completion (some twelve years in the case of the quartet) spoke much of both lack of resources, interest and money on the one hand but also of an inexplicably (and inexcusably) ignorant attitude of those of means and supposed interest in artistic endeavour, on the other.⁸³

Thus far the RDS has shown itself somewhat oblivious to its responsibilities in this respect, and it is my reasonable plea that henceforth it should bestow upon the composer just a fraction of that fatherly interest which it has up to now reserved for the horse, the bull and the boar.⁸⁴

⁸¹ *ibid.*, 168.

⁸² *ibid.*, 169.

⁸³ Although one should bear in mind, as adverted to above, that the absence of a professional string quartet must also have been a factor, it is interesting to note that special concerts devoted to music by Irish composers were held on St. Patrick's Day, with an orchestra conducted by Larchet or Vincent O'Brien. Although 'initially [enjoying] great favour', they dwindled 'inexplicably' in subsequent years (after Hughes: 'The Society and Music', 272).

⁸⁴ May: 'The Composer in Ireland', *Music in Ireland*, 169.

May's firm opposition to the prevailing nationalist idiom, so eloquently put forth above, especially in the versions of 'The Composer in Ireland', did not prevent him from directly succumbing to it. Although probably spurred by financial difficulties, he did in fact avail of Radio Éireann's commissioning scheme and contributed some arrangements, most notably the *Suite of Irish Airs* (1953).⁸⁵ In a voice quite alien to that which he had actively espoused, the five independent movements that comprise the work nevertheless display the (albeit restrained) hand of a master in their assured display of technique and sense of balance. The opening of the first movement *Ga Gréine* (The Sunbeam) displays this fact in its elegant simplicity, but as Ryan points out 'here as in its companions the listener is conscious that this is an expression without marked personality or commitment' (Example 8) (Please see following page).⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Ryan: *Nationalism and Music in Ireland* (diss.), 426.

EXAMPLE 8

May: *Suite of Irish Airs*, bars 1-10 (strings only)

Musical score for strings, measures 1-10. The score is written for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Double Bass. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/D minor) and the time signature is 3/4. The first measure includes a fermata over the first note of the Violin I part. Dynamic markings include *mp* (mezzo-piano) for the Violin I part and *p* (piano) for the other parts. The score consists of five staves with a brace on the left side.

Musical score for strings, measures 11-20. The score is written for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Double Bass. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/D minor) and the time signature is 3/4. The score consists of five staves with a brace on the left side. Dynamic markings include *p* (piano) and *mp* (mezzo-piano).

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, 427.

The fifties continued with May exercising his prose pen in preference to his compositional one. 'The Composer and Society' appeared in *The Bell* in 1954 and like its journalistic predecessors continued in an increasingly autobiographical vein to explore this often complex area. Discussing the area of income, a constant concern and calamitous subject for May, there is more than a hint of self-pity in his description of composers such as Mozart and Schubert, who 'had an extremely rough passage through the world': 'it is on record that Mozart was forced, more than once, to borrow money, and ill-health, stimulated by poverty, dragged these immortals down to a tragically early death'.⁸⁷ Thus while *he* may not have suffered a 'tragically early death' (as he lived into his seventy-fourth year), his compositional career did; as one who was assisted financially by friends and others more than once, May's awareness of his tenuous position in this regard was acute:

If one person transfers money to another, either as a loan, as a gift, or as payment for work done, it inevitably places the giver in a special relationship with the recipient. In the case of a loan he may, should the necessity arise, apply varying degrees of pressure, ranging from gentle persuasion to dire threats, while in the case of payment for work done he will have the right to specify the kind of work he wants, to circumscribe his employee's freedom of action, and to withhold future favours from him should he fail to provide what has been required of him. So that when a broadcasting corporation or film company engage a composer to do a job of work for them they have him, to a very large extent, at their mercy.⁸⁸

Whether or not he felt *RÉ* had him 'at their mercy' is a matter of conjecture; but it is, nevertheless, interesting to note the slightly contrite tone of the above statement. Perhaps this was May's way of defending or explaining his actions by his 'turning native' and producing polished but sterile arrangements of ethnic music, an idea anathematic to one of such a cosmopolitan disposition. However, he does describe later how

⁸⁷ May: 'The Composer and Society', 27.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, 27.

Radio Éireann awards prizes annually to Irish composers *without too many strings attached*, and arrangements of Irish Airs for orchestra and for choir are paid for as well.⁸⁹ (My italics)

It should be remembered that this was part of the staple fare presented by the RÉ Light Orchestra of that time; and it was precisely *this* type of work, in addition to that undertaken while Director of Music at the Abbey Theatre (1936-1951), that May felt distracted an Irish composer from 'serious' endeavour.

The main problem facing the composer in Ireland, is, as I see it, how to get the time and the freedom from outside worries and pre-occupations to do his creative work properly without jettisoning the various odd jobs which he must see after if he is to earn what is regarded as a reasonable living.⁹⁰

But, annoyingly, it was precisely this 'hack-work' that gained a composer any measure of popularity at that time. However, the cleavage between art and life May had detected in 'Music and the Nation' in 1936 was, in his view, reparable by 1954. He felt that 'society [but not, perhaps, that 'society' which had enclosed itself at Ballsbridge, i.e. the RDS] had at length become aware of [composers'] existence and wants, I think, to do its best for them'.⁹¹ Nevertheless,

it is for the composer himself to try and arrange his life so that somehow, sometime he may, during his span on earth, say what he knows he has in him to say, relapsing neither into cynicism nor despair; and thus, in spite of all imperfections and apparent failures, life and art may ultimately merge and fuse together into a perfect and rounded whole.⁹²

As adverted to above, May's 'marked personality and commitment' had steadily waned under the anxiety of the various trials and tribulations he felt that life had dealt him. A long fallow period devoid of 'serious' composition induced concerned friends to press the troubled composer into action. One such friend and colleague was Brian Boydell, whose alarmist tactics are recounted below in his inimitable fashion.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, 28.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, 29.

⁹¹ *ibid.*, 29.

I feel responsible for really ‘making’ him write his last work, *Sunlight and Shadow* because I remember saying to him (we were very good friends): “Look here, Fred – I’m going to say something awful to you: ever since the Thirties you’ve ‘laid back’ on your old reputation and done damn all, and there’s so much you could do [!] You’ve jolly well got to write something.”⁹³

Thus *Sunlight and Shadow* (1955), his last work, came to be. Hailed by many as his best,⁹⁴ it is scored for full orchestra, including harp and celeste, and was dedicated to, and premièred by, Milan Horvat and the RÉSO on January 22 1956, at the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin. The work is pensive in mood and is, as noted above, thematically linked (in spirit) with the earlier *Spring Nocturne* and *Songs from Prison*; its use of orchestral colours for the purposes of illumination and shading illustratively befits the title. But perhaps there was a more psychological adjunct to this obvious musical feature.

The idea that there is, in addition to present reality, another reality that is inevitably *absent* is a commonplace in psychology. The ‘shadow’ side of the psyche is essential to the life of the organism as a whole, because it is only when both sides are fully integrated that creativity can be released (and here one is tempted to think of Frederick May’s ... *Sunlight and Shadow*).⁹⁵

Whether this allusion forms an indirect corollary with May’s idealistic view of an ‘organic’ relationship existing between the composer and society is questionable. What is known is that the shadow cast by increasing deafness and personal problems began to envelop him even more from 1955 onwards.

Nevertheless, May was the subject of Radio Éireann programme in a commendable series entitled ‘Composers at Work’ presented by Henry Comerford in 1958.⁹⁶ The

⁹² *ibid.*, 29.

⁹³ Interview with the author, 9 December 1998, though incident recalled also in Boydell: ‘A programme commemorating Frederick May’, 2.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, 2.

⁹⁵ Pine: ‘Growth, 1890-1921’, *To Talent Alone*, 183.

⁹⁶ See bibliography below.

programme consisted mainly of a selection from May's twenty or so undated songs and also included a revised work entitled *Idyll*, for violin and piano. Beginning with a rather rough rendition of his accomplished but staid *Three Irish Folksongs* ('Seoladh na nGamhna, 'Sliabh Geal gCua' and 'Dilín Ó Deamhas'), the programme later contained an interesting statement regarding May: 'like most contemporary composers, he is drawn to the folklore of his native land'; although later on one hears songs on texts by the Czech poet Jaroslav Kvapil and Walt Whitman. The aforementioned *Idyll*, which was performed by William Shanahan (violin) and May himself (piano), possibly in the studio, is demonstrative of the latent 'Irish' pastoralism mentioned above, whereas the songs are of a romantic nature, reflecting the influence of Hugo Wolf (on whose songs May modelled his own).⁹⁷ What is most interesting about the programme is the extended talk that was given by May, where he laid bare his innermost feelings in regard to composition and his position as a composer, with perhaps an oblique reference to his own place in Irish composition. Commenting on how composers come by their ideas and briefly on the flawless fecundity of Mozart and Schubert, he said

Unluckily, the great majority of us are by no means so fortunate. I have often felt myself to be like a rock on the sea-shore - covered over by the incoming tide every so often, but when the tide withdraws again, it is left once more desolate and forsaken. Sometimes, one may ask oneself, in moments of depression, whether it would be better never to have been given any creative gift at all, then only to have been granted an unserviceable kind of 'half-gift'; so variable, so uncertain and so capricious. But to think like that, even if understandable, is also silly. After all, a bridge has its uses, even if it is not an end in itself. And John the Baptist is not without honour, for to him it was given to prepare for a greater and more resplendent personality.⁹⁸

The latter comment could be interpreted as May's tacit acknowledgement that perhaps his distinctive voice and outlook, largely practised and pursued in relative obscurity, was to herald the dawn of a new age in Irish composition, less insular and bound to an

⁹⁷ S., T.O.: 'Spring Nocturne', 17.

⁹⁸ May in 'Composers at Work', prod. Garvey.

idealistic past. It is thus all the more tragic that he was not musically active in the veritable cultural 'revolution' that followed in the 1960s, advented by Lemass's rise to power.

Nevertheless, an equally revealing exegesis came some sixteen years after Comerford's programme in 1974 at the time of May's 'renaissance', precipitated by the performance, recording and subsequent publication (in 1976) of his quartet. Here he revealed the reasons behind his lifelong admiration for his former teacher and mentor at the RCM and how this coloured his later directional shift in composition:

I have great respect for Vaughan Williams, because he made such a great effort to rescue English music from the domination of Wagner and his ilk. He seemed to think salvation lay in English folk music. I'm not sure if he was right ... I think he recognised earlier than most composers that *there was a danger that the international market would be overtaken by serial and atonal music, leaving no room for national flavour*; and this is why he tried to establish an English national musical tradition.⁹⁹(My italics)

Surely if the reason behind May's repudiation of the modernism he so cogently evinced in the *Scherzo*, the string quartet and the *Songs from Prison* is sought, one should look no further than the above statement. However, the crux of the issue was to follow:

If I hadn't been afflicted in this way, I'd have liked to try to bridge the national-international gap myself. This is something that Seán Ó Riada never quite managed to do. He did wonderful work for Irish folk music and developed himself greatly in so doing; but there was always a dichotomy between his Irish music and the work with which he achieved international recognition.¹⁰⁰

The gap is a hard one to bridge for an Irishman. In the centuries that the French and the Finns were preparing to produce composers of the stature of Debussy and Sibelius, Ireland had no art music development at all. We had had fine national ballads, all right, but everything else was imported. I think we're still suffering the results of that.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ May in Kent: 'Kent talks to May'.

¹⁰⁰ One could, of course, apportion this description to May himself (which may have been the reason for his raising such a point, certainly in reference to the second part of the statement), perhaps substituting 'Irish folk music' for 'Irish art music' and 'Irish music' for 'folk music arrangements'. Indeed, the similarities inherent in the viewpoints and career fortunes of both composers is alluded to by Harry White (see White: *The Keeper's Recital*, 135-136).

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

That May noted and would have endeavoured to bridge such a 'gap' is a sure indication of his (understandably) bi-cultural leanings; being Irish within a European cultural milieu and advocating that sense of one's identity was, certainly by the fifties, laudable for artists such as Joyce, Beckett and the Yeats brothers but strangely unacceptable for composers, bound by the perpetual question of 'To be, or not to be (Irish)'. For unlike the aforementioned Ó Riada, who seemed to find self-advertised, personal and musical fulfilment in a quasi-mystical 'Gaelic' lifestyle and identity, perhaps May (during his 'active' years) increasingly saw himself as the nexus between a 'European' and an 'Irish' (though not narrowly so) compositional mindset. Thus his efforts to promote himself as such in the face of cultural stagnation and official ignorance are all the more noble; Charles Acton's description of May as 'our Sibelius *manqué*', though regrettable in its resonance, is thus most apt.¹⁰²

However, perhaps it is better to remember him for what he *was*, rather than what he could have been: 'a fervent advocate of cosmopolitanism who continued to pursue more universal artistic objectives throughout his creative life, at a time when Ireland preferred to look inwards; he also hoped to ignite belief in the search for an individual style, free from the constraints of national stereotypes.'¹⁰³

¹⁰² Acton: 'Frederick May: an appreciation'.

¹⁰³ Dibble: 'The Composer in the Academy (1) 1850-1940', 417.

CHAPTER FOUR

A RENAISSANCE MAN IN THE COURT OF 'KING JEV'

'I would like to give pleasure by my compositions ... to add to, shall I say, the cultural heritage of one's area'.¹ Brian Boydell's aforementioned statement of intent (made in 1970) is rather modest when read today. As one of the most influential figures in twentieth-century Irish musical endeavour, Boydell has, undoubtedly, added much to his country's cultural heritage. But how has that self-same heritage wrought an effect on his sense of identity, his cultural mores, and most importantly, his music? In order to address these questions, a detailed look at the composer's fascinating background and colourful career should provide the necessary evidence.

The youngest of the triumvirate, Boydell was born in Dublin on 17 March 1917 and educated at the universities of Cambridge and Heidelberg, the RCM and the RIAM. After gaining external MusB and MusD degrees from TCD in 1942 and 1959, respectively, Boydell went on to become professor of music there from 1962-1982, revolutionising both the tenure and character of the post, and creating an honours school of music. His retirement saw him gain recognition as an esteemed historical musicologist, publishing two books on music in eighteenth-century Dublin.²

¹ Boydell quoted in Acton: 'An Interview with Boydell', 102.

² Boydell, Brian: *A Dublin Musical Calendar 1700-60* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1988) and *Rotunda Music in Eighteenth-Century Dublin* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1992).

Boydell was born to a Protestant Anglo-Irish family of the rising upper middle class.³ As part of a community who, in the wider sense, had either departed from the burning embers of the ‘big houses’ or stayed amidst the seismic shift in Ireland’s political status from colony (via revolution) to dominion, Boydell’s parents would surely have felt isolated. In the inter-war period, the Anglo-Irish usually distanced themselves from the new Irish *bourgeoisie*, preferring to perpetuate the look eastwards for their moral and social values, and their political views.

The composer’s father, James Boydell, was somewhat emblematic of this mindset while his mother Eileen went ‘against the grain’, even though her leanings were tempered by family and community loyalties. The composer comments:

My father was a very, very strict Moravian [a Protestant sect] – he never told a lie, not even in jest. My mother, on the other hand, was quite a wild sort of person. She really was a ‘secret’ republican – very fond of Irish nationalism and, of course, very different from my father, who believed that the King of England was appointed by God.⁴

Boydell had early experiences of republicanism of a less ‘secret’ nature whilst a child. Following the prevalent practice of the day amongst those of their ilk, his family rented large, usually suburban houses in preference to purchase; indeed, incidents of that nature which he recalled in later life, stemmed from a spell in Howth.

I remember my cot being moved into the passage, because Howth was in an area of battle. ‘Dev’ [Eamon de Valera] and his lot were up in one place and there was some pitched battle ... I remember going into town one day with my father and passing barracks where [he] would gently say “Just get down in the back, ... in case there’s any shooting.”

³ I follow here Murphy *et al.*: *Education and the Arts*, 219-229, where a detailed account of Boydell’s cultural background, based on an interview, is afforded.

⁴ Boydell in ‘All My Enthusiasms’, prod. Makower.

... I remember the extraordinary *depressing* feeling I got on seeing the Four Courts with the 'twisted' light which was in front of the portico, twisted by the explosion which had blown it up and it giving me an *extraordinary* feeling of terror and foreboding.⁵

Boydell's father was a respected maltster in a family-run business that made malt for Guinness's brewery while his mother was among the first female graduates of the University of Dublin, gaining honours in natural sciences at Trinity College.⁶ Thus in their household, as in many other Anglo-Irish homes of the period, a great emphasis was placed on the acquisition of certain accomplishments by the children with a concomitant high level of attainment; an expectation to learn sports (such as tennis), to develop equestrian skills, and the learning of a musical instrument were seen as necessary cultural pursuits to equip the child for his/her future place in life. However, a necessary cultural achievement was not regarded as a basis of serious professional endeavour, although Boydell's blossoming musical talent was recognised not by his largely musically-illiterate parents, but by his governess, and encouraged also by his paternal grandmother and aunt. James Boydell's lack of interest in music was quite surprising as his mother had visited Bayreuth for the Wagner festival, and his sister was a fairly good amateur pianist. Thus the composer's parents generally exhibited no more than the requisite polite interest in regard to music and the other arts; Brian's father preferred the traditional over the exotic or contemporary, although his mother displayed marked catholicity in taste, especially in the domain of literature.

⁵ Boydell in 'Composers in Conversation', prod. de Bromhead..

⁶ Battersby, Eileen: 'Brian's double forte: Brian Boydell talks to Eileen Battersby', *Irish Times*, 6 November 1992.

After a period in Nightingale Hall, one of Ireland's first kindergartens, the young Boydell was sent to Monkstown Park preparatory school at the age of seven, before starting his educational sojourn abroad at the Dragon School, Oxford. He comments: 'For families of my background, the usual thing to do was to send your son to school in England: to learn good manners and get rid of the awful 'brogue'⁷; while finding Dragon School 'empire-hearty, but [with] a great sense of freedom', he found the attitude at his next 'placement' (public school at Rugby) bent on the enshrinement of colonialism.

I reacted against my upbringing. ... [At Rugby School,] they were so patronising towards the Irish that I became really, rabidly nationalistic. For instance, one of my earliest compositions which was written while I was [there] were variations on an Irish tune, 'The Snowy Breasted Pearl' and the title I had all written out in Gaelic script.⁸

The political and social orientation at Rugby also saw its pupils being obliged to join the Officers' Training Corps; the enforced regime he had to endure fuelled the growth of Boydell's acute pacifistic views - his rejection of the use of force as a means to an end, in addition to the fiercely tribal attitude he found in sporting activities whilst there, saw him reject romantic nationalism as a *raison d'être* in later life.

However, Rugby did have its more positive aspects, especially in regard to the young composer's musical development. Under the inspirational tutelage of the director of music, K. A. Stubbs, Boydell studied organ, piano and voice and was introduced to a wide spectrum of composers, styles and performance media.⁹ Thus an inventory of influences formed which he absorbed into his own emerging musical personality.

⁷ Boydell in 'All my Enthusiasms'. prod. Makower.

⁸ Interview with the author, 9 December 1998. The piece he refers to is his second work, *Variations on 'The Snowy Breasted Pearl'* Op. 2 (1935), for piano (after 'Brian Boydell', *Catalogue of Contemporary Irish Music*, ed. Harrison, 14).

Wagner, Delius, Warlock, Sibelius, Bloch, and Bartók, respectively, were added to by Stravinsky, Berg, Hindemith and Prokofiev in his later career to form a potent fusion of styles that helped foment his own musical language.

On leaving Rugby in 1935, Boydell attended the Evangelisches Kirchenmusikalisches Institut at the University of Heidelberg, mainly, he comments, ‘to learn the language and broaden my general educational experience by living in a foreign country’.¹⁰ Weekly visits to the Mannheim Opera House, an intensive study of Wagner, and the opportunity of seeing Richard Strauss conducting his *Die Frau ohne Schatten* in Munich were among the highlights, while he admits ‘I was too steeped in cultural interests, and too immature to be politically aware (except in disturbing retrospect) of what was going on in Germany at that time’.¹¹ He recalls that period and the chilling implications of living in fear in a police state as having

... a lot to do with turning me against nationalism and all it entailed. I was living with a family ... [and the father] was very much anti-Hitler. I remember him saying: “We must admit Hitler has pulled the place together, but we can’t like him for all the dreadful things he’s doing”. They’d be terrified in case I would report him for having said things like this. And then the tragic thing - his children were being ‘won over’: I remember one evening one of the boys coming back saying what a wonderful time he’d had with the *Hitler Jugend* on a week-end camping and marching. The awful disturbance of the old man as he did not approve, but did not dare say so because his son would have reported him.¹²

After leaving Germany, Boydell won a choral exhibition to Clare College, Cambridge, in 1935 (involving the training of, and singing in, the chapel choir) but read natural

⁹ Stubbs made such an impression on the young Boydell that the young composer dedicated his first work, *The Wild Geese* Op. 1 (1935) for low voice and piano, to him. The piece was based on a text by the then headmaster at Rugby, P.H.B. Lyon, and its vocal part was first performed by the composer himself.

¹⁰ Klein: ‘Irish Composers and Foreign Education’, 274.

¹¹ *ibid.*, 281.

¹² Boydell in an interview with the author.

sciences, conforming with his father's wish. However, this did not deter him from immersing himself in the musical life at the college, and James Boydell's determination for his only son to follow in his footsteps in malting was softened somewhat by the realisation of the sheer depth of his son's interest and talent in music. Thus he offered to subsidise a period of study at the RCM on the condition that Brian attained a good degree; first class honours in 1938 saw Boydell off to London where he studied voice, oboe and composition, the latter under Patrick Hadley and Herbert Howells. However, his studies were curtailed a year later by the outbreak of the Second World War and he returned to his homeland after nine years of term-time absence to confront a rather different type of hindrance.

When I came back to Ireland after being educated in England you couldn't get a good job unless you spoke Irish. I had the greatest difficulty in being accepted as an Irishman because I had the wrong type of voice ...¹³

I'm always slightly embarrassed about my background. But I think it's unfair to criticise people for things that weren't their own fault ... because that kind of an upbringing tended to alienate [me] from the sort of people that I came to like later on, not of the same background. And I had quite a struggle right throughout my life ... trying to identify myself with the people that I really felt I belonged to. Number one: What it was to be 'Irish' - that comes later when I was sent to England and number two: What it was not to be set aside as somebody who came from a 'superior' kind of privileged background. And I've had quite a struggle throughout my life dealing with ... those rather 'heavy' disabilities.¹⁴

So I saw the 'other side of the coin' and really 'sat on the fence.'¹⁵

Boydell's latterly-avowed position of 'sitting on the fence' meant, in effect, that he expressly went 'neither one way or the other'¹⁶; thus he asserted himself as a cosmopolitan Irishman. However, the practical expediencies of the war soon obfuscated these aesthetic questions and called his dormant scientific knowledge into use for a

¹³ Boydell in 'All my Enthusiasms', prod. Makower.

¹⁴ Boydell in 'Composers in Conversation: Interview with Boydell', prod de Bromhead.

¹⁵ Boydell in 'All my Enthusiasms', prod Makower.

¹⁶ *ibid.*,

laboratory job with his father. Boydell's existence as an inveterate polymath, whose 'enthusiasms' progressively embraced racing cars, photography, gardening, poetry, mysticism, fishing and archaeology, then saw him teaching painting at St. Columba's College in Dublin¹⁷ while simultaneously cultivating a clientele of private vocal pupils (he became professor of singing at the RIAM from 1944-1948). Thus the early forties saw Boydell's time divided between music and painting; he gained his external MusB from TCD in 1942 under Larchet's tutelage at the RIAM, while lessons from Mainie Jellett saw him becoming involved with the White Stag' group, 'a small gathering of artists associated with the surrealist movement and accused of being "spies and communists"'.¹⁸ His bohemian lifestyle even informed his music: *The Feather of Death* Op.22 (1943) was a setting of three surrealist texts by fellow White Stag associate, painter Thurloe Connolly, for baritone, flute and string trio. It was perhaps this work, along with his incidental music for Paul Vincent Carroll's play *The Strings are False* (1942), which confirmed him as the *enfant terrible* of the Irish contemporary music scene of the era.

Thus when the time came to choose between painting and music, Boydell, of course, picked the latter, ceasing his painting activities in 1944. He had, since Rugby, produced

¹⁷ 'I had no qualifications except that I was a "Sunday Painter." ' (Boydell in Dungan: 'Everything except team-games and horse-racing', 10.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, 10. The core of the White Stag Group comprised of English painters Basil Rakoczi (1908-1979) and Kenneth Hall (1913-1946), who, with fellow pacifist and associate Herbrand Ingouville-Williams, fled to Ireland in 1939. It was first orientated towards psychology (reflecting Rakoczi's interests), and art; founded in late 1935, it held its first art exhibition at 34 Lower Baggot St., Dublin in April 1940, featuring works by Mainie Jellett, Georgette Rondel and Elisabeth Ormsby, in addition to those of its founders. Their adopted emblem, a white stag set on dark ground, was Hungarian in origin and signified creativity. Boydell's *The Return of the Wood* and *Atlas Approached* (both of 1943) were exhibited in the White Stag-arranged *Exhibition of Subjective Art*, at 6 Lower Baggot St. in January 1944, and displayed a style that

a steady stream of music but later asserted that ‘everything ... up to the period of the five Joyce Songs and the first string quartet [i.e., the late 1940s], [should be regarded as] definitely *early* works ...’.¹⁹ Thus a look at ‘Irish’ inferences in Boydell’s works should, perhaps, begin from the start of his self-professed ‘mature’ period with a look at the *Five Joyce Songs* Op 28 (1946) for baritone and piano.

Comparing the *Symphony for Strings* Op. 26 (composed in 1945 and premièred that year by the Dublin Orchestral Players under the composer’s baton)²⁰ with the *Joyce Songs*, Aloys Fleischmann noted that:

here there is an expensiveness, natural to the ardour of youth, which was soon to be drastically curbed ... in the *Joyce Songs* ... , settings as clear and intense in feelings as the poems themselves, but relying, as with Joyce, on understatement for their effect. The range is considerable from the lilting, folk-song of “Oh! (*sic*), It was out by Donnycarney” to the dramatic incisiveness of “I hear an army charging on the land.”²¹

The ‘lilting, folk-song’ of the above-mentioned setting is confirmed by the work’s evocative (though *uncharacteristically* Boydellian) post-‘Celtic twilight’ beginning and perpetuated by ubiquitous use of fifths in the right hand. Inhabiting a diatonic/modal ‘netherworld’, the piano accompaniment uses the chord of F major as a non-functional cornerstone (with liberal ‘spicings’ of a D chord with variable mode) while sporting an uppermost strand in the transposed Dorian mode (beginning on c²). The vocal line opens with a ‘gapped’ melody in C, its seventh flattened to give a modal flavour while

tended towards surrealism (after Kennedy, S.B.: *Irish Art and Modernism* (Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies at The Queen’s University of Belfast, 1991), 90-115).

¹⁹ Boydell in Acton: ‘Interview with Boydell’, 98.

²⁰ A founder-member in 1939, Boydell conducted the Dublin Orchestral Players from 1942-1967, replacing Havelock Nelson as principal conductor when the latter became accompanist at BBC Northern Ireland in 1947.

²¹ Fleischmann, Aloys: ‘Brian Boydell’.

displaying a simple but effective use of syllabic note-placement from bars 1-9 (Example 1).

EXAMPLE 1

Boydell: *Five Joyce Songs* III, bars 1-9

Allegretto grazioso

O. it was

mp

Rit

Rit

Tempo

out by Donny-car-ney when the bat flew from tree to

tree

3
4

Fleischmann's contention that the songs match the poems in clarity and intensity of feeling, with characteristic Joycean understatement, is tellingly underlined in the melancholic, counter-illustrative whole-tone tracery of 'O, happily', whose effect is swiftly curbed by the repeat of the second word which presents a descending G flat major triad over rich modal harmony (bars 22-24). The last words of the setting '(But softer than the breath of summer was) the kiss she gave to me' are illustrated with another whole-tone 'snippet' (bars 31-33) while the ending for solo re-captures the 'mood' of the start (bars 34-37) (Example 2).

EXAMPLE 2

Boydell: *Five Joyce Songs* III, bars 22-37

The image shows a handwritten musical score for 'Five Joyce Songs III, bars 22-37' by Boydell. The score is in 3/4 time and features a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The score is divided into two systems. The first system starts at bar 22 with the tempo marking 'murmuring' and dynamic 'mp'. The vocal line begins with 'hap-pi-ly' and the piano accompaniment features a whole-tone 'snippet'. The second system starts at bar 31 with the tempo marking 'Poco Rit' and dynamic 'p'. The vocal line begins with 'But soft-er than the' and the piano accompaniment features another whole-tone 'snippet'. The score ends at bar 37 with a final cadence.

breath of summer was the kiss she you gave to me

poco Allargando

A Tempo

Crescendo

mf

The following year saw the production of Boydell's String Quartet No. 1 op. 31 which won the Radio Éireann Chamber Music Prize in 1949 and which, along with the orchestral *In Memoriam Mahatma Gandhi* (1948), can be considered among the composer's major early works. Wholly different than the aforementioned *Joyce Songs*,

these works saw the maturation of Boydell's musical language through his employment of the octatonic scale²², a feature that was to characterise his style as his career progressed. As Gareth Cox comments: 'the octatonic scale (with its many diatonic features), which is ubiquitous in his works, saved him from having to eschew tonality, but his antipathy toward the Schoenberg school and any 'systems' explains his rather anarchic treatment of the scale'.²³

Such strong musical beliefs were also reflected in Boydell's attitudes towards the progress of, and encouragement for, matters musical in the Ireland of the early 1950s. Having made his philosophy clear by being a founder-member of the Music Association of Ireland in 1948, Boydell also, like May and Fleischmann before him, wrote eloquently about these concerns.²⁴ In an aptly-entitled article 'Culture and Chauvinism' from 1950, he voiced his opinions in a most compelling fashion about the isolationist tactics exercised by the establishment in regard to culture and foreign influences; some of his opening comments are worth quoting here if only to emphasise the strength of his conviction.

It is ... well to realise that the importance of [Irish] culture depends upon the contribution it can make to the Art of Living of the world as a whole. Furthermore, the character of any individual or nation is formed by the reaction of that individual to his surroundings. The richer his experience, and the wider his knowledge, the more developed is his character, and the more capable he becomes of making a contribution to the evolution of human experience. ...²⁵

A misinterpretation of the true nature of that form of nationalism which can benefit the world at large is already tolling the death-knell of Irish culture. When we should be keeping our eyes open to the developments around us, so that we may interpret and expand them from the point of view

²² A scale that alternates tones and semitones thus giving nine notes to the octave.

²³ Cox: 'Octatonicism in the String Quartets of Brian Boydell', 266.

²⁴ For the purposes of this study, the following articles were consulted:

Boydell, Brian: 'Culture and Chauvinism', *Envoy* ii (May 1950), 75-79; 'The Future of Music in Ireland', *The Bell* xvi/4 (1951), 21-29.

²⁵ Boydell: 'Culture and Chauvinism', 75.

of our own national vision as a contribution to the world, we are told by loud voices that we should shut our doors and develop our own pure little culture on our own.²⁶

Boydell then went on to criticise the ‘hysterical exaggeration of individuality’, symptomatic of the prevailing national sentiment, which posited that Ireland’s long subjugation validated its claims.²⁷

It is time ... that we grew up and realised that the individuality of a Nation is expressed by the *natural* activities and thoughts of its people, through the mouthpiece of its artists.

Any artist who is Irish, and is sensitive to the strong and individual atmosphere of his country cannot help expressing the Irish spirit in his work; and it is his particular viewpoint which is the contribution to the Art of the World. If the artist should become aggressively self-conscious of his nationality he deceives himself and becomes an impostor; he behaves like a small boy asserting his individuality, and adds nothing to the progress of culture.²⁸

Boydell’s vitriolic indictment of ‘Irish Ireland’ continues by describing his very personal philosophy of creation while deriding artists who follow a nationalist ‘agenda.’

One either expresses what one feels in a language which can (in the case of music and painting) be understood by the world, or, one plasters a work with nationalist emblems, dug up from the glorious past. In the first case, one may be a great artist making an individual and national contribution to the culture of the world. In the second case, one is merely a ridiculous fraud, who may be acclaimed by hysterical nationalists, who lack the depth of vision to understand the true nature of artistic expression.²⁹

The issue of ‘composition and the folk idiom’ elicits a particularly percipient response from one who was (and is), perhaps, the most trenchantly cosmopolitan of the triumvirate;³⁰ note also an early definition of what he was later to label as ‘plastic shamrocks’.

We are fortunate and unfortunate in having an incomparable tradition of folksong. I say “unfortunate” because herein lies a great danger. Folksong is a spontaneous expression of national feeling; it is totally different from the organised expression of art music. It is too easy for unimaginative composers to-day to hide their lack of imagination by pasting this ready-made national expression all over their music.³¹

²⁶ *ibid.*, 75-76.

²⁷ *ibid.*, 76.

²⁸ *ibid.*, 77.

²⁹ *ibid.*, 77-78.

³⁰ A view that was confirmed by Charles Acton in an interview with the author, 18 February 1999.

³¹ *ibid.*, 78.

Boydell's contempt for the prevalent bias against the influence of 'foreign' music draws the telling rejoinder:

... before we turn for inspiration from Irish folk-music, it would be well to realise that what the average person believes to be the genuine article is nothing more than a shadow, distorted by Victorian musical ideas.³²

'Pseudo-Irishness', it seems, whether couched in the quaint harmonisations of Thomas Moore's *Irish Melodies*, or as practised by perpetrators of the 'Stanford-Harty Anglo-Irish tradition', is anathema to Boydell.³³ However, it should be understood that his revulsion is not due to a disregard for the ethnic repertory itself, but rather its obvious misuse as a badge of (largely contrived) national identity and expression. He comments that:

it's wrong to say I wasn't drawn towards Irish folk-song, it was just that I never got to know much about it. There's no denying the real beauty of it, ... *sean-nós* singing is very beautiful.³⁴

Irish themes as such don't lend themselves to symphonic development and that is a mistake that a lot of people made; also, the use of folk-song in order to 'stamp' one's music with a national flavour is something that belongs very much to nineteenth century romanticism and I don't think that it really has a place in this century.³⁵

Returning to the article, Boydell's final paragraph was a calculated parting shot across the bows of the establishment's cultural isolationist tactics.

If Irish culture is worthy of survival, which I sincerely believe it is, it will survive on its own merits as an integral part of the culture of the world. Insulate it from the invigorating influences of other countries, and it will surely rot in its own mildew of chauvinism.³⁶

³² *ibid.*, 79.

³³ Boydell in Acton 'Interview with Boydell', 104.

³⁴ Boydell in an interview with the author.

³⁵ Brian Boydell in 'Music and the Musician', prod. Carty.

³⁶ Boydell: 'Culture and Chauvinism', 79.

Boydell's obvious concern with music as an issue in Irish culture did not detract him from highlighting more practical exigencies. Thus in the late forties and early fifties, he was part of a cadre of regular contributors to *The Bell* which helped establish a 'presence for music largely unencumbered by the aesthetic debate'.³⁷ His 1951 essay, gravely entitled 'The Future of Music in Ireland', precipitated a vital and controversial debate when he famously urged that, despite the existence of radio orchestras and marked improvement in a number of musical infrastructures since the mid-1920s, 'music in Ireland ... is in a shocking state'.³⁸ Compositionally, this period witnessed what was perhaps (notwithstanding the achievement of the first quartet) one of the most accomplished works of Boydell's *œuvre* to date: the Violin Concerto op. 36 (1953, rev. 1954).

The work was commissioned and premièred by Jaroslav Vanaček³⁹ (its solo part was composed with his guidance) on 1 October 1954 at the Phoenix Hall in Dublin with the RÉSO, conducted by the composer. 'Brittle [and] energetic with moments of quiet',⁴⁰ the work exhibits a quirky, undercurrent admixture of *Mitteleuropa* and ethnic Irish elements (the latter wholly innately drawn), which gave a vivid and pungent vitality to its musical language. The composer himself has adverted to this fact:

³⁷ White: *The Keeper's Recital*, 133.

³⁸ Boydell: 'The Future of Music in Ireland', 21, quoted in *ibid.*, 133.

³⁹ Vanaček was a Czech-born artist who had come to Ireland to give a recital with his wife at the RDS and had asked to remain in the country. Firstly at the RIAM, he later moved to Dublin's Municipal School of Music (now the DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama) where he was professor of violin for many years. (See O'Kelly: *The National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland*, [Chap 2:] 'The RTÉSO 1948-1973') for details regarding other immigrant musicians who 'escaped' from (now former) 'Eastern-bloc' countries to Ireland during this period).

⁴⁰ Fleischmann: 'Brian Boydell'.

I've always eschewed the idea of writing 'Irish' music Nevertheless the flavour seems to have got under my skin and I think that comes out very much in my violin concerto.⁴¹

An early 'moment of quiet' for the soloist (after the 'energetic' opening) sees the plaintive second theme which, akin to a similar moment in May's quartet, is unmistakably Irish (bars 92-94).

There is one particular little figure which keeps cropping up in my music, and I notice it keeps cropping up in Irish folk music. It's completely unconscious, it just happens. I think I use the sort of characteristic Irish melismata unconsciously ...⁴²

This theme, cast in the Dorian mode beginning on the note c" over a bare harmonic backing, is then enunciated an octave higher and added to, before a reversion to its original register is appended by an example of the 'characteristic Irish melismata' he adverts to above (bar 103). The exposition of the theme in largely string-based instrumentation, after its truncation in the solo part, adds even more to its redolence (bar 110-119; not included in the example). As Axel Klein comments: 'The effect of an old Irish lament is thereby strongly evoked'⁴³ (Example 3) (Please see following page).

⁴¹ Boydell in O' Kelly: 'An Ongoing Tradition', 8, also quoted in Klein: *Die Musik Irlands*, 230.

⁴² Boydell in Acton: 'Interview with Boydell', 105.

EXAMPLE 3

Boydell: Violin Concerto I, bars 91-110 (solo violin and strings only)

Meno Mosso
♩ = 76 (no rubato)

The musical score is presented in two systems. The top system shows the Solo Violin and the string sections (V.I., V.II., Viola, Cello, Bass, and Harfe) with their respective parts. The Solo Violin part is marked 'Solo Vln' and features a melodic line with triplets and a fermata. The string parts are marked 'arco mp' and include triplets and dynamic markings. The bottom system provides a more detailed view of the Solo Violin and string parts, including dynamic markings like 'dlee', 'pp', 'p', and 'arco pp.'

⁴³ 'Der Effect eines altirischen Lamento wird dadurch besonders stark hervorgerufen', quoted from Klein:

A handwritten musical score for a string quartet and piano. The score is written on six staves. The top staff is the first violin, followed by the second violin, the first and second violas, the first and second cellos, and the piano. The music is in 4/4 time and features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes. Dynamic markings such as *pp*, *mp*, and *pp* are present throughout the piece. The score is divided into measures by vertical bar lines, and there are some handwritten annotations and markings, including a '2' above a measure in the first violin part and an 'x' above a measure in the piano part.

Handwritten musical score for Violin (Vln) and Piano (Piano). The score is written on six staves. The top staff is for the Violin (Vln), and the bottom staff is for the Piano. The middle four staves are for the Piano's right hand, with the notes 'I.', 'la', 'lo', and 'is' written vertically to the left of each staff. The score is divided into three measures. The first measure contains a violin melody with a flat (b) and a slur. The second measure contains a violin melody with a slur and a dynamic marking of *p*. The third measure contains a violin melody with a slur and a dynamic marking of *pp*. The piano accompaniment consists of chords and arpeggiated figures. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, dynamics (*p*, *pp*), and articulation marks. There are some handwritten annotations and corrections throughout the score.

Molto piu mosso

mf

poco cresc.

poco cresc.

mp

p

Overall, Boydell achieves remarkable unity in the first movement through concentration on this theme and its rapid, semi-quaver based predecessor; he even manages to coalesce the 'spirit' of each in the soloist's cadenza. Its opening is a good case in point: here repeated fifths preface a rendition of the second theme which is soon interspersed by semiquaver figuration of octatonic melodic content (bars 169-174). The interspersion is thus informed by the first theme, as is the *kamikaze*-like descent of the violin's line to a natural in bar 176 (Example 4).

EXAMPLE 4

Boydell: Violin Concerto I, bars 169-176 (solo violin only)

The image shows a page of a musical score for Boydell's Violin Concerto I, bars 169-176. The score is arranged in a system with eight staves. The top staff is for the Solo Violin (Vln), which is marked 'Cadenza' and contains the main melodic line. The following staves are for the Violin I (V.I.), Violin II (V.II.), Viola, Cello, Bass, and Harp. The strings are marked 'pp' and 'Mutes off'. A box containing the number '170' is located below the string staves. The Solo Violin part features repeated fifths and semiquaver figuration, as described in the text.

This image shows a continuation of the musical score for Example 4, focusing on the Solo Violin part and the rest of the orchestra from bar 170 to 176. The Solo Violin part is marked 'Cadenza' and features repeated fifths and semiquaver figuration. The orchestra parts are marked 'pp' and 'Mutes off'. The Solo Violin part features a 'kamikaze-like descent' of the violin's line to a natural in bar 176, as described in the text.

The above-mentioned melisma of the work's first movement, which pointed strongly to its composer's nationality, is what helps to add a new depth of expression to the second; indeed, Boydell himself once remarked upon the Lento as being 'very Irish'.⁴⁴ The opening features an exotic, octatonic melody for the soloist contributing to an overall sonority that evokes Bartók, before being 'capped' by the now familiar melisma (bars 7-16) (Example 5a). Somewhat later, the melisma re-appears (though not strictly 'on' one note) in a similar setting after another octatonic 'flourish' in a different guise: this time similar in figuration, as Klein points out, to that found in *sean-nós* vocal lines (bars 31-34) (Example 5b) (Please see following pages).⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Boydell in Acton 'Interview with Boydell', 105.

EXAMPLE 5a

Boydell: Violin Concerto II, bars 7-16 (solo violin, strings and harp only)

1. p.
T.g. *P. tranquillo - pressare.*
Solo Vln *Con Sordino*
V.I. *p > pp*
V.II. *p > pp*
Viola
Cello
Bass
Harfe *p* *pp* *Clacy Gouge* *CH-PR AB-AB*

10

dim *pp* *dim* *pp* *dim* *pp*

15

⁴⁵ Klein: *Die Musik Irlands*, 228.

EXAMPLE 5b

Boydell: Violin Concerto I, bars 31-34 (solo violin, strings and harp only)

This musical score covers bars 31 to 34. The top staff is marked *Rall. ad* with a tempo change to $\text{♩} = 54$. The Solo Violin part features a melodic line with a *Senza Sord.* marking and a dynamic of *pp*. The string parts (V.I., V.II., Viola, Cello, Bass) are marked *Senza Sord.* and include various dynamics such as *pp*, *p*, and *mp*. The Harp part includes a sequence of notes: *A₄ G₄ C₅ D₅ B₄ G₄ F₄ G₄*. Handwritten annotations include *1/2 c. Cb* and a boxed number **30**.

This block shows the continuation of the musical score for bars 31-34, including the Solo Violin and string parts. A boxed number **31** is visible at the bottom right of this section.

The third and final movement combines the rhythmic vitality of the first with the melodic drama of the second.⁴⁶ That the piece as a whole stands, perhaps, as Boydell's most cogent example of a synthesis between the conscious use of some contemporary art-music techniques of its era and unconscious ethnic Irish elements, owes much to the above-mentioned influence of Bartók, who forged a similar alliance with the music of his native Hungary.

... I feel that the position of the creative artist in Ireland is to express, through the international language of his/[her] art, the 'feeling' of Ireland. I'm proud to be Irish, but I hate all the 'trappings' of nationalism: what I love about this country [are] the landscape and the people My image there was Bartók - [he] never used a folk-song in any of his major works (right, he did arrange folk-songs); what he did was 'absorb' the whole spirit of what produced Hungarian folk-music by looking all through Europe (even as far as North Africa) to trace its origins and learn all about it. That soaked into his bones, and then he produced himself.⁴⁷

An encapsulation in sound of 'the feeling', 'landscape' and 'people' of Ireland (albeit of prehistoric times) was apportioned in Boydell's *Megalithic Ritual Dances* op.39 (1956). Commissioned by Radio Éireann and first performed in Dublin's Gaiety Theatre on 12 February 1956 by its symphony orchestra under Milan Horvat, the work was described later as an Irish *Rite of Spring*, evoking a fantastic world of primitive pagan imagery.⁴⁸ This view is confirmed by the composer's own comments on the work's genesis.

At various places in Ireland, circles of immense stones remind us of the strange religious rituals which took place before the arrival of St Patrick [the country's patron saint, *fla.* c.390-c.460]. The fascination of these rituals ... suggested the title ...⁴⁹

After the anticipatory Introduction: Maestoso, the First Dance (2/2) is centred on 'a pastoral, folk-like melody introduced by the oboe, accompanied by a swaying ostinato,

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 229.

⁴⁷ Boydell in an interview with the author.

⁴⁸ Fleischmann: 'Brian Boydell'.

⁴⁹ Boydell, Brian: 'Megalithic Ritual Dances', sleeve notes.

in which a tom-tom marks the languid rhythm'.⁵⁰ Obviously 'acceptable' to Boydell's aesthetic concerns (given its subjective use), the 'Celticism' of the aforementioned melody is circumscribed by its Dorian mode-setting and idiomatic acciaccatura in bar 13 (Example 6).

EXAMPLE 6

Boydell: *Megalithic Ritual Dances* First Dance, bars 44-50 (woodwind and tom-tom only)

The image displays a musical score for Example 6, covering bars 44 to 50. The score is arranged in five staves. The top two staves are labeled 'FLUTES' and contain two parts of the flute. The third staff is labeled 'OBOE I.' and contains the oboe part. The fourth staff is labeled 'CLTs.' and contains the clarinet part. The fifth staff is labeled 'TOM-TOM.' and contains the tom-tom part. A box containing the number '45' is placed above the fifth staff, indicating the start of bar 45. The music features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some acciaccatura (short notes) and rests. The tom-tom part consists of a simple rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

Handwritten musical score for woodwinds and percussion. The score is organized into two systems. The first system includes staves for FLUTES (two staves), PICCOLO, OBOE, CLTS. (Cello/Double Bass), and FAG. (Bassoon). The second system includes staves for COR. (Cor Anglais), TOM-TOM, and ANGOUINE. The OBOE part features a melodic line with slurs and a '70' marking. The TOM-TOM part has a rhythmic pattern. A box containing the number '50' is located at the bottom of the second system.

A similarly 'pastoral' melody appears later in the work, in the second, 'trio-like' section of the following dance. Cast in 6/8, the movement's lively first half leads to a more serene successor with a pentatonic 'cello line, replete with the 'Irish' melisma (bars 235-240), which is subsequently treated canonically (Example 6).

EXAMPLE 7

Boydell: *Megalithic Ritual Dances* Second Dance, bars 235-240 (strings only)

STR.

DIV.

p

pizz.

arco p dolce.

arco p dolce.

235

Another striking example of the use of ethnically-‘inspired’ material (but of a more unconscious nature) is the String Quartet No. 2 op 44 (1957). First performed on 14 January 1959 at UCC by The Benthien String Quartet, the work has been hailed (along with its predecessor of 1947) as being ‘important national achievements of this century’.⁵¹ Cast in two movements, the work starts in a mood not unlike the first quartet,

⁵¹ Charles Acton in *idem*: ‘Interview with Boydell’, 109.

with a tentative motif for viola solo 'answered' by a similar line in the 'cello 'in which the harmonies, with their bare fourths and fifths, owe something to the flavour of certain types of mediaeval music'.⁵² This leads to a phrase-ending with a definite 'Irish' character in its 'gapped' sonority, as it draws to a close (bars 6-10). The 'cello re-enters with the above-mentioned theme suffixed by the 'Irish melisma' (Example 8).

EXAMPLE 8

Boydell: String Quartet No. 2 I, bars 1-15

♩ = 54 - 56

5

10

15

pp senza vibrato

⁵² Boydell, Brian: 'Boydell: String Quartet No. 2', programme notes.

Somewhat later, a similar 'figure' appears firstly in the 'cello: the sudden shift in register attenuating the effect of the *sean-nós*-styled undulating line (bars 160-164) (Example 9).

EXAMPLE 9

Boydell: String Quartet No. 2 I, bars 160-164

Sempre accel → bar 174

160

165

mf cresc.

mp cresc.

mp cresc.

The 'cello sports again a further, innately 'Irish' rhythmic quirk towards the end of the movement: another moment of fragmentation similar to that of the start sees it open in octatonic fashion, while an acciaccatura lends the line an ethnic flavour which informs the ensuing viola entry (bars 190-192) (Example 10).

EXAMPLE 10

Boydell: String Quartet No. 2 I, bars 190-192

The musical score for Example 10 consists of four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The music is in 2/4 time. Bar 190 is marked with a box containing the number 190. The Violin I part has a *pp* dynamic. The Viola part has a *pp* dynamic. The Cello part has a *p* dynamic. In bar 191, the Viola part is marked 'Can. Sard.' and has a *p* dynamic. The Cello part has a *pp* dynamic. The score shows various rhythmic patterns and dynamics across the three bars.

‘The nervously eruptive [Allegro -] Presto finale,’ as Fleischmann commented, ‘...is extremely well knit, and is graced with a most attractive singing theme for its middle section’⁵³ which is treated canonically by the first violin and ’cello (bars 152-169). Essentially pentatonic (as evident in the ’cello line from bars 157-162), its rhythmic ‘quirkiness’ underlines its inherently ‘Irish’ colouring (Example 11).

⁵³ Fleischmann: ‘Brian Boydell’

EXAMPLE 11

Boydell: String Quartet No. 2 II, bars 152-177

The image displays a musical score for Boydell's String Quartet No. 2 II, covering bars 152 to 177. The score is arranged in three systems, each containing four staves (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass). The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (f, mf, mp), articulation (accents, slurs), and performance instructions (trills, breath marks). The first system (bars 152-155) features a dynamic of *f* and *mf*. The second system (bars 156-159) features a dynamic of *mf* and *mp*. The third system (bars 160-163) features a dynamic of *mf*. The score concludes with a double bar line and a fermata over the final note.

The image shows a musical score for measures 165 to 175. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system (measures 165-170) features a piano part (top two staves) and a cello/bass part (bottom two staves). The piano part has a melodic line with some grace notes and a bass line with eighth-note patterns. The cello/bass part has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Dynamic markings include 'diminuendo' above the piano staff, 'dim.' below the piano and cello/bass staves, and 'mp' below the cello/bass staff at measure 170. The second system (measures 171-175) continues the piano and cello/bass parts. The piano part has a more active melodic line with some triplets. Dynamic markings include 'p' above the piano staff, 'pp' below the piano staff, and 'pizz. p' below the cello/bass staff at measure 175. Measure numbers 165, 170, and 175 are boxed in the score.

Although expressly opposed to writing music using Irish ‘folk-songs’, and not interested in writing ‘light music’, Boydell was commissioned by the BBCLO to write such a work for the 1960 BBC Festival of Light Music.⁵⁴ The result was the *Shielmartin Suite* op. 47 (1958-1959) largely (and quite understandably) composed, he comments:

for the kudos of doing something for the ... festival and for the possibility that through it my name might get known. What I tried to interest myself in was doing the thing well, but otherwise I don’t want to “ride on the bandwagon” of being popular because you produce “Irish things” which delight the Irish public.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Boydell in Acton: ‘Interview with Boydell’, 103.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, 103.

Some twelve minutes in length, the piece is scored for symphony orchestra and received its first performance on 1 June 1960 at the Festival Hall, London by the BBCCO under Vilem Tausky.⁵⁶ The work was dedicated to the harpist Gráinne Yeats (daughter-in-law of W.B.) and is in four movements ('Procession and Dance', 'Lament', 'The Wooing of Etáin'⁵⁷ and 'Jig').

Like May's *Suite Of Irish Airs* (1956), Boydell's work exhibits similarly proficient technique in its first movement, but with an increased sense of imagination and interest in the task. After a brief but lively opening, the movement proceeds with the melody of origin, adumbrated by judicious use of orchestral accompaniment (bars 12-18) (Example 12) (Please see following page).

⁵⁶ Vilem Tausky (1910-), Czech-born conductor and composer (Eng. Cit.) Conducted at Brno Opera 1929-1939, before settling in England. Tausky was Musical Director of Carl Rosa Opera, 1945-1949, Artistic Director of Phoenix Opera from 1967 and Director of opera at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London from 1966. He conducted the first English performance (BBC) of Janáček's *Osud* in 1972. (after 'Tausky, Villem', *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 4th edn., ed. Kennedy, 727).

⁵⁷ This section is based on incidental music composed in 1954 for the play of the same name by Pádraig Fallon.

EXAMPLE 12

Boydell: *Shielmartin Suite I*, bars 12-18 (strings only)

Another piece that involved the skills of Gráinne Yeats were the *Four Sketches for Two Irish Harps* op. 52 (1961-1962), commissioned, dedicated and premièred by her and Mercedes Bolger on 11 May 1962 at the Eblana Theatre, Dublin. As a compositional aid, Boydell later reported that he borrowed an Irish harp to experiment with and to discover its potentialities; indeed, this is clearly manifest in the fact that each instrument is tuned to a different chromatic series.⁵⁸ By increasing the range of this traditionally diatonic instrument, Boydell was able to educe new and innovative sound effects.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Boydell in Acton: 'Interview with Boydell', 100.

In the first sketch, the beginning of the main section sees a bare, syncopated figure in consecutive octaves in the second harp, before it takes the lead role (on the entry of the first harp) with a pentatonic melody based in F (bars 3-13). The predominantly 'sparse' harmony that ensues between the parts generates a sound-world suitable to the 'ethnicity' of the Irish harp, without being wholly derivative of the traditional idiom which it usually purveys and represents (Example 13).

EXAMPLE 13

Boydell: *Four Sketches for Two Irish Harps* No.1, bars 3-13

The image shows a handwritten musical score for two harps. It consists of two systems of staves. The top system is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It is marked "1st Time." and "Poco meno Mosso". The bottom system is in bass clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb). It is also marked "Poco meno Mosso" and "1st Time.". Both systems include "Change" markings and a "5" in a circle. The notation includes various rhythmic values and accidentals, with some notes circled.

⁵⁹ Fleischmann: 'Brian Boydell'.

The second sketch differs in its sonorities and stands as a telling representation of mid-century, central European music on an ethnic Irish instrument, made possible by Boydell's prescribed tuning adjustments. 'Centred' on the note E (in a similar fashion to the Violin Concerto), the sketch begins with the second harp in syncopated octaves once more. The first harp then enters with a short, octatonic flourish that characterises its next two entries (the latter, at bar 14, sees an expansive scalic run; it only enters into extended discourse at bar 15 with lively syncopation engendered by a clever juxtaposition of the related time signatures, 6/8 and 2/4 (as exemplified in the 'dual designation' apportioned at the start of the sketch in both parts) (Example 14).

EXAMPLE 14

Boydell: *Four Sketches for Two Irish Harps No. 2*, bars 1-18

Handwritten musical score for Boydell's *Four Sketches for Two Irish Harps No. 2*, bars 1-18. The score is written on three systems of staves.

The first system shows two treble clefs. A tempo marking $\text{♩} = 60$ is present. The notation includes notes, rests, and dynamic markings p and mf . A handwritten note "Throughout range" is written above the first staff, and "Except: $b \times$ " is written below it. A circled $4/8$ is also visible.

The second system shows a treble and bass clef. The time signature is $6/8$. The notation includes notes, rests, and dynamic markings p and $>$. A handwritten note "Throughout range except $b \times$ " is written to the left of the staff.

The third system shows a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The notation includes notes, rests, and dynamic markings pp and mp . A circled 5 is visible below the bass staff.

A later work for soprano and Irish harp, the *Three Yeats Songs* op. 56a (1965) once again (quite fittingly) involved the aforementioned Gráinne Yeats; that same year, it was adapted (and added to) to become the *Four Yeats Poems* op. 56 for soprano and orchestra. The settings ('The Cloths of Heaven', 'Musician's Song', 'Drinking Song' and 'Red Hanarahan's Song') were premièred on 25 February 1969 at the SFX (St. Francis Xavier) Hall, Dublin by the RTÉSO with Mary Sheridan (soloist) and conducted by the composer.

No. III ('A Drinking Song') is another example of skilled word-setting by the composer. The movement starts in 6/8 with an orchestral accompaniment that traces a G minor pentatonic line over C-'based' harmony in an idiomatically 'Irish' rhythm. The vocal

line then enters similarly, in a stylised manner suitable to the song's subject before accentuating its inherent G tonality by outlining the intervals of a fourth and fifth (bars 1-16) (Example 15).

EXAMPLE 15

Boydell: *Four Yeats Poems III*, bars 1-16 (soprano, harp and strings only)

Musical score for Example 15, first system. The score includes staves for Soprano, Harp, Violin 1 (Vl.1), Violin 2 (Vl.2), Viola (Vla), Violoncello (Vcl), and Contrabass (Cb.). The Soprano part has lyrics: "mp WINE - Wine comes in at the mouth And love". The Harp part has a circled number "5" in the middle. The string parts include dynamic markings like mp, mf, p, and performance instructions like pizz and arco.

Musical score for Example 15, second system. The score includes staves for Soprano, Violin 1 (Vl.1), Violin 2 (Vl.2), Viola (Vla), Violoncello (Vcl), and Contrabass (Cb.). The Soprano part has lyrics: "love comes in at the eye; - That's all we shall for death before we grow old - and die". The string parts include dynamic markings like mp, p, and performance instructions like arco and pizz.

Boydell's predilection for clarity and intensity of feeling (as adverted to by Fleischmann in connection with the earlier *Joyce Songs*) is pointedly demonstrated in the fourth and final movement, 'Red Hanrahan's Song'. The setting of one particular line: 'But we have hidden in our hearts the flame out of the eyes of Cathleen the daughter of Houlihan' (bars 32-40) elicits a vivid example of heightened drama. Here the vocal line sports octatonic tendencies before gradually shading the 'tonality' of E amidst sparse but colourful orchestration (bars 32-40): (note especially the iridescent harp figuration from bars 34-37). The section ends in fragmentation with an incursion of the note b flat (enunciated in the harp first in bar 37) lending an air of tritonal ambiguity (Example 16) (Please see following page).

EXAMPLE 16

Boydell: *Four Yeats Poems IV*, bars 32-42 (soprano, harp and strings only)

The image shows a handwritten musical score for Example 16, covering bars 32 to 42. The score is arranged in five systems, each with a different instrument part:

- Soprano:** The top staff contains the vocal line. It begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (Bb). The lyrics are "But we have hidden in our hearts the flame out of the eyes of". The music features a melodic line with some grace notes and a dynamic marking of *pp cresc.* at the start.
- Harp:** The second system is for the harp. It includes a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and various dynamic markings such as *p*, *mp*, *p*, *Bb*, *2 p cresc.*, and *mf*. There are also some handwritten annotations and a bracketed section.
- Violins (Vl. 1 and Vl. 2):** The third and fourth systems are for the first and second violins. They share a common staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. Dynamics include *p*, *mp*, *p cresc.*, and *mf*. There are also some handwritten annotations and a bracketed section.
- Violas (Vcl. 1 and Vcl. 2):** The fifth system is for the first and second violas. They share a common staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. Dynamics include *p*, *mp*, *p cresc.*, and *mf*. There are also some handwritten annotations and a bracketed section.
- Celli (Cb.):** The bottom staff is for the cellos. It includes a bass clef, a key signature of one flat, and dynamic markings of *arco p*, *p cresc.*, and *mf*.

Handwritten annotations and markings are present throughout the score, including bar numbers (32, 35, 38, 41, 42) and various performance instructions. On the right side of the page, there are large handwritten numbers: a '3' and '4' next to the Harp staff, and a '3' and '4' next to the string staves, possibly indicating rehearsal marks or specific measures.

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The image shows a handwritten musical score for the song "Cathleen The daughter of Houlihan". The score is written on five staves. The top staff is for the Soprano (Sopr.) voice, with the lyrics "Cathleen The daughter of Houlihan" written below the notes. The second staff is for the Harp, with various musical notations including fingerings (e.g., 3, 4, 5) and dynamics (e.g., mp, p). The bottom three staves are for the string ensemble, labeled VE1, VE2, Vcl, and Cb. (Cello). These staves contain rhythmic patterns and dynamics such as p, mp, and mf. The score is written in a clear, legible hand.

Yeats's poetry, in addition to that of Francis Ledwidge, Thomas MacDonagh, George Russell (Æ), George Sigerson and Thomas Kettle provided the inspiration for another

Boydell work of 1965: *A Terrible Beauty is Born* Op. 59.⁶⁰ The work is for SAB soli, SATB, symphony orchestra and speaker was commissioned by RTÉ for the commemoration of the 1916 Easter Rising. It was premièred on 11 April 1966 in the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin with Veronica Dunne (Soprano), Bernadette Greevy (Alto) William Young (Bass), Conor Farrington (Speaker), Our Lady's Choral Society and the RTÉSO under Tibor Paul.

⁶⁰ Francis Ledwidge (1887-1917) was a Meath-born poet who, despite his nationalist convictions, joined the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and was killed in Belgium on 31 July 1917; his first collection of poems, *Songs of the Fields*, was published a year previously while the *Complete Poems* appeared in 1919 (after 'Ledwidge, Francis', *A Dictionary of Irish Biography*, 3rd edn, ed. Boylan 220).

Thomas MacDonagh (1878-1916), poet and revolutionary. The Yeats-dedicated *Through the Ivory Gate* (1902) was followed by a further five collections culminating in the selected *Lyrical Poems* (1913). He was a founder member of the Irish Volunteers (November 1913); last of the Signatories to the 1916 Proclamation of the Irish Republic to join the military council planning the Rising in early 1916, he was shot by firing squad in its aftermath in May of that year (after Cooke: 'MacDonagh, Thomas', *The Blackwell Companion to Modern Irish Culture*, ed McCormack, 363)..

George Russell (1867-1935), poet, painter, theosophist, and writer on economic and political issues. Was also known by the pen-name Æ (for 'Æon'); educated at Rathmines School and Metropolitan School of Art where his life-long friendship with W.B. Yeats began. His first book of poems *Homeward: Songs by the Way* (1894) established him in the literary movement. Russell was editor of the *Irish Statesman* from 1923-1930, and his house in Rathgar Ave, Dublin was a meeting-place for those with an interest in Ireland's artistic and economic future (after 'Russell, George William', *A Dictionary of Irish Biography*, 3rd edn, ed. Boylan, 385).

George Sigerson (1836-1925), physician, scientist, and man of letters. Self-taught in Irish, his *Bards of the Gael and Gall* (1897) was a collection of his translations. Sigerson's house at 3 Clare St., Dublin was a centre for others with similar interests in Irish literature and music; he was one of the founders of the *Feis Cheoil*, president of the National Literary Society from 1893 until his death, and one of the first members of the Free State *Seanad* [Senate] (after 'Sigerson, George', *ibid.*, 401).

Thomas Kettle (1880-1916), nationalist. Called to the bar in Dublin in 1905 and practised law until 1908, when he was appointed the first professor of national economics at UCD. He joined the Irish Volunteers on their formation in 1913, but became convinced that England was fighting for the rights of small nations on the outbreak of World War I and joined the Dublin Fusiliers on his return from an arms-procurement operation in Belgium in 1914. He was killed in September 1916 at the battle of the Somme (after 'Kettle, Thomas', *ibid.*, 208).

It should be noted that a significant contribution to Boydell's selection of poetic texts, especially in this work, was made by his friend (and co-member of The Dowland Consort) Tomás Ó Suilleabháin. The aforementioned ensemble was founded and directed by Boydell, and was particularly active in the 1960s.

Boydell's transition from *enfant terrible* to *doyen* of the musical establishment was, by that time, virtually complete in order to quantify the offering to him of the commission; but its significance was nevertheless telling. He comments:

I am always interested in challenges. A particular challenge was the 1916 music, *A Terrible Beauty is Born*. That interested me enormously because ... I was so much excited by the fact that I was offered the commission at all, being Protestant Anglo-Irish and a pacifist to boot.⁶¹

Boydell was well aware that his main aim in fulfilling the commission successfully was 'knowing that one was writing a piece of music which would appeal on that particular occasion without playing down'.⁶² Fleischmann's praise for the work and its composer were characteristically unreserved:

[he] rose to the big occasion ... and in many a telling passage captured the sense of poignancy, of high endeavour, the elation and the despair of the poems chosen to represent that stirring time.⁶³

One particular passage in the fourth setting (a re-casting of the above-mentioned 'Red Hanrahan's Song', here apportioned the fuller title of 'Red Hanrahan's Song about Ireland') exemplifies the 'bare, flowing lines' that Fleischmann cites as one of its attributes. Bars 227-231 see a declamatory line for the soprano soloist, over a mainly homophonic backing in the chorus and strings, that puts the sense of poignancy (also commented on above by Fleischmann) into perspective 'without playing down' musically, despite the rather astringent harmony (Example 17).

⁶¹ Boydell in Acton: 'Interview with Boydell', 103.

⁶² *ibid.*, 103.

⁶³ Fleischmann: 'Brian Boydell'.

Handwritten musical score for Soprano Solo and Harp. The Soprano part is on a single staff with lyrics "daughter of Houli-han". The Harp part is on a grand staff with various musical notations including accidentals and dynamics like "pp" and "hp". A box containing the number "235" is visible in the Harp part. The score is written on multiple staves with some corrections and markings.

A similarly pathetic moment can be found in the eighth movement, a setting of Francis Ledwidge's 'In Memoriam Thomas McDonagh'. The author's compassion for his martyred subject is encapsulated perfectly by Boydell in the sombre scene set at the opening (bars 339-345). 'Heralded' in mood by the cor anglais and underscored by a repeated figure in the strings (similar to that found in the Violin Concerto: see example 3

above), the flute spans a ninth in the Phrygian mode, its wide spacings soon regulated by a concentration on the intervals of a third and fifth before ending with a particularly 'Irish', 'gapped' turn-of-phrase (Example 18) (Please see following page).

EXAMPLE 18

Boydell: *A Terrible Beauty is Born* No. 8, bars 339-345

Handwritten musical score for Boydell's *A Terrible Beauty is Born* No. 8, bars 339-345. The score includes parts for Piccolo Flute, Flute, Oboe, Clarinet in A, Clarinet in Bb, Bassoon, Cor Anglais, Horn I, Violin, Viola, Cello, and Double Bass. The score is in 3/4 time and features various dynamics such as *pp*, *mf*, *p*, *mp*, *f*, and *dim*. A tempo marking of *Andante* is present. The score includes a rehearsal mark **48-50** at the beginning and a section marked **340** and **345**. The lyrics "He shall not" are written below the Violin part. The score is written in a cursive, handwritten style.

Boydell's relish for challenges is also evident from his forays into the world of film and radio music⁶⁴ and his setting of the Irish national anthem. In regard to the latter, he later commented that he wanted 'to make something noble out of a bad tune.'⁶⁵ The former preoccupation was first exemplified by the incidental music to Padraig Fallon's aforementioned radio play *The Wooing of Etain* op.37 (1954); while four commissions for documentary film music followed in the 1960s: Patrick Carey's *Yeats Country*⁶⁶ op. 57 (1965), *Mists of Time* op. 61 (1967) and *Errigal* op. 63 (1968) and Vincent Corcoran's *Ireland* op. 58 (1965). The requirements for Carey's films made Boydell the 'obvious choice', according to Fleischmann:

[In *Yeats Country*,] his ability to match the subtle and fleeting visual images with just the right wisps of sound contributed to the making of a masterpiece.

[In *Errigal*,] novel but entirely appropriate effects [were] brought about by devices such as the action of brushes on piano strings and the strings of the harp.

All of his film music is marked by an economy of sound⁶⁷

It was this fruitful working relationship with Carey that provided the inspiration for Boydell's *Symphonic Inscapes* op. 64 (1968) which he dedicated to the film-maker; the work was first performed in the Gaiety Theatre by the RTÉSO under Albert Rosen on 26 January 1969. The composer reveals how it 'grew out from feelings about the Irish

⁶⁴ *ibid.*.

⁶⁵ Boydell in 'All my Enthusiasms', prod. Makower.

⁶⁶ Funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs Cultural Relations Committee, Carey's *Yeats Country* was produced for the hundredth anniversary of the birth of W.B. Yeats, and it used scenes of the poet's native Sligo's landscape and seascape to evoke his poetry. The film was the recipient of many awards and was widely seen (see Rockett, Gibbons & Hill: *Cinema & Ireland*, 84-85).

⁶⁷ Fleischmann: 'Brian Boydell'. In regard to *Errigal*, which celebrates the beauty of the Donegal mountain of that name, Carey's own comment on the film reveals, perhaps, why Boydell (with his 'enthusiasms') was such a suitable candidate for the composition of its soundtrack: 'The mountains are the characters in the story. The drama is in the battle of the elements. I have tried to convey this feeling of personality in a landscape by picture, supported by only music and natural sound' (*ibid.*, 251-252 after Miller, Liam: 'Yeats Country', 20).

countryside' and his particular interest in archaeology.⁶⁸ In using the apt term of Gerard Manley Hopkins,⁶⁹ Boydell succeeded in crafting an evocative, imaginative and yet *mostly* abstract work; a work based on the 'feeling' of the Ireland's natural terrain by a sensitive artist is bound to be subjective in places. Thus even though *Symphonic Inscapes* is one of Boydell's more 'uncompromising' works in musico-linguistic terms, it nevertheless is permeated by that unconscious ethnic Irish influence that so naturally and tellingly pervades his output. A slow section that occurs early in the piece exemplifies this trait (bars 192-197): here a variation of the cornerstone 'open' motif of the introductory bars is found in the harp and brass; this prefaces a hexatonic melody in the oboe, accentuated by its syncopated beginning and lyrical melodic contour (Example 19) (Please see following page).

⁶⁸ 'Music and the Musician', prod. Carty.

⁶⁹ Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889), English poet. Hopkins's poetry is 'a celebration of God's immanence, and of the shocking beauty and strangeness of the natural order'. In his lyrics, he attempted to evoke the essential quality of his subject, its individuation or 'inscape' as he termed it, by the use of internal rhyme, alliteration, compound metaphor, and the use of 'sprung rhythm', i.e. the use of a combination of regular numbers of stresses with freely varying numbers of syllables (after 'Hopkins, Gerard Manley', *Microsoft® Encarta® 98 Encyclopedia*. ©).

EXAMPLE 19

Boydell: *Symphonic Inscapes* Lento, bars 192-197

Lento $\text{♩} = 58$

Fl
Ob.
Cl.
Fg
Cb
Cor
Tpt
Tbn
Tuba

[190] Lento $\text{♩} = 58$ [195]

St
Harp

In conclusion, it should be evident that the cultural context for Boydell's modernistic and highly personal style has had a profound and, in some respects, desired effect on his output. This fact is, in essence, the secret of his art. Boydell's place in the triumvirate is pivotal; his was to be the strongest voice in '[promoting] a creative philosophy which embraced the idea of using contemporary European idioms as a musical language with which to express an individual Irish viewpoint'.⁷⁰ It was this emphatic cosmopolitanism that makes instances of the 'Irish note' in Boydell's *œuvre* all the more subtle and enriching. As Fleischmann commented: 'beneath the surface, certain individual mannerisms – details of melodic curve, certain tonal progressions – ... relate back to Irish folk song, and ... stamp the composer's work as part of the Irish tradition, as clearly as that of James Joyce'.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Boydell: 'New harmonic horizons'.

⁷¹ Fleischmann: 'Brian Boydell', *Contemporary Composers*, 113.

CHAPTER FIVE

‘THE CELT AND THE PROFESSOR’

In 1980 Aloys Fleischmann made the telling admission: ‘The folk idiom is pretty strong in my early work, and I suppose it is still there’.¹ Then approaching the sunset of his illustrious career, he could, indeed, look back and afford to be vague about his music and the ‘Irish note’. For Fleischmann, the advent of musical modernism in Ireland presented its own personal challenge to him as man and musician: the striking of a path between tradition and innovation. Although perhaps not an uncommon crisis for any twentieth century artist of note, it is the fashion in which he dealt with this matter that makes him a fascinating figure.

Fleischmann was born in Munich on 13 April 1910 to German parents who had settled in Cork.² He attended UCC, obtaining the degrees of BMus (1931) and MA (1932) before emigrating to study composition (with Joseph Haas) and conducting at the Hochschule für Musik in Munich, and musicology at the city’s university from 1932-1934.³ He held the chair in music at UCC from 1934-1980, and was awarded a DMus

¹ Fleischmann in ‘The Arts: Profile of Aloys Fleischmann’, prod. Collins.

² Fleischmann’s parents, organist and composer Aloys senior, and concert pianist Tilly (née Schwertz), met as music students in Munich. The former studied at the Hochschule für Musik in Munich under Rheinberger and at the university there under Sandberger; the latter, born in Cork in 1879, studied at the same Hochschule under Liszt’s last pupil, Bernhard Stavenhagen. After their marriage in 1906, they resided at the artists’ colony in Dachau before Fleischmann senior replaced Tilly’s father, Hans Konrad Schwertz, as organist and choirmaster at St Mary’s Cathedral, Cork, in the same year. Their only child, Aloys, was born in Munich in 1910 while Tilly was engaged on a concert tour. (after Foreman: *Bax: A Composer and his Times*, 2nd edn, 239, & Leland: ‘A lifetime spent in the service of music’.

³ Joseph Haas (1879-1960), German composer. He taught composition at Stuttgart Conservatoire from 1911 before taking up a similar post in Munich in 1921, co-founding the influential Donaueschingen Festival in the same year. A biographer of Reger, his works included operas, two string quartets, a violin

degree in composition by the National University of Ireland in 1963 and an honorary MusD from the University of Dublin in 1964.

Fleischmann's life-long work-rate as a musical 'jack-of-all-trades' was legendary.⁴ He founded the Cork Symphony Orchestra (which he developed from the University Orchestra established in 1934 and conducted for nearly sixty years till his death, thus earning himself a place in *The Guinness Book of Records*) and the Cork International Choral and Folk Dance Festival in 1954 which he directed (along with the attendant seminars on contemporary choral music which started in 1964) until 1987. He was musical director of the Cork Ballet Company, whose founder/director Joan Denise Moriarty was a major influence on the foundation of the Irish Ballet Company in the 1970s (later The Irish National Ballet Company) until its demise in the following decade.⁵ Fleischmann was a highly active member of many organisations and committees and a key figure in Irish musical life. He died in Cork after a brief illness on 21 July 1992.

Fleischmann's pluralist attitude to matters musical was symptomatic of an education divided between Cork and Munich⁶; this fuelled an early (though not overly-narrow) compunction to assert his cultural identity with Ireland and things Irish. He regarded

sonata, choral music and song-cycles. (after 'Haas, Joseph,' *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 4th edn, ed. Kennedy, 312).

⁴ It was this description that Fleischmann himself wished to be remembered by, as expressed in 'Composers in Conversation: an interview with Fleischmann', prod. de Bromhead.

⁵ Accounts of Moriarty's successes and travails, including her collaboration with Fleischmann (afforded by the late composer before his death), are featured in *Joan Denise Moriarty - Founder of Irish National Ballet*, ed. Ruth Fleischmann (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1999).

⁶ Ryan: 'Fleischmann: **Piano Quintet**', sleeve notes.

one's milieu, with its culture, traditions, mores and language, as being vital to the creation of personal and cultural identity: 'The whole environment in which you live and speak is something which is unique and once you lose it and take another language and another tradition you lose your identity'.⁷ Whether this referred to Aloys's perception of his German parents' experience in Ireland, or his own sojourn in Munich, is unclear; what does seem certain, nevertheless, is that the Fleischmanns were determined that their son grew up as 'normally' as possible in his adopted country.⁸ This was underlined by the fact that they did not, apparently, teach him the language of his homeland. In discussing Dean Scanell, the president of Farranferris College (Fleischmann's secondary school), the composer claimed that 'it was he who taught me German, not my parents', adding that: 'I was the only one doing German so he took me privately and used to tell me a lot about his travels around Europe. He influenced me greatly'.⁹

In regard to Irish, the composer's primary schooling was at a time when Irish did not figure in the curriculum, while in his secondary school he regarded Irish as being inadequately taught.¹⁰ His respectable level of fluency was the result of trips to The Dingle peninsula in Co. Kerry undertaken in order to learn Irish although, self-critically, he felt his composition would have benefited from a greater knowledge of the language.¹¹ The composer's musical 'identity' was, nevertheless, undoubtedly the

⁷ Murphy *et al.*: *Education and the Arts*, 202.

⁸ Tilly Fleischmann, it appears, referred to her son as 'Aloys Óg' (young Aloys), as exemplified in her unpublished memoirs detailing how Arnold Bax (1883-1953) came to know and visit their family in Cork every year from 1928 except 1939-1946 (i.e., the period of Second World War) till his death (see Foreman: *Bax*, 239).

⁹ Murphy *et al.*: *Education and the Arts*, 204.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 203.

¹¹ *ibid.*, 202.

product of his parents' occupations. Thus 'from the beginning', he once said, 'I had no other idea other than that I was going to become a musician'.¹²

As a child of Teutonic descent during the First World War, Fleischmann was often taunted by other children and the victim of anti-German sentiment. This sense of isolation was surely compounded by the experience of seeing his father endure temporary internment as an enemy alien, while his mother continued Fleischmann senior's work in the organ loft at St Mary's Cathedral, in addition to her own activities as a piano tutor:

It was very strange growing up as a German boy. ... Half the population were intensely pro-British and the other half were intensely anti-British. So with the pro-British people we were suspect. My mother had students from every stratum. She had army officers (...) [and] people who were sympathetic to the IRA side. Sometimes I was called after in the street, 'You little Hun!' It was a very difficult childhood.¹³

In fact, Fleischmann felt that he was 'a stranger in his own country', although, he commented, 'the fact that I was rather solitary on the whole and kept my own counsel meant I was a little more individualistic in my approach'.¹⁴ This individualism, which precipitated an innate conservatism in compositional trends and techniques for the first part of his career, was, he posited, a product of his childhood environment: 'I imagine it made me rather inclined to be a rebel against the establishment, even when it happened to be the anti-establishment'.¹⁵

¹² *ibid.*, 198.

¹³ *ibid.*, 199.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, 199.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, 199.

Possessive of perspicacity and erudition, Fleischmann, like fellow internationalists May and Boydell, was an early advocate for the acculturation of an indigenous contemporary art-music, unindentured to the ethnic repertory. He expounded his views through the pages of Irish periodical literature from the thirties to the fifties but initially his line was considerably softer than those of his compatriots. Commenting on the position of music in Ireland in 1935, he wrote:

We have on the one hand a tradition in folk-music, on the other hand a half developed art-music which is for the most part alien or at best no more than superficially connected with that tradition. What we need is a Gaelic art-music which will embody all the technique that contemporary music can boast and at the same time will be rooted in the folk-music spirit, and will be as individual and genuine as that folk-music is individual and genuine.¹⁶

Fleischmann's youthful ardour for a 'Gaelic art-music' was, however, quelled by the late forties as his compositional *modus operandi* became increasingly dichotomous in nature. Although one is inclined to agree with Joseph J. Ryan's view that Fleischmann's more populist works 'tended to favour ... nationalist expression [and] had the effect of further moving [him] from outspoken criticism of what he hitherto considered the ascendancy of insular musical ideas and "the upholders of traditionalism" to a more median view ...',¹⁷ it is perhaps Axel Klein who posits a more convincing argument. Aligning Fleischmann with other 'eclectics' such as A.J. Potter (1918-1980), Gerard Victory (1921-1995) and Seán Ó Riada (1931-1971), Klein asserts that the above are 'predestined to misinterpretation and misunderstanding by anybody hearing a single piece'.¹⁸ In Fleischmann's case, this was due to the fact that 'throughout his life he wrote a very understandable music, trying unsuccessfully to bridge the gap between the taste of the well-meaning friend of 'light' classical music and that of the more discerning

¹⁶ Fleischmann: 'The Outlook of Music in Ireland', 124.

¹⁷ Ryan: *Nationalism and music in Ireland* (diss.), 440.

listener.¹⁹ It is in this sense that he came to 'don' two 'hats'; a fairly diatonic, populist style exemplified in orchestral works with/without audience participation, that fulfilled commissions for public events, and were indicated by titles with 'Irish' connections, was counter-balanced by a more individual, detached and abstract voice found in the smaller-scale works which espoused modernism and cognisance of contemporary technique.

It is with acknowledgement of this dichotomy that one must approach his music. At the outset of his career, being of the opinion that his German surname was unsuitable to his nationalist aspirations, Fleischmann adopted an Irish pseudonym (Muiris Ó Rónáin) for his first major (similarly-spirited work) the *Piano Suite* (gaelicised as *Sreath de Phiano*) of 1933. Premiered by the composer himself the following year at the State Academy of Music in Munich, Fleischmann persuaded its publisher, Chester, to print the performance directions in Irish, in addition to the conventional Italian. This rather strange arrangement baffled some in the music world, as he recalled:

I remember on one occasion the composer E.J. Moeran ... said that English publishers had gone 'stark raving mad' - that ... Chester's [had published] a piece of music with Irish titles and directions. He said, "How on earth could any publisher dream of producing something in the Irish language that nobody could understand?" He was so cross that I didn't like to betray the fact that it was I who was the culprit!²⁰

This very visual indication of where Fleischmann's sympathies lay was further underlined by his *raison d' être* for leaving Germany: 'I was never so enthusiastic about

¹⁸ Klein: 'The Composer in the Academy (2)', 426.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, 426.

²⁰ Fleischmann in 'Composers in Conversation: an interview with Fleischmann', prod. de Bromhead.

Ireland and its traditions as I was in Munich. I wouldn't for the world stay [there], the Celtic pull was too strong'.²¹

It was this affinity with 'Celticism', peppered with the folk-music style pursued fruitfully at that time by his British contemporaries (Vaughan Williams, in particular, and his personal friends, Bax and Moeran) and unimaginatively by the more insular, ideology-serving nationalist clique in his adopted country, that formed the back-bone of Fleischmann's output for some years afterwards. But it was the mythology, history and literature of Ireland that resonated more throughout his corpus; it was from this bountiful store that most of his themes and texts were drawn. 'It seemed vital', he wrote, 'to delve into the Hidden Ireland²² and out of the heroic tales and romances to create an idiom which would express in music some of the essence of this rich untapped literary tradition'.²³

The *Piano Suite* saw an attempt on its composer's part to demonstrate the possibilities of diatonic modal writing in a compositional climate which, in the wider European sense, had embraced the serial language of the Second Viennese School.²⁴ This description, allied with Fleischmann's own opinion of his early style also being 'terse

²¹ Dervan, Michael: 'Unflagging Energy', 7.

²² *The Hidden Ireland: A Study of Gaelic Munster* was a book by Daniel Corkery (1878-1964), professor of English at UCC from 1930 to his retirement in 1947. First published in 1924, this study of Irish poetry and culture in eighteenth-century Munster was a curious influence on Fleischmann; its espousal of a narrow sense of cultural separatism, as promulgated by the 'Irish Ireland' movement, would seem to have flown in the face of his avowed pluralist approach to music.

However, it is telling that Corkery was one of a considerable number of the contemporary cultural *intelligensia* to have frequented the Fleischmann family home during the composer's youth. (after Dunne: 'A life given to music').

²³ Quoted in de Barra: 'Fleischmann the Composer', 7.

and austere ... not too esoteric²⁵ encapsulates the musico-linguistic 'setting' here perfectly. At a glance, one notices the transposed Aeolian mode beginning on E outlined in the right-hand at bars 1-5 and a characteristic 'Irish' rhythm at bars 2, 3 and 7 while the placing of a duple rhythm against this syncopated figure serves to highlight its 'quirkiness'. Bars 9-11 see Fleischmann conscious of European pianistic heritage, certainly in terms of technique, where the figuration of Liszt is recalled in the rapid, wide spacings interspersed with a derivation of the rhythmic 'tag' outline above (Example 1).

EXAMPLE 1

Fleischmann: *Piano Suite I*, bars 1-11

Le líonrith
(Agitato)

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system (bars 1-5) shows a right-hand melody with a syncopated rhythm and a left-hand accompaniment with a duple rhythm. The second system (bars 6-11) shows a more complex texture with rapid, wide-spaced figures in the right hand and a duple rhythm in the left hand. Dynamics include *mp*, *sf*, and *mp*.

²⁴ Quigley: 'Fleischmann: *Piano Suite*', sleeve notes for LP.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for piano. The first system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff features a melodic line with slurs and a fermata over a final note. The bass staff contains a rhythmic accompaniment with a triplet of eighth notes. The second system also consists of a treble and bass clef staff. The treble staff has a melodic line with slurs and a fermata. The bass staff features a rhythmic accompaniment. Dynamics include a piano (*p*) marking in the first system and a *molto cresc.* marking in the second system.

²⁵ 'Books and Bookmen: Interview with Fleischmann', pres. Des Hickey.

The second movement of the suite opens with a lilting melody strongly flavoured with a G major pentatonic scale. Bar 6 sees a fiddle-like 'roll' (usually executed in jigs in 6/8)²⁶ in the right hand, a derivation of which is repeated in bar 8 (Example 2).

EXAMPLE 2

Fleischmann: *Piano Suite II*, bars 1-8

Mall siansach
(Andante espressivo)

The musical score consists of three systems of piano accompaniment. The first system (bars 1-2) begins with a piano (*ppp*) dynamic. The second system (bars 3-4) features a piano (*pp*) dynamic. The third system (bars 5-8) includes a forte (*f*) dynamic. The right hand in bar 6 and bar 8 contains a fiddle-like 'roll' figure, which is a characteristic melodic ornament in traditional Irish music.

²⁶ Ó Canainn: *Traditional Music in Ireland*, 30.

In an interview with the composer in 1990, Michael Dervan (in discussing this work) asserts that the major compositional influence on Fleischmann around 1933 seems to have been Sibelius.²⁷ This would appear to be quite true; Fleischmann's wish to evoke his nation's lore, literature and landscape was not dissimilar to Sibelius similar nationalistically-propelled musical imagination, one so formidable as to create such picturesque masterpieces as *Finlandia* (1900) and the later and more darker-hewn, *Tapiola* (1925-1926). Certainly some of the latter composer's dense textures (characteristic of his last works) are reflected in Fleischmann's suite at the end of the fourth movement. Textural considerations aside, the cerebral, slow-moving rhythm is quite akin to the stasis favoured by Hindemith in certain parts of his works (Example 3) (Please see following page).

²⁷ Murphy *et al.*: *Education and the Arts*, 8.

EXAMPLE 3

Fleischmann: *Piano Suite IV*, bars 14-28

Musical score for Example 3, Fleischmann: *Piano Suite IV*, bars 14-28. The score is written for piano and consists of five systems of two staves each. The music is in 3/4 time and features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth-note runs. Dynamics range from piano (*p*) to fortissimo (*fff*). Performance instructions include *più ff*, *sempre ff*, *trom (pesamente)*, and *le lánfhórsa (con tutta forza)*.

In conclusion, Axel Klein's comment in regard to the rhythm of the work as a whole, that 'one feels the jig sooner than one hears it',²⁸ is especially apt in regard to the opening of the fifth movement (Example 4).

EXAMPLE 4

Fleischmann: *Piano Suite V*, bars 1-8

Gasta gealadhramach
(Presto scherzando)

p éadtrom (leggiero)

Fleischmann's aforementioned incursions into journalism began in earnest in 1936.²⁹

Entitled 'The Outlook of Music in Ireland,' Fleischmann's 'debut' contained the quote

²⁸ 'Man spürt den Jig eher als daß man ihm hört', quoted from Klein: *Die Musik Irlands*, 187 (My translation).

²⁹ For the purposes of this study, the following articles were consulted:

that appears above on p. 133, in addition to an exploration of the contemporaneous paucity in the field of music education in Ireland. In his next published article, ‘*Ars Nova: Irish Music in the Shaping*,’ he addressed to a greater degree the question of art music in Ireland and its virtual non-existence.

Irish folk-song and the bardic music of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries seems to have fixed itself on the popular imagination, lending to this country a reputation for musical culture which it does not possess. Nicely-turned phrases, such as “our music-loving people and “our heritage of music”, have made this legend a household word. Nobody likes to hear that *this* is the land without music, a land that is literally music-starved.¹⁰¹

Fleischmann, though idealistic, was not naively so; he realised that the key to popular acceptance of a ‘new’ Irish art music was intelligibility and thus he proposed an ‘evolutionary’ policy in this regard.

The musical language of three or four generations back can become a natural and intelligible medium of expression, learnt just as child, growing up, will learn from hearing a language spoken.¹⁰²

Nevertheless, he did point out that:

it is necessary to realise that this language must and will change from generation to generation. ...
The best composers will launch out into modes of expression which have not been used before, modes which it may take some time to understand.¹⁰³

He was also well aware of the ‘false dawn’ that had accompanied political independence and cultural isolationism. Thus he initiated a repeated call for a ‘Gaelic’ (but

Fleischmann, Aloys: ‘The Outlook of Music in Ireland’, *Studies* xxiv (March 1935), 121-130; ‘*Ars Nova: Irish Music in the Shaping*’, *Ireland To-day* i/2 (1936), 41-48; ‘Composition and the Folk Idiom’, *Ireland To-day* i/6 (1936), 37-44.

A more comprehensive list can be found in Klein: *Die Musik Irlands*, Anhang II: Bibliographie, 493-494.

¹⁰¹ Fleischmann: ‘*Ars Nova: Irish Music in the Shaping*’, 41-48.

¹⁰² *ibid.*, 42-43.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*, 43.

contemporary) art-music which saw him, perhaps not unconsciously, aligning himself in terms of ideals with composers such as Bartók, Kodály and Sibelius.

A new wave of interest and enthusiasm is indeed perceptible, but the majority of the enthusiasts, when they speak of music, mean traditional music Composition is conceived as the adding of three parts to a folk-tune. Centuries of development in craft and idiom are ignored. Surely it is a poor story if the Ireland of the present day - and a Gaelic thinking, even Gaelic speaking Ireland at that - could not begin to express herself as truly and as individually in the language of contemporary music And such new expression, though breathing the spirit of traditional music, need not have the remotest connection with its externalia in form or manner.³³

The following passage asserted a telling incrimination of the musical wing of 'Irish Ireland' that both presaged a similar outburst by Boydell in the 1950s and sparked a controversial war of words with its premier ideologue, composer Eamonn Ó Gallocobhair.

Continuity or fidelity of tradition is not best achieved by atavism, by a slavish use of the material of the past. While welcoming the spread of Irish traditional music ... , we must remember that the task before us lies in the larger and more important field of art-music, lies in raising it from the half-baked, shoddy thing it is, in establishing contacts with contemporary movements, in making of music a medium for the expression of the life of present-day Ireland, by the use of present-day methods elsewhere.³⁴

A third article, 'Composition and the Folk Idiom', expanded this theme and saw a perpetuation of Fleischmann's railing against the establishment and its cronies.

Novelty in art, we are told, is mere vulgarity. Not only is novelty vulgarity, it is one of the foremost essentials of art, for without novelty, that is, the reaching out after what is unexpressed, the utilisation of ever wider resources, art becomes a stagnant bye-pool, out of contact with the onrush of life, stale and formalised. Without novelty we have atavism, in the sense of ancestor-worship which precludes all development.

To talk about composition in Ireland and in the same breath to identify it with the problem of what must or must not be done in the treatment of Irish airs is to take the cart (or rather its contents) for the noble beast of locomotion.³⁵

³³ *ibid.*, 45.

³⁴ *ibid.*, 45.

³⁵ *ibid.*, 38-39.

In a similar vein to that of May, Fleischmann was equally perceptive in his analysis of the composer's position in inter-war Ireland:

A would-be composer here has a thorny path to tread, in seeking out his medium, in linking hands with tradition and all it has to give, while at the same time keeping pace with contemporary technical evolution. . . . Either he has to choose the vocabulary of a pre-war generation, contriving to make it personal, or else he has to plunge into the principles of Schönberg or Milhaud and let loose a series of atonal or polytonal profundities on the astonished ears of a public more acclimatised to Moore. . . . One feels inclined to favour the first and more cautious policy, for in seeking a new tradition, . . . we must make good the breach with the past before we strike out apace. The obvious starting-point is some seventy years back when folk song first vitalised Russian music sufficiently for it to break the classical mould. We would do well for a generation, perhaps even for less - within a composer's single period - swiftly to accomplish that evolution between the cradle of modern music and its present stature, so that we could safely say that our feet are well implanted, firmly enough to stand the stress and strain of any future periods of experiment.³⁶

Fleischmann's *credo* was clear: while trenchantly opposed to slavish use of ethnic material, he nevertheless felt the need for an 'Irish school of composition' to 'spring from the soil,' but only 'if the incipient eagerness of younger generations were not dulled by the lotus-eating tenets of the traditionalists'.³⁷ His anger at the new-found laudatory status that representatives of this faction were being afforded in culturally-isolated Ireland is clearly evident from the following statement.

The advocates of the traditional outlook . . . relieve their devotees of all hard labour, of prolonged dealings with contrapuntal and fugal intricacies, of the study of musical literature of the past, not to mention that of contemporary movements. A few folk tunes, as much knowledge of composition as may be gained in an elementary harmony class, and for their purposes the equipment of the youthful prodigy is complete. He can be sent out to missionarise, as an authority and a composer, while, but for his outlook, the technique of Europe awaits his beck and call, for him to acquire if he had the brains and the will.³⁸

Although Fleischmann was aware of the danger of side-stepping tradition in regard to public perception he was, nevertheless, confident that his advocations would eventually gain acceptance.

³⁶ *ibid.*, 40-41.

³⁷ Fleischmann: 'The Outlook of Music in Ireland', 44.

³⁸ *ibid.*, 43.

Unless his music is confined to arrangements of traditional tunes, or at most confined to sets of variations on these tunes, [the composer] may indeed risk being classed by the rank and file as Anglo-Irish, even as anti-Irish. But the intelligent will realise that his music was wrought free from the trammels of the folk-beginning, and that the expression of the environment will depend less on patent devices borrowed from the traditional idiom as on some undercurrent, some indefinable hue which will be of deeper origin than these ... It can be the composer's task ... to express ... the 'hidden Ireland' ... - it is yet an exile from its rightful place, awaiting, perhaps, the composer to place it there.³⁹

The composer's wish to 'place the hidden Ireland' in 'its rightful place,' thus expressed in 1936, was exemplified in music in the following year. While a certain amount of Fleischmann's early works expressed a conscious patriotism, they were 'never offensive, but of a vigorous innocence which is peculiarly appealing.'⁴⁰ It is in this sense that one can consider the composer's *Tri hAmhráin* (Three Songs) of 1937 scored for high voice and orchestra. Dedicated to Carl Hardebeck, this work was also written under Fleischmann's Irish pseudonym and alludes both in sentiment and stylistic features to Irish traditional music. The first, 'Mabhna Eoghain Ruaidh Uí Neill' (Lament for Owen Roe O'Neill) is a setting of a poem by Turlough Carolan bewailing the death of the famed Irish military leader, whose death in 1649 laid the country open to the Cromwellian conquest. Beginning in a characteristically solemn vein with a lilting *sean-nós*-styled vocal melody in E minor, the song features the almost clichéd use of the flattened seventh, especially heightened dynamically at bar 4, which presages the more contemplative course the melody line undertakes in evoking Carolan's lamentation:

³⁹ *ibid.*, 44.

⁴⁰ de Barra: 'Fleischmann the Composer', 7.

'Níor bheo mo chroidhe acht ag caoineadh id' dheoidh' (without hope or joy I'd be keening your death'⁴¹ (Example 5).

EXAMPLE 5

Fleischmann: *Tri hAmhráin I*, bars 1-7
Grave funebre (J-69)

Dá bhfuighinn maoin a's

fíon le n-ól Níor bheo mo chroidhe acht ag

caoineadh id' dheoidh. An bhfuil duin-e ar bith ar an tsaigheal

⁴¹ The translations of this work's text are by a Father P. Sweeney, taken from accompanying material to a facsimile of the autograph score held by The Contemporary Music Centre, 95 Lower Baggot St., Dublin,

The sheer emotionality of the text-setting is brought to a climax towards the end of the lament. Bar 31 sees melismatic decoration on the note f' similar to *sean-nós* treatment of similar words at 'beidh mé id' dhéidh ('na bhrón)' (for woe I'll pass away). Bars 33-37 see consistent use of chromatic inflection on the note c' lending a modal 'feel' to the plaintive melody line. At bars 41-47, the lament apportioned its dramatic climax; the melisma on the word 'Och !' in the vocal line containing the latterly-discussed modal inflection while the accompanying parts match the voice in emotional intensity (Example 6).

EXAMPLE 6

Fleischmann: *Trí hAmhráin-I*, bars 31-47

The musical score consists of two systems of music. The first system, starting at bar 30, shows the vocal line with the lyrics "beidh mé id' dhéidh 'na bhrón." The piano accompaniment features a melismatic line on the note f' in the vocal line. The second system, starting at bar 35, shows the vocal line with the lyrics "I n-áit an óil, o - chón! beidh". The piano accompaniment continues with chromatic inflection on the note c' in the vocal line. The score is in G major and 4/4 time. The piano part includes dynamic markings such as *mp* and *mf*.

os - na, I n-áit an cheóil, o - bói beidh

(40) *Largamente*

tuir - se. Och!

The image shows a musical score for two systems. The first system consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has lyrics: "os - na, I n-áit an cheóil, o - bói beidh". The piano accompaniment is in the left hand. The second system also has a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line has lyrics: "tuir - se. Och!". The piano accompaniment continues. A circled number "40" is placed above the piano part of the second system, and the word "Largamente" is written above the vocal line of the second system. The score is written in a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). The first system has a dynamic marking of *mf* at the beginning and *f* later. The second system has a dynamic marking of *f* at the beginning of the piano part.

Ochl' Ochl' mo

45 bhrón 's mo dhíth!

con tutta forza

Translation:

I n-áit an óil, ochón: béidh osna,

In place of wine, ochone, there's
wailing

I n-áit an cheoil, obó! béidh tuirse.

In place of music, obo, there's mourning.

Ochl' Ochl' Ochl' mo bhrón's mo dhíth! ...

Och, och, och my grief, my death ...

The second song, 'Bíogadh' (Away), is an adaptation by Micheál Ó Murchú of a medieval poem about a butterfly and a bee who discuss their respective stations in life. The accompaniment starts with a syncopated reel-like figure,⁴² built on a triplet-driven rhythm which ably supports the similar figure found in the vocal melody illustrating the words, 'Má tá sé an am' (If it be time) over the course of some eighteen bars (Example 7).

EXAMPLE 7

Fleischmann: *Tri hAmhráin* II, bars I-7 and 21-25

Allegro assai (♩=92)

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system shows the piano accompaniment for the first seven bars. It features a syncopated triplet figure in the right hand, marked *pp* (*leggiero*). The second system shows the vocal melody and piano accompaniment for bars 21-25. The vocal line includes the lyrics "Má tá sé 'na" and is marked *p*. The piano accompaniment includes markings for the left hand (L.H.) and right hand (R.H.) and is marked *pp*.

⁴² James Cowdery writes: 'All reels are quick tunes with a feeling of two beats per bar, subdivided with four quavers. Some musicians play reels "inegale," that is, the first pair of quavers slightly longer and the second slightly shorter. This practice may result in a triple feeling, like a tune in very fast 12/8; but

am'' A - dubh-airt go c

Má tá sé 'na am,

Má tá sé 'na am''

(25)

mp

*musicians conceive of reels as duple, sometimes played with a kind of swing rhythm' (My italics; after Cowdery: *The Melodic Tradition of Ireland*, 18).*

The third setting, entitled 'An Píobaire' (The Piper), is of another poem by Ó Murchú. Its story and nationalistic message are clear: 'The piper has been away for many a year, the glens are silent, but when the sound of his pipes is heard again, echoing above the tread of marching feet, Sheila will know that her cause has triumphed, that the flag of victory is unfurled from the Suir to the Bann'.⁴³ Bar 13 sees another use of modal inflection, the ubiquitous flattened seventh, which is further tempered by a harmonic support replete with a characteristic 'drone-like' bass. The martial implications of the poem's words are reflected in the trumpet-like enunciation of vocal line at bars 19-21, while the song's more 'European' aspects are shown in the use of varying metre and tempo (e.g., bars 18-19) (Example 8).

EXAMPLE 8

Fleischmann: *Trí hAmhráin* III, bars 10-21

10

10

pp *cresc.*

Do chual - a-mar do phíob - air-e, A

pp

⁴³ From accompanying material to autograph in the CMC.

(15)

Shighl - e a char - a, Ag gluais-eacht tríd an

poco a poco cresc.

tír. Ag-us na míl - te fair-is! A's

Marziale (♩ = 124) (20)

ó h'or - ó, a phíob-air-e, Siubhail, siubhail a-

Another of Fleischmann's early works to reflect the 'Irish' note was the Piano Quintet of 1938. However, the dropping of the Gaelic pseudonym for his first Irish première 'as himself,' and the adoption of a more abstract form, also signified an increased catholicity of styles and influences in its make-up. The pensive opening of the first movement (Allegretto), reminiscent of Brahms and early Rachmaninov, establishes its

As Joseph J. Ryan comments, the work is 'eclectic with a range of echoes from Stanford to Delius ...';⁴⁴ the influence of the former is certainly apparent in the euphonious section in D major that begins at bar 34 and follows the introduction (Example 10).

EXAMPLE 10

Fleischmann: Piano Quintet I, bars 34-/39 (violin I only)



By complete contrast, Fleischmann's later 'modernist' works are foreshadowed in the astringent harmony and fragmentary texture also found in this movement (Example 11).

⁴⁴ Ryan: 'Fleischmann: Piano Quintet', sleeve notes.

EXAMPLE 11

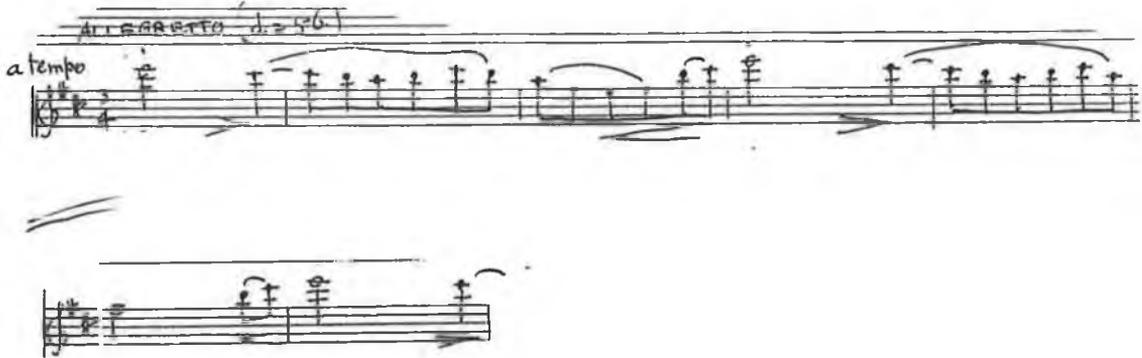
Fleischmann: Piano Quintet I, bars 211-214

Handwritten musical score for Piano Quintet I, bars 211-214. The score is written on five staves. The top staff is marked "MENO MOSSO ma appassionata" and "3/4". The second staff is marked "fp" and "mf". The third staff is marked "p" and "mf". The fourth staff is marked "mf" and "f". The fifth staff is marked "MENO MOSSO, ma" and "pesante". The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

The sectional formal structure of the work, encased in four movements, is highlighted by the succession of moods that follow the introductory passage noted in Example 3. The buoyant Allegretto that occurs in the third movement (Allegro Scherzando) sees a lyrical melody of ethnic character beginning in the first violin (Example 12).

EXAMPLE 12

Fleischmann: Piano Quintet III, bars 17-23 (Violin I only)



The following and final movement (*Allegro Molto*) opens with a melody in the viola reminiscent of the work's beginning. The sectional construction of the work is reflected here in the succession of fugato, lyrical melody of Irish character, and return to the opening theme voiced high in the first violin.⁴⁵ The introspective end of the work is peppered by tonal ambiguity as chromatic inflections cloud the sense of closure which is finally achieved as the work concludes in the tonic A minor.

Ryan is also equally perceptive in his assessment of the work's formal design. Commenting on the variation principle employed that lends the work its above-mentioned sectional feel, he writes: 'While the work is not indentured to a specifically Irish programme, the linear writing and character of the initial variations invoke a

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

distinctive spirit of place ...'.⁴⁶ Ryan sees the composer's overall approach as one founded on a conscious proposition to 'represent the Irish condition'; thus '[Fleischmann's] goal was ever to forge the universal without repudiating the particular'.⁴⁷ These innate facets of Fleischmann's musical personality were also noted by fellow-composer Frederick May in an article in 1949. In discussing the nationalistic *Clare's Dragoons* (1944), May wrote:

... in this work as in the three Irish songs [*Tri hAmhráin*], Fleischmann has managed to do something entirely original; he has become articulate for an Ireland that is gone, or rather, he has given us in music a symbol of what Ireland, her people, her history ... mean to each one of us. He has effected in sound a crystallisation and intensification of a feeling common to all Irishmen, and in so doing he has secured for himself an honoured and a permanent place in the musical history of his country.⁴⁸

Commissioned for the Thomas Davis and Young Ireland Centenary, the work is scored for baritone, warpipes, chorus and orchestra after a song by Davis of the same name,⁴⁹ and was dedicated to Fleischmann's contemporary, folk-song enthusiast and writer Donal O' Sullivan.⁵⁰ In its then unprecedented use of warpipes in an orchestral setting, *Clare's Dragoon's* epitomises Fleischmann's populist 'hat'; the simple diatonicism of its musical language, despite betraying mild dissonances in places, perfectly suited both the occasion and the sentiment evoked by Davis's song. The orchestral introduction evokes a distant droning and drumming that gradually gathers in intensity into a vigorous

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ *ibid.*,

⁴⁸ de Barra: 'Fleischmann the Composer', 7.

⁴⁹ 'Clare's Dragoons' appeared in a collection entitled *The Spirit of the Nation* (1843) in which Davis expounded his own brand of romantic nationalism. The book 'occupied the mid-point between the drawing-room and the highway; its immense popularity appeared to signify that it represented "the hopes and passions of the Irish people ..."' (after White: *The Keeper's Recital*, 60).

⁵⁰ Donal O' Sullivan (1883-1973) was editor of the Bunting Collection of Irish folk music for the *Journal of the Irish Folk Song Society* from 1927-1939, and author of the two-volume *Carolan - Life and Times of an Irish Harper* (1958). According to Ryan, he was '[an important influence] in furthering his friend's interest in the nationalist idiom'; '[although] there can be no doubt that Fleischmann was primarily

march. Laden with open fifths, this atmospheric beginning yields a bassoon line in a suitably 'Irish' and militaristic vein (Example 13).

EXAMPLE 13

Fleischmann: *Clare's Dragoons*, bars 9-24 (bassoons and clarinets only)

The image shows a musical score for two staves, likely bassoon and clarinet parts. The top staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). It features a series of notes with slurs and accents, including dynamic markings such as *pp* and *f*. The bottom staff begins with a bass clef and a key signature of one flat. It contains a more complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes, also featuring slurs and dynamic markings like *pp* and *f*. The score is presented in a handwritten or typeset style with clear notation for notes, rests, and dynamics.

conscious of the occasion for which this was written, ... the stylistic discrepancy with his earlier works is

In the following section depicting scenes of battle, the choir enters into the tumult in B flat major (a third lower than the home tonality, D major) with the first two verses of the song. The tenors and basses enter first, singing the traditional air of 'Clare's Dragoons' assertively in unison, while the percussion adds to the mood (Example 14) (Please see following page).

EXAMPLE 14

Fleischmann: *Clare's Dragoons*, 113-116 (woodwind, horns and choir only)

⑦ *Tempo Primo ma sempre Con Brio* $\text{♩} = 120$

The musical score is arranged in a standard orchestral format. At the top, the tempo and metronome marking are given as *Tempo Primo ma sempre Con Brio* with a quarter note equal to 120 beats per minute. The score is divided into four measures. The woodwind section includes Clarinet, Flute, Oboe, and Bassoon. The brass section includes Horns, Trumpets, and Tuba. The percussion section includes Drum, Cymbals, and Bass Drum. The choir part is at the bottom with the following lyrics: "When on ra-mit-lies' bloody field the Def-fled french were forced to yield, The". The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (p, mf, sfz), articulation (accents), and performance instructions like *III-IV* for the horns.

The addition of warpipes ensures that the ethnic flavour of the work is all-pervasive while the impact of first hearing their strains off-stage, before their entrance into view to join the choir and orchestra, must be very dramatic in performance. Dr Ita Beausang, a former student of Fleischmann's at UCC, remembers 'one unforgettable performance of *Clare's Dragoons* ... during which Joan Denise Moriarty⁵¹ made a dramatic entrance into the Aula Maxima, red hair flying, playing the war pipes'.⁵²

However, as Ryan asserts, '*Clare's Dragoon's* cannot be said to be typical of Fleischmann's style'.⁵³ As his career progressed, his modernist 'hat' was increasingly worn; his elegant *Lament for Elizabeth MacDermott Roe* for string orchestra (1946) (extracted from the four-movement *The Humours of Carolan* (1941) and published by An Gúm, represents a synthesis between the 'Irish' modal style and the new, more cosmopolitan-inclined compositional disposition of his later works. One of the first clear examples of this latter departure was the song-cycle *The Fountain of Magic* of the same year (based on Irish poems translated by Frank O'Connor) which included bitonal elements and the use of varying metre while maintaining a semblance of traditional thematic development by use of short melodic and rhythmic units.⁵⁴ The composer's *Introduction and Funeral March* (1960), later appended by a third movement ('Bachannale') and in this form renamed *Sinfonia Votiva* (1977), displayed a more serious, contemplative side of his compositional character that contrasted with the many

⁵¹ Ballet impresario Moriarty was a competent pipes-player who also, according to the composer, helped with the ornamentation of the part (after Hogan: 'An artistic partnership that lasted a lifetime').

⁵² Beausang: 'Obituary: Aloys Fleischmann', 5.

⁵³ Ryan: *Nationalism and Music in Ireland* (diss.), 440.

⁵⁴ Klein, Axel: 'Aloys Fleischmann', *Komponisten den Gegenwart*, ed. Sparrer and Heisker, 9.

slight, commissioned works for mostly non-professional ensembles of the fifties and sixties.

However, to be fair, practical concerns were probably just as important to a composer such as Fleischmann as those relating to compositional aesthetic and style. His position as conductor of the Cork Symphony Orchestra must have given him valuable insight into the capabilities of a largely amateur ensemble, and thus tempered his writing somewhat.

Beausang reflects:

In retrospect, I realise what Herculean efforts it must have taken to combine the talents of varying standards who made up the Cork Symphony Orchestra. The programmes included not only the standard works but also first performances of music by contemporary Irish composers ... : [Fleischmann's] own compositions also featured ...⁵⁵

It is in this light that one can consider *Songs of Colmcille* (1964) for speaker, choir and orchestra on a text by Robert Farren. The piece was commissioned by TCD as part of bi-centennial celebrations for the foundation of the School of Music, and premièred on 2 December 1964 at the college by the TCD College Singers and Chamber Orchestra, conducted by the composer himself. The work was dedicated to his fellow composer, academic and friend Brian Boydell (the latter having replaced George Hewson as professor of music at TCD in 1962), a telling fact as Boydell himself was similarly aware of the exigencies of writing suitable, yet artistically satisfying music for performance by often largely amateur executants in his role as conductor of the Dublin Orchestral Players at that time.

⁵⁵ Beausang: 'Obituary: Aloys Fleischmann', 5.

The orchestral prelude is rooted in plainchant; the delicate tracery of the scoring for the string section contrasts with the slow-moving, tenor-like horn line (Example 15).

EXAMPLE 15

Fleischmann: *Songs of Colmcille I*, bars 1-14 (horn and strings only)

The musical score for Example 15 consists of the following parts and markings:

- 1 HN.**: First Horn part, starting with a half note G4 and a half note G4, marked *p*.
- K.D. in A and C**: Keyboard part, marked with a large *C*.
- PERC.**: Percussion part, marked with a large *C*.
- PIANO**: Piano part, marked with a large *C*.
- ANDANTE CON RITARD.**: Tempo marking for the string section.
- VLN. I**: Violin I part, marked with *p* and *mp*.
- VLN. II**: Violin II part, marked with *p* and *mp*.
- VLA.**: Viola part, marked with *p*.
- VCL.**: Violoncello part, marked with *p*.
- D.B.**: Double Bass part, marked with *p*.

Handwritten annotations include a circled *5* at the bottom of the page.

The image shows a handwritten musical score on a page numbered 165. The score is divided into two main systems. The top system consists of a single staff with a treble clef, containing a melodic line with notes and rests. The bottom system is a piano accompaniment, consisting of two staves (treble and bass clefs) with dense chordal textures, including many triplets and complex rhythmic patterns. There are various annotations throughout the score, including dynamic markings like 'mp' and 'p', and some handwritten notes in Italian such as 'poco agitato' and 'a tempo'. A circled number '10' is written below the piano part. The handwriting is in black ink on white paper.

The medieval flavour is maintained in the horn line in the music that follows as the melody outlines the interval of a fifth, adumbrated by the woodwind, amidst rich string scoring of a shimmering quality that echoes Debussy in its opulence (Example 16).

EXAMPLE 16

Fleischmann: *Songs of Colmcille I*, 48-51 (clarinets, bassoon, horn and strings only)

The musical score is arranged in a system with four main parts: Clarinet (Cl), Bassoon (Fg), Horn (Hn), and Strings (Str). The Clarinet and Bassoon parts are written in a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The Horn part is in a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The Strings part is in a grand staff with a treble and bass clef and a key signature of one flat. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamics. The Clarinet and Bassoon parts have a melodic line with some grace notes and slurs. The Horn part has a melodic line with a 'p' dynamic marking. The Strings part has a complex texture with many notes and slurs. The score is divided into four measures.

A Colmcille 'motif' is gradually 'formed' in the course of the Prelude consisting of a musical syllabification of the saint's name. This is brought to its apotheosis at the end of the movement while also displaying Fleischmann's penchant for shifting harmonies by semitones (similar to that which was executed in the above-mentioned Piano Quintet).⁵⁶

The composer's writing for chorus on this occasion resulted in an economy of expression that lent a presumably intended clarity to the annunciation of the text. Although the vocal lines are largely declamatory and quite limited in intervallic scope, their delivery would have, undoubtedly, served to heighten the humour of their text in a fashion perhaps not unlike that of Warlock (Example 17).

EXAMPLE 17

Fleischmann: *Songs of Colmcille* IV, bars 33-42 (chorus and strings only)

The image shows a handwritten musical score for Example 17, consisting of six staves. The top two staves are for the chorus, with lyrics "AND IT HAPPENED THAT THE WREN ARE THE". The bottom four staves are for the strings, with various dynamics and articulations. The score is heavily annotated with performance instructions and musical markings.

⁵⁶ Ryan: 'Fleischmann: *Piano Quintet*', sleeve notes.

Handwritten musical score for Soprano (S), Alto (A), and Tenor (T) with piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "AND IT HAPPENED THAT THE CAT ATE THE WREN. THEN FLY, AND THE CAT ATE THE WREN. THEN". The score includes vocal lines and piano accompaniment with various musical notations such as dynamics (f, mf, dir.), articulation (accents, slurs), and fingerings.

The 1970s saw more opportunities for Fleischmann to don his modernist 'hat' but the resultant works were not all necessarily serious. This fact was perfectly exemplified by *Cornucopia* for horn and piano, commissioned for the Dublin Festival of Twentieth Century Music in 1970. Presented in a version for orchestra a year later, the erudite wit underlying the broad interpretation of the work's title results in solo writing of melodic and inventive fecundity befitting of the 'horn of plenty' in its title. The imaginative

opening asserts a harmonic language and resultant sound-world which were notably advanced of anything heard heretofore in the composer's output (Example 18).

EXAMPLE 18

Fleischmann: *Cornucopia I*, bars 1-6

The musical score for *Cornucopia I*, bars 1-6, is presented in a full orchestral arrangement. The score is divided into two systems. The first system includes Flutes, Oboes, Clarinet (Bb), Bassoon, Trumpets (E), Trombones (Bb), Timpani, C.D.A., Snare Drum, Bass Drum, Piano, and Harp. The second system includes Violins I & II, Viola, Cello, and Bass. The score is marked 'PRELUDE' and 'Andante Con Moto (♩ = C. 58)'. The music features complex rhythmic patterns, dynamic markings such as 'f' and 'pizz.', and various articulations. The score is written in a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature. The first system includes a 'PRELUDE' marking and a 'Com. Score' marking. The second system includes a 'Andante Con Moto (♩ = C. 58)' marking. The score is written in a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature. The first system includes a 'PRELUDE' marking and a 'Com. Score' marking. The second system includes a 'Andante Con Moto (♩ = C. 58)' marking.

OXION

N. 49

1800

15108

Handwritten musical score for OXION, N. 49, 1800. The score consists of multiple staves with musical notation, including notes, rests, and dynamic markings such as *p*, *fp*, and *f*. A tempo marking *largo e sonore* is present. The notation includes various clefs, accidentals, and articulation marks.

This page contains a handwritten musical score for a percussion ensemble. The score is organized into several systems of staves. The top system includes parts for Snare Drum (labeled 'Snare'), Tom (labeled 'Tom'), and Cymbal (labeled 'Cym'). The middle system features a complex arrangement of notes and rests, with a 'Cassio.' (Cassidy) part indicated. The bottom system includes parts for Snare Drum and Tom. The score is heavily annotated with dynamics such as *f*, *ff*, *fp*, and *sfz*, as well as performance markings like accents (>), slurs, and articulation marks. A large bracket labeled 'A' spans the bottom two systems. The notation includes various rhythmic values and rests, with some notes marked with '3' and '6'.

A further commission for the above-mentioned Dublin Festival of Twentieth Century Music was *Tides* (1973), a song-cycle for mezzo-soprano and piano that, like *Cornucopia*, was adapted for orchestra a year later but with the addition of a harpsichord. The work was based on the book of poems by the same name by John Montague, which as Brian Boydell comments, 'survey the human scene with compassion, with an acute eye for detail and felicity of imagery and language.'¹²⁸

In the first setting of four, 'King and Queen', man is seen as a ritual image; the use of harpsichord bespeaks telling acknowledgement of its revival in twentieth-century music while lending a new and somewhat eerie quality to the orchestral colour. The vocal writing is characterised by understatement, which later leads to heightened expression (not included in the example) (Example 19) (Please see following page).

¹²⁸ 'Sixty Years of Irish Radio: The Irish Composers,' prod. de Bromhead.

EXAMPLE 19

Fleischmann: *Tides I*, bars 1-6 (harpsichord, harp and voice only)

The image shows a handwritten musical score for three parts: Harpsichord (HP), Harp (RP), and Voice (CE). The score is written in 4/4 time and consists of six systems of staves. The first system includes the following elements:

- HP (Harpsichord):** Treble clef, starting with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The notation includes various chords and melodic lines.
- RP (Harp):** Treble clef, starting with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The notation includes various chords and melodic lines.
- CE (Voice):** Treble clef, starting with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The tempo marking is *ANDANTE LUN DOLO*. The lyrics are "JAG - GED HEAD OF WAR - RI - OR".

The second system continues the musical notation for all three parts. The third system includes the following elements:

- HP (Harpsichord):** Treble clef, continuing the musical notation.
- RP (Harp):** Treble clef, continuing the musical notation.
- CE (Voice):** Treble clef, continuing the musical notation. The lyrics are "BIRD OF PREY SUR - VEYING SPACE".

The fourth system includes the following elements:

- HP (Harpsichord):** Treble clef, continuing the musical notation.
- RP (Harp):** Treble clef, continuing the musical notation.
- CE (Voice):** Treble clef, continuing the musical notation. The lyrics are "SIDE BY SIDE".

The fifth system includes the following elements:

- HP (Harpsichord):** Treble clef, continuing the musical notation.
- RP (Harp):** Treble clef, continuing the musical notation.
- CE (Voice):** Treble clef, continuing the musical notation. The tempo marking is *PIU MOSSO*.

The sixth system includes the following elements:

- HP (Harpsichord):** Treble clef, continuing the musical notation.
- RP (Harp):** Treble clef, continuing the musical notation.
- CE (Voice):** Treble clef, continuing the musical notation.

The score is marked with various dynamics such as *mf* and *f*, and includes a large watermark "EXAMPLE 19" across the middle of the page.

The third setting, entitled 'A Dream of July', is, as Boydell asserts, 'serene as a girl in a Botticelli painting'. This description is underlined by the writing for both voice and solo violin: the Bergian lyricism of the latter showing that 'modern' music need not be shorn of beauty (Example 20).

EXAMPLE 20

Fleischmann: *Tides III*, bars 1-8 (voice and strings only)

ANDANTE AFFETTO (♩ = 63)

Voice (V): *mp*

Violin (VINS): *mp*

String parts (C, F, C, B, C): *CON SORD.*, *UNIS.*, *DIV.*, *mp*, *p*, *PRZ.*

P

Handwritten musical score for voice and orchestra. The top staff is for voice, with lyrics: "SI - - - LENCE AND DAWN NIGHT AIR FLO - - - - WING FROM THE GAR - DEN." The score includes dynamic markings like "pp", "p", and "ppp", and various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and fermatas. The orchestra part is written on multiple staves below the voice line.

The decade ended on a 'populist' note with *Ómós don Phiarsach* (Homage to Pearse) of 1979. This work, commissioned by RTÉ for the centenary of the birth of Pádraig Pearse, is scored for mezzo-soprano, speaker and orchestra and its seven movements are based on texts by the patriot. Fleischmann's successful essays in ballet music (*An Cóitín Dearg* [The Red Petticoat] and *Macha Ruadh* [Red Macha] of 1950 and 1955, respectively,) were then crowned in 1981 by *The Táin*⁵⁸, written for the Irish Ballet Company. The composer once commented that he considered this work to be his most challenging and suprisingly - to him - most successful and popular orchestral

composition: interpreting a mythological theme in terms of contemporary music, adding 'yet we filled the Gaiety with it for a week!'⁵⁹

The piece opens with lower strings and low-registered percussion with a tremolant figure that starts at an undercurrent before increasing in intensity. The syncopated rhythm in the *divisi* 'celli gives a suitably muted ethnic flavour to the music as the first bassoon comes to life assertively (Example 21).

EXAMPLE 21

Fleischmann: *The Táin I*, bars 1-11 (bassoon, percussion and strings only)

The musical score for Example 21 consists of eight staves. The top staff is for K.D. in G, C, F, B, D, with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. It features a melodic line with dynamic markings *pp*, *ff*, and *pp*. The second staff is for B.D. with a bass clef and a tremolant figure, marked *pp* and *fff*. The third staff is for Hp. (Harp). The fourth staff is for VLN I (Violin I) with a treble clef, marked *ff* and *MOLTO MODERATO*. The fifth staff is for VLN II (Violin II) with a treble clef. The sixth staff is for VLA. (Viola) with a treble clef. The seventh staff is for VCL. DIV. (Violoncello Divisi) with a bass clef, marked *f* and *pp*. The eighth staff is for D.B. (Double Bass) with a bass clef, marked *pp* and *mp*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic hairpins.

⁵⁸ The ballet was named after the famous Irish mythological cycle of tales which came back to prominence following a translation by Thomas Kinsella published in 1969.

⁵⁹ Leland: 'A lifetime in the service of music'.

Handwritten musical score for a string quartet, page 176. The score consists of four staves. The top two staves are mostly blank, with some handwritten notes and dynamics (f, p) in the second measure. The bottom two staves contain a dense melodic line with many slurs and accents. The instruction "CRESC. poco a poco" is written multiple times across the bottom staves.

A later section, entitled 'Cuchulainn and Emer', starts with a characteristically serene passage redolent of 'Celtic Twilight' pastoralism that recalls Bax in its neo-late Romantic harmony teeming with ninths (Example 22).

EXAMPLE 22

Fleischmann: *The Táin* IV, bars 1-9

2
4 | 154 | ANDANTE ESPRESSIVO

The first system of handwritten musical notation consists of five staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The second staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one sharp. The third and fourth staves are also treble clefs with a key signature of one sharp. The fifth staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one sharp. The notation includes various notes, rests, and slurs, with some handwritten annotations like '2' and '4' above the first staff.

The second system of handwritten musical notation consists of five staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp. The second staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one sharp. The third and fourth staves are also treble clefs with a key signature of one sharp. The fifth staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one sharp. The notation includes various notes, rests, and slurs, with some handwritten annotations like '2' and '4' above the first staff.

The third system of handwritten musical notation consists of five staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp. The second staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one sharp. The third and fourth staves are also treble clefs with a key signature of one sharp. The fifth staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one sharp. The notation includes various notes, rests, and slurs, with some handwritten annotations like '2' and '4' above the first staff.

ANDANTE ESPRESSIVO

The image shows a handwritten musical score for a large ensemble, likely a symphony or chamber orchestra. The score is written on multiple staves, with various instruments and sections labeled on the left side. The notation includes notes, rests, dynamics (p, pp, f), and performance instructions such as "Solo" and "2 Soli". The score is organized into measures, with some measures containing complex rhythmic patterns and others featuring sustained notes or rests. The handwriting is clear and professional, typical of a composer's manuscript.

The broad wit that circumscribed the above-mentioned *Cornucopia* of the early seventies was brought to the fore in what appears to have been Fleischmann's compositional swan-song, *Games*. Composed in 1990 (two years before his death), the

piece was based on six poems by Serbo-Croat poet Vasco Popa translated by Anne Pennington, and is scored for choir, harp and percussion. Despite Fleischmann being an octogenerian at this stage, it astonished the audience at its première in Cork with, as Sarah Burn details, its 'virtuosity, vigour and vehemence'.⁶⁰ Indeed, the second movement, 'The Nail', stands testament to this acute observation in its sheer momentum and visceral energy (Example 23).

EXAMPLE 23

Fleischmann: *Games II*, bars 1-25

joitale (♩ = 200)

Soprano (S):

Alto (A):

Tenor (T):

Bass (B):

Xylorimba (Xyl):

Lyrics:

a - no - ther the pin - cers

One be the nail

The o - thers are work - men

⁶⁰ Burn, Sarah M.: 'Irish Musical Portraits: 5. Aloys Fleischmann', after de Barra: 'Fleischmann the

A

Soprano: *mp* The

Alto: *p* The cers

Tenor: *p* The pin

Xyl: *f*

Hp: *p*

Soprano: pin-cers grip the nail by the head

Alto: the pin -

Tenor: cers the pin

Bass: *mp* The pin-cers the pin -

Xyl

Hp: *mp* ch

The musical score is arranged in seven staves. The vocal parts (S, A, T, B) and S.D. part have lyrics: "Grip him grip him grip him" and "cers". The piano part (Hp.) has a dynamic marking of *ff* and a marking "Dq 14 24" in the final measure. The tambourine part (Tamb.) has a dynamic marking of *ff*. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

However, his ineffable humour shines through at the movement's close with a whimsical spoken ending. The fact that *Games* probably stands as Fleischmann's last work is telling; it was, perhaps, his way of indicating where his true stylistic leanings lay after a compositional career characterised by a public/'private'-populist/modernist dichotomy.

In regard to Fleischmann's multifarious musical activities in general, one could contend that his compositional legacy would have been larger had he been able to focus his energies more pointedly; 'that he did not is due to his understanding of the larger obligation his generation had to create the circumstances in which modern Irish music could flourish'.⁶¹

Though open to innovation and less often making use of clear 'Irish' references after the forties, the youthful respect for tradition that spurred his early quest for a 'Gaelic art-music' did, it seems, remain with him throughout his life. Perhaps his admission of 1980 (which opens this chapter) can thus be viewed as a tacit acknowledgement of an underlying 'debt' to the ethnic repertory; his monumental posthumous publication, *Sources of Irish Traditional Music 1583-1855* certainly attested to his scholarly interest in the subject.⁶² As de Barra writes: 'Aloys Fleischmann was keenly aware of his position as one of the first group of native composers to live and work in Ireland': '... how to be Irish in a larger European context [was] a question that lost none of its urgency' for him.⁶³

⁶¹ de Barra: 'Fleischmann the Composer', 7.

⁶² Fleischmann, Aloys: *Sources of Irish Traditional Music 1583-1855* (New York: Garland, 1997).

⁶³ de Barra: 'Fleischmann the Composer', 7.

CHAPTER SIX

SOME CONCLUSIONS: FORGING THE UNIVERSAL WITHOUT REPUDIATING THE PARTICULAR

If I hadn't been afflicted in this way, I'd have liked to try to bridge the national-international gap

I feel that the position of the creative artist in [this country] is to express, through the international language of his[her] art, the 'feeling' of Ireland.²

The task before us lies in ... art-music, lies in raising it from the half-baked, shoddy thing it is, in establishing contacts with contemporary movements, in making of music a medium for the expression of the life of present-day Ireland, by the use of present-day methods elsewhere.³

The three statements from the triumvirate, made at various stages of their careers, should highlight the main thrust of this study. The focus has not been to attempt a definitive study of Irish musical modernism by their example (an approach that has been profitably explored elsewhere through the example of Seán Ó Riada).⁴ It has, hopefully, elucidated the main determinant that faced these composers in their conviction to 'modernise' Irish music in more ways than one: that which I hesitantly call 'the cultural context.'

'Cultural context' is worth closer examination. It was, perhaps, inevitable that any lasting engagement between Irish art music and modernism would entail a solution to the 'national question' in Irish composition: in various periods and to varying extents each composer provided their own answer. As adverted to above, May and Boydell were

¹ May quoted in Kent: 'Kay Kent talks to Frederick May'.

² Boydell in an interview with the author, 1998.

³ Fleischmann: 'Ars Nova: Irish Music in the Shaping', 45.

the first to consciously by-pass it; even if the absence of a multiplicity of 'private languages' found in Irish composition today led to competent, if uninspired, 'folksong' arrangements for commercial gain on the part of the former that were worlds apart from his masterly string quartet. For Fleischmann, a bid to coalesce elements of the ethnic tradition with inherited art music techniques, and a realisation of their inherent incompatibility, led to a conscious adoption of two, fundamentally dislocated styles.

But an exploration of cultural aspects should not begin and end with their music: it should also be obvious that their backgrounds were also vital in creating who and what they were. In each case, however, it is important to remember the essentially 'separate' nature of their familial and cultural origins from that of the general milieu. That this was a vital and formative element in their development, both social and musical, is evidenced most clearly in Fleischmann and Boydell.

Fleischmann, as already seen, though raised in the country, was not even Irish by birth. Although his expressed wish to have been born in Ireland, allied with his fundamental assimilation into its social fabric by the time his professional career began betokened *de facto* nationality, his name and above-mentioned bifurcated compositional character displayed a plurality that remained with him throughout his life. Despite being denominationally an obvious Roman Catholic (given his father's position as a Catholic cathedral organist in Cork), his self-confessed often 'difficult' childhood as a German boy in a wartime Ireland fraught with contradictory allegiance and fuelled by jingoism,

⁴ See White: *The Keeper's Recital*, 125-151.

conditioned his early fervency in asserting his avowed 'Irishness' in music and words. Perhaps it is in this light that one can read Fleischmann's near life-long scholarly quest, culminating in his magisterial posthumous publication, *Sources of Irish Traditional Music*, as indicative of his wish to circumscribe his identity for posterity as a *bona fide* Irishman.

Boydell's cultural background, a result of Anglo-Irish Protestant parentage and an English education, was similarly apart from the Irish social mainstream. However, it was his concomitant 'West British' accent and manner that alienated him, he describes, from the people he most wished to identify with – his fellow-countrymen; his fellow *Irishmen*. Thus the concept of a 'multiplicity of Irishness' (originally applied in terms of composition to May) comes to the fore again; when Boydell experienced what were for him very real difficulties in asserting his nationality and cultural identity, such an abstraction was not as common in currency as it is in today's more pluralistic Ireland.⁵

May, also Protestant, probably endured similar difficulties; in early independent Ireland (i.e. 1920s - 1940s), relatively few Protestants were regarded as 'truly' Irish unless (like Douglas Hyde) they were outspokenly pro-Irish culture, or (like W.B. Yeats) they expressed a strong *public* Irish identity. Furthermore, May's white-gloved, dilettantish presence in the fellow-company of Dublin's mid-century cultural *intelligensia*, his homosexuality, and later his alcoholism and reclusive nature, were other discerning

⁵ Pine: 'Maturity, 1922-1998', *To Talent Alone*, 345; The original quote, (which appears in chapter 3) is 'When May wrote in 1935 of cultural life and cultural practitioners being equally fragile and vulnerable, by virtue of the fact that a nation did not exist, that there was a "a multiplication of private languages, but

factors in his essential ‘difference’ from others in his environs. However, it should be noted at this juncture that while all three composers were in their various ways outside the norms of a highly conservative Irish society, they were not outcasts; nevertheless, they felt drawn, as a consequence of their avowed artistic modernism, to wider European musical (and cultural) concerns. Allied to this, I would argue, was a need to communicate this relationship without having to compromise their positions as Irishmen and, crucially, Irish composers. To-reiterate, ‘Irishness’ in musical composition was to most (establishment and public alike) synonymous with the use of ‘folk music’ – although by the 1950s, as Richard Pine adverts to: ‘that [which] had been regarded as the life-blood of cultural revival was thus coming to be seen as, at the least, problematic and possibly a poisoned chalice’.⁶ In their determined ‘internationalism’ (in the most literal sense of the term), May, Boydell and Fleischmann courageously, if unconsciously, adhered to the ‘dictum’ that (to paraphrase Michael Kennedy) there is no such thing as Irish music, only music by Irish composers.⁷

‘Music seems to be a key to identity because it offers, so intensely, a sense of self and others, of the subjective in the collective.’⁸ Cultural identity, it seems, was a concept that concerned the triumvirate, even from their youth: from the experimental (to use Boydell’s term) ‘bottom-drawer’ efforts of May and the aforementioned, to the more (musically) accomplished ‘Gaelicism’ of Fleischmann’s *Piano Suite*. While May’s *Irish*

no vehicle for communication”, such a sense of identity was not available to him’ (from May: ‘Music and the Nation, 51).

⁶ *ibid.*, 345.

⁷ Kennedy: ‘Foreword to the Second Edition’, *National Music and other Essays*, Vaughan Williams (arr. Kennedy), viii.

⁸ Frith: ‘Music and Identity’, 110.

Love Song (1930) possibly denoted the musical influence of Larchet (his teacher at that time), it most certainly evidenced the inspiration of the Anglo-Irish literary revival in the choice of a Hyde text translated by Lady Gregory. However, perhaps one should not read too much into what was possibly a mere compositional exercise (of, significantly, the pre-London/Vienna period in his career) that would have cleverly appealed to the moderately nationalist, academic musical sensibilities of his aforementioned tutor. The corollary of this train of thought is that all three composers had ‘a great sense of the national and the natural’, to quote once more the quality which May attributed to Bartók; but one that was without recourse to parochialism.⁹ From the *Scherzo for Orchestra* (1933) to his swan-song, *Sunlight and Shadow* (1957), May intimated his great love for nature: note the C major serenity at the close of the often turbulent quartet, possibly stimulated (he proposed) by Goethe’s line ‘Over all the mountain tops is peace.’ A more tangible example was his interest in the renewal that accompanies the coming of spring, given direct voice in his *Spring Nocturne*, and indirect allusion in the *Songs from Prison*.¹⁰

Irish culture, and essentially, being Irish, has had an important and nurturing effect on Boydell as man and musician, as shown in his works. His youthful *Variations on ‘The Snowy-Breasted Pearl’* (1935), composed whilst at second-level education in Rugby was, he reveals, indicative of his early expatriate ‘rabid’ nationalism in a mostly anti-Irish environment; indeed it was this depth of feeling that led him to immerse himself in

⁹ See May in Kent: ‘Kent talks to May’.

¹⁰ ‘*Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh*’, cited in Ryan: ‘May: **String Quartet in C Minor**’, sleeve notes, after a quotation by the composer in ‘Note on String Quartet in C minor’, String Quartet in C minor, May, [ii].

Anglo-Irish literature.¹¹ This affinity provided the spring-board for some works: the *Joyce Songs*, the *Yeats Poems* and *A Terrible Beauty is Born*, while his interest in the physical landscape and its pre-history fuelled the *Megalithic Ritual Dances* and the later *Symphonic Inscapes*. Even traditionally ‘abstract’ forms such as the concerto and string quartet display an encapsulation of May’s précis (and more particularly, Boydell’s perception thereof) in music. In conceptual terms, Boydell’s nationality thus permeated his creative endeavour naturally; indeed, a maxim that he inadvertently formulated can be used to sum up his approach: ‘I live here: I absorb the atmosphere: I create.’¹²

Fleischmann similarly admitted to a literary stimulus, though in his expressed bid to represent the ‘Hidden Ireland’ it seems that perhaps he was more influenced by what he perceived as the *implications* of such a phenomenon; after all, he did suffix its mention with a notion of fashioning an idiom out of ‘the heroic tales and legends’. The above-mentioned early assertion of his cultural identity saw a lifelong identification by the composer with the literature, history and mythology of Ireland that even ‘crossed the boundary’ between his populist and modernist works. Thus, leaving aside the redolent (and aforementioned) *Suite for Piano* (1933), this conscious espousal of ‘Irishness’ in thematic or textual terms ranges across Fleischmann’s *œuvre* from the quasi-nostalgic *Trí hAmhráin* [Three Songs] (1937) to *Tides* (1972), and from *Clare’s Dragoon’s* (1944) to *Sinfonia Votiva* (1972).

Another binding factor between the three composers was that their experiences or awareness of Nazism (during their respective periods of foreign study) brought the

¹¹ ‘All My Enthusiasms’, prod. Makower.

effects of 'extreme' nationalism into sharp relief, thus informing their aversion of similar practices as applied to culture (and especially music) in Ireland. As Axel Klein asserts: 'Fleischmann's Munich, Boydell's Heidelberg and May's Vienna were overshadowed by this fatal ambition.'¹³ What Fleischmann noted as strong conservatism was reflected in the city's concert programmes:

Sibelius, to my utter astonishment, was virtually unknown in Munich. I brought the scores to Haas, who said, "Not of interest to us. Too dry, too dry." Most extraordinary. When I showed him a Bax symphony, he said, "Bruckner has us spoiled." Amazing. They were all like that, terribly conservative, not open to outside influences.¹⁴

Boydell's disturbing experiences of the deleterious social effects of Nazism are attested to above while May was 'deeply impressed by the political turmoil and frequent violence in the streets of Vienna in 1935-6, especially when he saw what developments led to a few years later'.¹⁵

Thus, to follow Klein, the "'human side," [i.e.] the musical environment and general atmosphere' of their places of study and temporary sojourns, and indeed that of their domicile, affected the output of the three composers in question; each went on to write, at various stages of their respective careers, works with strong political overtones. Although May's quartet (1936) belies 'an occasionally depressive tone which has been attributed both to his experiences in Austria and his incipient illness', the first, most telling, and most controversial example (given its timing) was his aforementioned *Songs from Prison* (1941).¹⁶ From its plaintive opening, replete with haunting, Mahlerian cor

¹² Boydell in Acton: Interview with Boydell, 104.

¹³ Klein: 'Irish Composers and Foreign Education', 281.

¹⁴ Fleischmann quoted in Dervan: 'Unflagging Energy', 8.

¹⁵ Klein: 'Irish Composers and Foreign Education', 281.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 281.

anglais to the drama of his depiction of the cruelty of the guards, May's sensitivity towards events in contemporary central Europe was keenly focused throughout the score, intermixing this pessimism with more tranquil concerns.

Apart from his pacifism and membership of Amnesty International, Boydell has been decidedly apolitical in his views, and consequently, most of his music. Nevertheless, *A Terrible Beauty is born* of 1966 (commissioned by the Irish government to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising), as he intimated, posed tremendous challenges to him as a composer, not to mention his aforementioned 'status' as a pacifist and an Anglo-Irish Protestant. As mentioned above, producing a work that was, to him, artistically satisfying without infringing on his beliefs, while fulfilling the requirements of the commission in a fitting and most importantly, intelligible manner must have been quite a test of strength in many regards. In a similar fashion to that in which May noticed, negatively, that there was correlation between the mood of the 1880s and that of the 1930s, there was an even greater connection between that of 1916 and its golden anniversary; indeed, one prime example was the fact that Dublin's interurban railway stations were re-named after some of the executed patriots of the former year.

The 'inoffensive' patriotism of some of Fleischmann's early works (e.g. his aforementioned *Trí hAmhráin* and *Clare's Dragoons*) became more concentrated in the later (and also populist), *Ómós don Phiarsach* (Homage to Pearse) of 1979. In its obvious veneration of such a controversial figure in modern Irish history and its

comparative lateness in his output, *Ómós don Phiarsach* is a telling example of ‘the manner in which [Fleischmann] compromised with the insistent demands for a nationalist expression.’¹⁷ However, it is interesting to note, as Joseph Ryan does, that in the early 1990s the composer was one of the main cultural sponsors of the counter-revolution which sought to ‘Reclaim the Spirit of 1916’, regarding the revisionist perspective as apostasy.¹⁸

To conclude, May, Boydell and Fleischmann's achievements as the harbingers of Irish musical modernism, in light of the cultural context, are manifold. The ‘difficult time’ in Irish cultural and musical history that Klein points to, has been, it is envisaged, well documented and discussed above; it suffices here to finally re-iterate that theirs was not only a revolution in terms of musical language. By being at the forefront of the modernisation of Irish musical life as a whole, e.g. through the co-foundation and steering of the Musical Association of Ireland (May and Boydell); the troubleshooting of Irish music's problems in terms of attitude and infrastructure (all three) and the improvement of its standing and scope as a university subject (Fleischmann and Boydell), this triumvirate's place in twentieth century Irish music history, even if only considered in the bureaucratic sense, is pivotal.

In their inclusive view of creativity in Irish music, and their conscious look to Europe, they succeeded in de-shackling composition from the folk idiom. That their music is imbued with (on the whole) subtle ‘Irish’ hints is merely concomitant of their nationality

¹⁷ Ryan: *Nationalism and Music in Ireland* (diss.), 435.

and the nature of the modernism they introduced from the thirties to the fifties which was characterised by ‘stylistic tensions prevalent in this period’ - ‘elements which contribute to the creation of any identity’.¹⁹ As Christina Howells explains, in regard to the artistic movement in its totality:

Modernism was built on a sense of lost community and civilisation. It embodied a series of contradictions and paradoxes. Since it had no stable centre it could embrace a multiplicity of features of the modern sensibility which might have appeared, in a logical sense, mutually exclusive. ... [Thus] revolution and conservatism coexisted, not necessarily peaceably, under the modernist umbrella.²⁰

For May, Boydell and Fleischmann, being artistically ‘modern’ thus constituted being *both* Irish and European: in a phrase, forging the universal without repudiating the particular.²¹

¹⁸ *ibid.*, 435.

¹⁹ Clampin: ‘“Those Blue Remembered Hills”: National Identity in English Music: 1900-1930’, 75.

²⁰ Howells: ‘Modernism (literature)’, *Microsoft® Encarta® 98 Encyclopedia*.

²¹ Derived from comment ascribed to Fleischmann by Ryan: ‘Fleischmann: **Piano Quintet**’, sleeve notes

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ABSTRACT

The spearheading of musical modernism in Ireland from the thirties to the sixties, in particular, by Frederick May, Brian Boydell and Aloys Fleischmann, was faced by an extra and pressing problem outside the realm of a revolution in musical language. For not only was the Irish public wholly unversed in the language of twentieth century music (due to the absence of an overall configuration of resources): the political and cultural establishment were antagonistic towards the effects of 'the filthy tide of modernism' (Yeats) on the fabricated, isolated 'Gaelic Eden' they wished post-independent Ireland to be. Thus a perseverance of the nineteenth century romantic-nationalist ideal of an art music wholly contingent on the ethnic repertory ensued well into the twentieth, deeming those who pursued more universal aims as being 'Anglo-Irish, or even anti-Irish' (Fleischmann).

This thesis examines (in a largely unprecedented fashion) the cultural background from which each of the composers in question emerged and the milieu in which they lived, and focuses on their wish express an individual, Irish aesthetic response using the idioms of contemporary European musical discourse: thereby largely side-stepping the ethnic tradition. As each composer was, by virtue of his background, essentially separate from the *hoi polloi*, it was in this conscious decision that, as this study highlights, *unconscious*, subtle elements of that tradition seeped into their creative endeavour in their determination to assert their cultural identities as cosmopolitan Irish artists.