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Defining the Irish Choral Nationalists: The Composers and their Music

*By Stacie Rossow**

This is the study of four nationalist composers and their contributions to the nationalist music of Ireland, which this author proposes are the continuation of the native music of Ireland, namely Fleischmann, Ó Riada, Bodley, and McGlynn. While other regions saw the rise in nationalist music in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the long British rule and subversion of Irish culture delayed this musical evolution until much more recently, especially in the choral repertoire. These composers used the Irish language in a manner that honored and sought to promote it as a living entity, and they used literature and folklore as primary sources of material. In addition to creating arrangements of traditional or folk songs, they used or quoted them in their original compositions, thus creating a unique, individual voice through an ancient medium. And, rather than succumbing to the experimental or serial ideas that were most prevalent on the European continent through much of the Twentieth century, all of these composers forged a harmonic language that, while modern, atonal, or tonal, was also rooted in the modality found in the ancient music of Ireland.

In the musical world, it is known that Ireland was the land of great musicians in ancient times; however, contemporary musicians would find it difficult to define what happened to that music and if it translates into modern compositions. By defining what the music was long ago before outside influence, we can determine the composers who sought to create uniquely Irish music. While other regions saw the rise in nationalist music in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the long British rule and subversion of Irish culture delayed this musical evolution until much more recently, especially in the choral repertoire.

Nationalism

Musical nationalism has never been about borders or political ideas. Rather, it is a similarity of traits a group of composers shares with those of similar cultural and linguistic heritage. These tendencies often occur outside or even despite the ruling class and are handed down through an oral tradition with no finite or discernable beginning. It is only from a bird's eye view, and often, by those looking in from the outside, common traits are recognized. Often, composers are not conscious of the commonalities with others around them. Over the past century, non-native musicians noticed commonalities in compositional output within areas

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like Hungary or Estonia. This article asserts the same of Ireland, but far more recently.

Ralph Vaughan Williams spoke about the idea of nationalism in an essay, "A composer consciously tries to express himself as his surroundings… if your art is firmly planted in your own soil, you may still gain the whole world and not lose your soul."[1] While a composer may attempt to express their surroundings, they may not always be aware of specific elements, which to them are as ingrained as the language they speak. For many, it is something that they unconsciously know or feel. In *Musical Constructions of Nationalism*, Jeremy Dibble authored the essay "A National Document" and illustrated the concept of foreign influence on the music of a nation with a quote by Cecil Forsyth:

> How long will it be before we realise the fact that where the foreign musician is there is the enemy? He may come to this island in shoals, but he comes for one purpose only – the money he can take back across the water, and he well knows that the surest way to make his position firm here is to denationalise our music[2]

Richard Taruskin expanded the idea further:

> Just as there were nations before there was nationalism, music has always exhibited local or national traits (often more apparent to outsiders than to those exhibiting them). Nor is musical nationalism invariably a matter of exhibiting or valuing stylistic peculiarities. Nationality is a condition; nationalism is an attitude.[3]

To better determine if a clear nationalist tradition exists in the region, nationalism must first be defined, and the traits must be identified. In the *Oxford Companion to Music* article "Nationalism," Nicholas Temperly discussed what he deemed as the three-step process necessary to consider music as nationalistic. First, there must be a native product that is as good as those that are foreign. Second, the compositions must incorporate folk elements, songs, dance music, or subjects of national or cultural significance. These elements need to become part of a mainstream style or a form. And third, there should be a change in forms, harmonies, or techniques inspired by the folk material. He further stated that nationalism is likely to arise when leaders are able "…to resist an alien culture that has been imposed on their own."[4]

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1. Ralph Vaughan Williams, *National Music and other Essays.* London: Oxford University Press, 1963.

2. Jeremy Dibble, "Grove's Musical Dictionary: A National Document," *Musical Constructions of Nationalism.* Cork: Cork University Press, 2001: 33

3. Richard Taruskin, "Nationalism." *Grove Music Online*. 2001

4. Nicholas Temperley, "Nationalism." *The Oxford Companion to Music*. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press, accessed September 9, 2024. http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e4676.

Historical Background

In Ireland, the ability to resist outside influence did not take place until nearly two decades into the Twentieth Century. Though entirely an oral tradition, Irish music was well established before the Norman invasion in 1169. It continued to flourish until King Henry VIII and the English Reformation- when to convert the faithful- Irish Catholics were prohibited from participation in public life. Essentially, the music of the Irish people was subverted from around 1200 CE until 1922 under British rule. In 1603, the suspicious Queen Elizabeth I sent forth a proclamation to "Hang the harpers where found and destroy their instruments."[5] She was fearful that any communication in the Irish language would be used to communicate her overthrow. Irish language, music, dance, and storytelling, which had existed since the time of the Celts (500 BCE), essentially went underground.

It was not until 1922, when the Irish Free State was established, and the British government no longer ruled Ireland, that the native culture and language of the people experienced a renaissance. The 1922 Constitution established Irish and English as co-national languages to demonstrate the new government's commitment to the people's heritage.[6]

Noted musicologist Brian Boydell wrote, "...Ireland has a reputation for inheriting a great musical tradition extending back to the earliest of times."[7] What elements of the native music then are identifiably nationalistic? Bards were the oral keepers of the laws; they recounted stories of war and genealogy. A harper would often accompany the bard as the stories were recounted; thus, a solo musical tradition began. This led to a multi-century commingling of ideas, mythology, Gaelic traditions, and the old-style (*sean-nós)* singing unique to Ireland's musical heritage. Three primary elements should be considered key features of nationalistic music in Ireland and will be explored further. First, a return by composers to the use of the Irish language or English-language poetry by Irish poets is an essential component of a nationalistic idiom. Second, musical elements of the folk tradition, including dance rhythms or modal harmonies like those in use pre-occupation, are used. Third, the use of traditional melodies or tunes in a way that moves beyond simple quotations or arrangements in creating new music is vital in creating national music.

5. Séan O'Boyle, *The Irish Song Tradition*. Toronto: Macmilian of Canada, 1976, 10.

6. J.C. Beckett, *Eighteenth Century Ireland, 1691-1800*, Vol. 4, in *A New History of Ireland*, ed. T.W. Moody and W.E. Vaughan. Oxford: Claredon Press, 1986, xil-xli.

7. Brian Boydell, *Music Before 1700*, Vol. IV, in *A New History of Ireland*, ed. T.W. Moody and W.E. Vaughan. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, 544.

Language

Irish or Irish-Gaelic belongs to the Celtic group of languages and, while similar to other Celtic languages, including Welsh, Manx, Breton, and Scots Gaelic, additions to the language came through missionaries, early settlements of the Viking peoples on the east coast, and the use of a language that was required by the British rule respectfully.[8] The Irish Gaelic literary tradition had a great influence on the songs of Ireland and, in turn, influenced the flow and structure of the choral and vocal music. The ancient bards used very complex forms of poetic meter in an oral, non-written tradition of storytelling. George Petrie first stated the importance of the interrelationship of the Irish language and song in his *Collection of the Ancient Music of Ireland* in 1855:

> For those airs are not, like so many modern melodies, mere ad libitum arrangements of a pleasing succession of tones unshackled by a rigid obedience of the sentiments of the songs for which they were composed, but always strictly coincident with, and subservient to, the laws of rhythm and metre which govern the construction of those songs, and to which they consequently owe their peculiarities of structure. And hence it obviously follows that entire body of our vocal melodies may be easily divided into, and arranged under, as many classes as there are metrical forms of construction in our native lyrics– but no further; and that any melody that will not naturally fall into some one or other of those classes must either be corrupt or altogether fictitious.[9]

Significant changes in the repertoire of Irish music came when the language was outlawed. Many songs became bi-lingual, and the traditional tune was translated and changed a bit into what became a well-known English version. Other tunes were sung partially in each language but sectionalized, typically with English verses and a shorter Irish refrain. One example of this modification is *Siúil a Rúin* (Table 1).

8. James Cowdery. *The Melodic Tradition of Ireland*. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1990: 7.

9. George Petrie. *The Petrie Collection of the Ancient Music of Ireland*, ed. David Cooper. Cork: Cork University Press, 2005: 36.

Table 1. Siúil, a Rúin, mixed English text and translation[10]

Verses	Chorus (cúrfa)
I wish I were on yonder hill	*Siúil, siúil, siúil a rúin*
'Tis there I'd sit and cry my fill	*Siúil go sochair agus siúil go ciúin*
And every tear would turn a mill	*Siúil go doras agus éalaigh liom.*
I wish I sat on my true love's knee	(Go, go, go my love
Many a fond story he told to me	Go quietly and go peacefully
He told me things that ne'er shall be	Go to the door and fly with me)

As the national language of Ireland, English-language poets who shaped the literary tradition cannot be excluded. Among those, Thomas Moore (1779-1852), W.B. Yeats (1865-1939), Jonathon Swift (1667-1745), and James Joyce (1882-1941), are quite well known the world over. Several other poets, including Antoine Ó Raifteirí [Anthony Raferty] (c. 1784-1834), Francis Ledwidge (1887-1917), Seán Ó Ríordáin (1916-1977), and Brendan Kennelly (1936-2021) have often been set to music. Many of their texts deal with Irish myths, old stories, poems, or internal struggles of the Irish people. As people have always shared an affinity with the land they inhabit, a depiction of Ireland's landscape or natural surroundings is also often visible in the poetry selections.

Modal and Musical Elements

In 1792, when Edward Bunting transcribed songs of the harpers at the Belfast Harp Festival, he noted: "It would appear that the old Musicians, in transmitting Music to us through so many centuries, treated it with the utmost reverence, as they seem to never have ventured to make the slightest innovation in it during its descent." While musicologists now consider Bunting's assertion that there was no innovation to be generally false, the observation is significant in its reference to the tuning systems employed, which form a foundation of the melodic and harmonic elements employed in all Irish traditional music.

Since the Irish harp was a fixed-pitch instrument, it is widely agreed that the scales employed were modal. From various writings and later transcriptions of tunes, it is believed the harp had one of its G strings tuned down to F# to facilitate a greater variety of modal scales. Thus, the Do, Re, and Mi modes were played through the C Do using the F natural while the Fa, Sol, and La modes were played through the G Do with the F#.[11] The division and distribution of notes within each scale and their relation to the traditional church modes is easily viewed in two sets of three modes (Table 2).

10. Celtic Lyrics Corner, *Siuil a Ruin.* (November 27, 2008) under http://www.celticlyric scorner.net/anuna/siuil.htm (accessed October 29, 2009).

11. Séan O'Boyle, *The Irish Song Tradition*, 30-31. For clarity, solfege syllables will be used.

Table 2. Modes Found in Irish Traditional Music[12]

First scale degree	Scale	Scale name
Do	C D E F G A B C	Ionian
Re	D E F G A B C D	Dorian
Mi	E F G A B C D E	Phrygian
Fa	C D E F# G A B C	Lydian
Sol	D E F# G A B C D	Mixolydian
La	E F# G A B C D E	Aeolian

Two other scales, also accessible in fixed tuning, the pentatonic and hexatonic (Figures 1 and 2), hold important places in Irish music. Both scales correspond to the Do scale or Ionian mode. The pentatonic scale most often used generally lacks the fourth and seventh scale degrees, while the hexatonic scale lacks only the seventh. In contrast, these scales are only employed in a few tunes in the traditional Irish music repertoire. Many songs have components or phrases set entirely in one of these two scales. Frequently, it is a secondary phrase or the refrain that completes the normal eight-tone scale by adding the missing scale degrees from the pentatonic or hexatonic phrase.

Figure 1. Pentatonic Scale

Figure 2. Hexatonic Scale

Dance Rhythms

Dance tunes are the most common and abundant music in traditional Irish repertoire. The most popular dances used in the song repertoire are jigs, reels, and hornpipes. Most of the dances are in a standard AABB form correlating to traditional Irish dance, where each step is repeated on the alternate foot. Tunes, which frequently began as dances, later had words added, and the song often became more popular than the original dance. Several variables identify the dances, the most easily identifiable of which are tempo, time signature, and rhythmic pattern (Table 3).

12. Séan O'Boyle, *The Irish Song Tradition*, 30.

Table 3. Dance Forms and Structure[13]

Dance Type	Tempo	Time Signature	Characteristic Rhythm
Single Jig (also known as slide)	Fast	6/8 (or 12/8)	♩ ♪ ♩ ♪
Double Jig	Moderately fast	6/8	♪♪♪ ♪♪♪
Hop or Slip Jig	Fast	9/8	♩ ♪ ♩♪ ♩ ♪
Reel	Fast, with a 2 feel	2/4 or 4/4	♪♪ ♪♪
Hornpipe	Steady, 4 feel	4/4	♩ ♪♪ ♩ ♪♪

Folk Tunes and Traditional Melodies

The first exclusively Irish tune collection, Neal's *A Collection of the Most Celebrated Irish Tunes*, was published in Dublin in 1726, should be viewed as an important milestone in the history of Irish music. [14] The serious and scholarly collection of Irish tunes began with Bunting at the 1792 Belfast Harp Festival. He produced his first volume of collected music, *Ancient Irish Music* (1796), from performances of the ten harpers, considered the last generation in a line that extended back several hundred years. Bunting was the first collector to note the importance of the Irish texts accompanying the tunes and employed Patrick Lynch to collect the texts separately. Bunting and Lynch encountered problems because of numerous interpretations of the same song. Bunting continued his work and collected over two hundred fifty songs, many of them with multiple variations from the Harp festival and from travels throughout the countryside. In the preface of the third volume, Bunting stated:

> Whatever differences of opinion may exist as to the high degree of early civilization and national glory laid claim to by the Irish people, it has never been questioned that, in the most remote times, they had at least a national music peculiar to themselves, and that their bards and harpers were eminently skillful in its performance.[15]

Bunting also attempted to provide an approximate origin for the composition of most tunes. He placed them into three categories: the very ancient, the ancient,

13. Andrew Purcell, "Irish Traditional Music," *Music: Revision for Leaving Certification*. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2006, 13.

14. Tomás Ó Canainn, *Traditional Music in Ireland*,10.

15. Edward Bunting, *The Ancient Music of Ireland: The Bunting Collections (a facsimile edition of Edward Bunting's songs and airs in piano arrangements)*, ed. Harry Long. Dublin: Walton Manufacturing Ltd., 2002, 1.

and those composed from around the time of Carolan the harper.[16] Further, he stated that while the words associated with each tune may change slightly, the tune remains the same if studied within the region of origin.

> A strain of music, once impressed on the popular ear, never varies. It may be made the vehicle of many different sets of words, but they are adapted to it, not it to them, and it will no more alter its character on their account than a ship will change the number of its masts on account of an alternation in the nature of its lading. … that when a melody has once been divulged in any district, a criterion is immediately established in almost every ear... It is thus that changes in the actual frame and structure of our melodies have never been attempted, unless on the introduction of the altered tunes for the first time amongst those who have never heard them in their original state.[17]

After the Bunting collections, several antiquarians began their compilations. Many collectors and noteworthy musicians contributed greatly to Irish musicology; several used a similar methodology to acquire the tunes. They traveled the countryside and asked traditional musicians to perform given pieces, which they then transcribed into modern (at their time) musical notation. Herein lies a distinct problem: all the collectors listened to the tunes through the prism of their modern musical ears relative to their knowledge of Western musical traditions. Many failed to realize that the tunes did not fit exactly into the modern tuning and harmonic systems they used for transcription. Unfortunately, many of the transcriptions forced the melodies into contemporary key signatures or scales, removing the ancient sound of the tune. To give metric value to notes, the free-flowing nature of many ballads were constrained to a determined note value and meter. Thus, despite their efforts to preserve the ancient music, they changed it forever.

Composition in Ireland

Music and musical evolution exist in a horizontal progression through time; each generation adds and builds upon or rejects what the previous set forth. Ireland is no different. Anecdotal writings speak to the great musical heritage, epic-length poetry set to music, and the harp was seen as a symbol of the country from early times. The Norman Invasion essentially created a time capsule for the ancient music of Ireland. It sent the transmission of music, language, and cultural customs "underground," passed only in small, closed communities, retaining the qualities, untouched by time, until the 'vault' was opened. Ancient folk music was not exposed to learned musicians to be consumed, evolved, or transformed normally.

16. Turlough O'Carolan (Toirdhealbhach Ó Cearbhalláin) was an Irish harper who lived near County Meath from 1670 to 1738. He is noted as an eminently skilled harper and the composer of many of the tunes in the modern repertoire.

17. Edward Bunting, *The Ancient Music of Ireland: The Bunting Collections,* 1-2.

Ireland was dominated by Great Britain and European hegemonic musical influence, and the music enjoyed by the elite or ruling British class was the only music deemed presentable for public consumption. Additionally, when you consider the music publication monopoly of a few composers selected by the reigning monarch throughout the occupation, only music that fit the age-old concepts of the *countenance anglsaise* would be considered. Even one of Ireland's best-known composers, Charles Villers Stanford, left Ireland for England to further his education and compositional career. While he did use folk tunes as source material at times, as Seamus de Barra noted, even though Stanford "composed works that were consciously 'Irish' [he] never advanced beyond the superficial incorporation of folk-song-like mannerisms."[18]

It is important to note that from the 1950s to the modern day, composers including John Larchet, Declan Townsend, Frank Corcoran, and others used both traditional material and modern compositional techniques in a Neo-Expressionistic, Post-Modern or *Avant-Garde* manner. Several of these composers also created arrangements in a nationalistic manner, but a great majority of their work is considered European Twentieth-century art music or experimental music. Greatly influenced by the Viennese and Darmstadt schools of thought, there was no deliberate attempt to advance the musical identity of Ireland. Their arrangements were simply that—arrangements that did not use the material in any transformative manner. Many works exist as annexes to their body of composition and do not form a compositional style that embodies the construct of nationalism in the defined manner. Several Irish composers have recently used various components of Irish folk music but to the same end. Much of this new music might use the Irish language or even quote a song. Still, it is done through a sound that is more identifiable with the German or French Twentieth-century compositional construct and, by definition, is not Irish nationalistic music. One such composer, John Larchet, expressed the attributes of the composer who would achieve that synthesis uniquely and recognizably:

> Possess a thorough knowledge and keen appreciation of the folk-music and the literature of Ireland, Gaelic and English… knowledge of great music and unusual technical skill… he will speak his own voice and from the depths of his Irish soul will be born the music that to us, Irish people, will seem evocative of the spirit of our country.[19]

In the middle of the last century, the Irish government took seriously the task of publishing and promoting choral music in the Irish language. For several decades, the *Oifig an tSoláthair* (now *An Gúm*) was charged with publishing and distributing scores in Irish. Of the hundreds of published works and arrangements dated from 1950 through 1970, many were printed in old Irish, and nearly all are currently out

18. Séamas de Barra, *Aloys Fleischmann.* Dublin: Field Day Publications, 2006.
19. Garreth Cox, *Seóirse Bodley*. Dublin, Field Day Music, 2010, p. 72

of publication. The scores vary from two-part treble to four-part mixed ensembles (with divisi).

The Nationalists

After researching nearly a hundred Irish composers from 1920 to the modern day, only a handful appear to use the outlined elements with regularity or in a manner that created unique, potentially nationalistic compositions. Of those composers, four appear to have encompassed the spirit of Nationalist music: Aloys Fleischmann, Seán Ó Riada, Seóirse Bodley, and Michael McGlynn. These four composers form a linear tradition, though not necessarily a conscious one, from the early 1930s to today. They each used the language, harmonic structures, and traditional music of Ireland and transformed those elements into a unique compositional voice that, while distinctly their own, is also unmistakably Irish. This is not to say they are the only Irish composers who considered components of Irish traditional music; however, they appear to have embraced the components to create something new in the greater body of their work rather than as outlier compositions. Additionally, each of these composers forged a language in their choral works that, while modern, was rooted in the musical traditions found in the ancient music of Ireland rather than succumbing to the experimental or serial ideas prevalent throughout Europe through much of the Twentieth century.

Table 4. The Nationalists, Stylistic Component Inclusion

Fleischmann	**Ó Riada**	**Bodley**	**McGlynn**
Conscious effort	Conscious effort	Conscious effort	Conscious effort
Irish Language or Irish Poet	Irish Language or Irish Poet	Irish Language or Irish Poet	Irish Language or Irish Poet
Modal Harmonic and Melodic ideas	Modal Harmonic and Melodic ideas	Modal Harmonic and Melodic ideas	Modal Harmonic and Melodic ideas
Dance rhythms/forms	Dance rhythms/forms	Dance rhythms/forms	Dance rhythms/forms
Traditional Tunes	Traditional Tunes	Traditional Tunes	Traditional Tunes
	Evocation of Landscape	Evocation of Landscape	Evocation of Landscape

The four composers used multiple components in their original compositions (Table 4). Moreover, each of these composers stated a desire to create something uniquely Irish, or that carried on an age-old tradition. The Irish composers previously mentioned touched upon one or two of the components. Still, they followed traditional European influences into the Avant-garde or Post-Modern ideals with

little or no regard for the heritage evolution of Irish music in their compositional language. The consideration lies in the treatment of the material to create a new body of work that places the Irish heritage and musical language at the center of compositional creation.

Aloys Fleischman

Aloys Fleischmann (1910-1992) was the child of Irish-based, German parents- Aloys and Tilly- during a time when being German was a difficult thing in Ireland. After the outbreak of the war in 1914, his father, Aloys (senior) was regarded as an immigrant from an enemy state and was under suspicion. On two separate occasions, he was sent to internment camps, once for sending a letter to Germany (it happened to be a Christmas greeting to his mother.) The result was nearly two years of separation for the family.[20]

Young Aloys was both precocious and intelligent. After completing his primary education with the highest examination scores in Ireland in three subjects, he entered University College Cork (UCC), where he completed the Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Music degrees in 1927 at seventeen. While at UCC, he studied harmony with Frederick St John Lacy and Annie Patterson, the latter influential in his approach to folk inclusion and collection. His early song settings from just after the completion of his degrees to poetry by Millington Synge sought to capture the Irish landscape depicted with a "vocal line that is obviously indebted to the contours of Irish folk song."[21] From the very beginning, his compositions were infused with his desire to express what he felt was uniquely Irish. He stated this desire eloquently in his 1931 founding document article for the University Art Society:

> …an artist draws his vitality from the men and women, the rocks, stones and rivers of this own country. … out of these he will build his art. … the art of a nation must flow out of itself as naturally as a river flowed out of its own source.[22]

With this statement, he defined the mission of his compositional life and declared his future path.

In 1932 Fleischmann left Ireland for Germany to begin advanced studies in composition and conducting at the State Academy of Munich. During his second year of study there, it became clear he was focused on his homeland, and "he was clearly motivated by a need to evolve a personal style that would be recognizably Irish."[23] For example, he chose texts in the Irish language for assignments for his composition class. He recalled much later in life, "When I was in Munich, I was

20. Séamus de Barra, *Aloys Fleischmann,* 7-10.
21. Séamus de Barra, *Aloys Fleischmann,* 17.
22. Séamus de Barra, *Aloys Fleischmann,* 19.
23. Séamus de Barra, *Aloys Fleischmann,* 31

very homesick and had an enormous appreciation of everything Irish, much more that I had before I went there."[24]

Upon his return to Cork, he succeeded his composition teacher Lacy at University College as Acting Professor of Music there in 1934, a post he would hold for forty-six years. Fleischmann soon realized the state of music and music education in Ireland could not support his high hopes for revitalizing the musical identity of the culture and used his position to set forth changes. In 1934, he published three articles in which he sought to formulate and explain his position of the Irish musical language.

> What is needed 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.[25]

Fleischmann further clarified his statements in 1936:

> … what was necessary for composers to be able to knead and mould [Irish folk music] as the raw material of their music, so that it became indistinguishable from the fabric into which it was wrought…if this proved possible, a new school might first achieve definite results, producing an early crop of works in which the folk song, its body and spirit, would be the all pervading sap.[26]

He advocated for the development of Irish Art music through the blending of contemporary techniques with what he identified as the "essence of Irish folk song." He also strongly criticized those who felt that essence was simply the inclusion of Irish folk song. To aid his argument, he began to publish under a pseudonym, 'Muiris Ó Rónáin, to counter any arguments of his not being an Irishman and also in the hope his works might be assessed upon their merits rather than by who he was.[27]

In 1943 Fleischmann revived the Cork University Choral Society, an organization that had been defunct for some time. Perhaps his most enduring contribution to choral music in Ireland came with the founding of the Cork International Choral and Folk-Dance Festival in 1954 and the subsequent initiation of the Seminars on Contemporary Choral Music in 1962. After more than forty years as a professor, Fleischmann retired and devoted himself to his most monumental task, his

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24. Séamus de Barra, *Aloys Fleischmann,* 32

25. Séamus de Barra, "Aloys Fleischmann and the idea of an Irish Composer," *Journal of Music.* (September 1, 2005) under http://journalofmusic.com/focus/aloys-fleischmann-and-idea-irish-composer (accessed February 9, 2024).

26. Séamus de Barra, "Aloys Fleischmann and the idea of an Irish Composer," *Journal of Music.*

27. Séamus de Barra, "Aloys Fleischmann and the idea of an Irish Composer," *Journal of Music*.

scholarly magnum *Sources of Irish Traditional Music 1600-1855.* This opus was a complete thematic index of nearly 7,000 Irish traditional melodies with all known variants, a work which today is considered the most complete source of Irish tunes.

Fleischmann's musical output, specifically his choral works and his very outspoken and conscious decision to create and promote a native music, reveal adherence to the identified components of a national music. He declared his intent was "to delve into the hidden Ireland, and to create an idiom which would express in music some of the essence of this rich untapped literary tradition."[28] Much of his work was achieved through symphonic and solo voice works and achieved at a high level of success, but his works for chorus are notable.

Among those works to consider is *Clare's Dragoons* (1945) which is scored for SATB choir, War Pipes, and orchestra. The text depicts the Wild Geese brigade of the Williamite War and their exploits. The inclusion of the pipes as an essential component of the work provided a unique and intrinsically Irish color to the standard orchestral timbre, and he chose to include the traditional popular tune as melodic material. His use and varied treatment of the tune as motivic material, demonstrated the variety of use for folk melodies. Additionally, as de Barra notes, Fleischmann took a great many risks with this composition,

> …a principal one being that music attempting to express nationalistic sentiment of this kind can all too easily degenerate into empty bombast… there are a great number of reasons why *Clare's Dragoons* succeed in avoiding this pitfall… Fleischmann was able to find the appropriate musical embodiment for such feeling… [it] is superbly accomplished from a technical point of view.[29]

Fleischmann's arrangements from this time, including the treble setting of *Cill Chais,* show an evolution in the making. While he essentially maintains the tune in the upper voice, the lower voices act as an instrumental accompaniment (Figure 3) before transitioning to either harmonic or canonic treatment of the melody (Figure 4) and finally returning to how it began.

28. Séamus de Barra, *Aloys Fleischmann,* 74.
29. Séamus de Barra, *Aloys Fleischmann,* 84-89.

Figure 3. Cill Chais, Fleischmann. m 5-7, Vocal accompaniment Treatment[30]

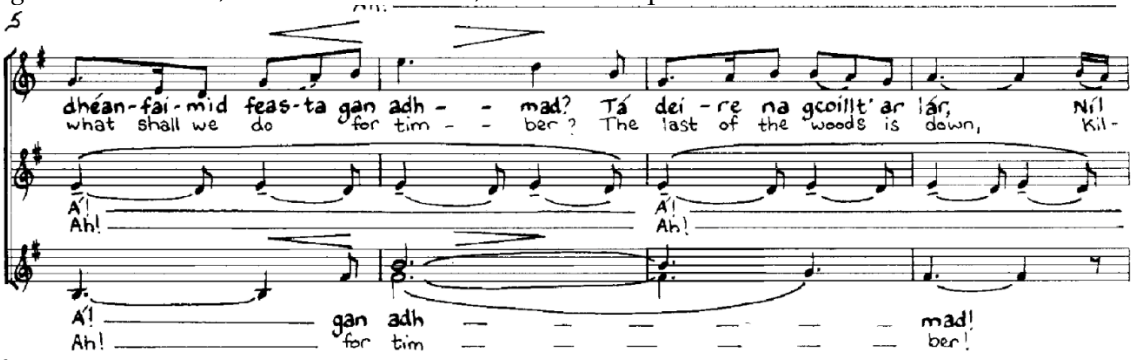
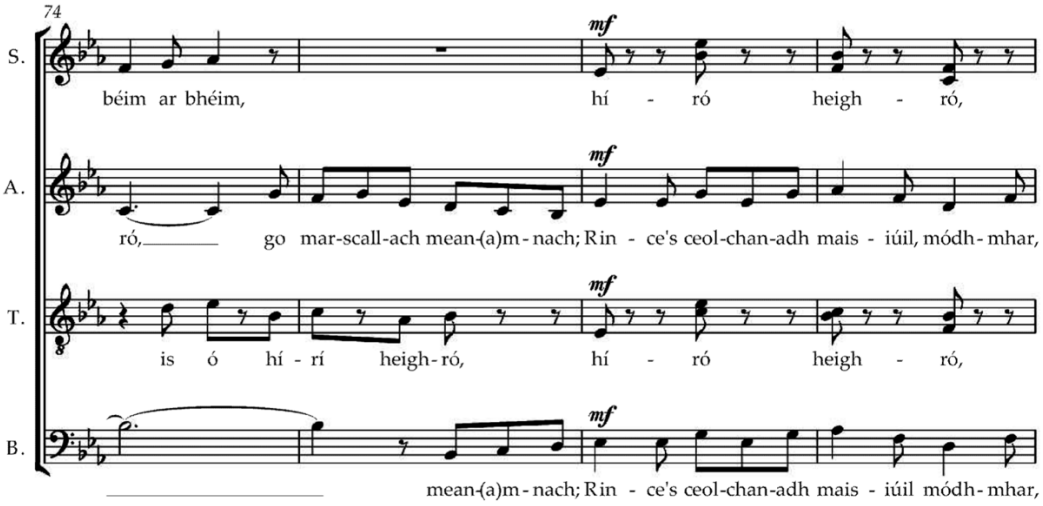


Figure 4. Cill Chais, Fleischmann. m 29-32, Vocal accompaniment Treatment

A later work, *Na Trí Captaení Loinge* (The Three Sea Captains) from Fleischmann's Choral Dance Suite, demonstrates the evolution of his treatment of a traditional tune, which, while retaining the overall idea of the traditional song, is far more than an arrangement. The opening depicts the motion of the sea before it shifts into the playful treble jig rhythm in which the traditional dance is set. Once the dance tune is established, the alto voice continues to carry it more or less in its original form. In contrast, the other voices accompany modern-sounding, tinged chords in imitation of traditional instruments before each takes on portions of the tune themselves (Figure 5).

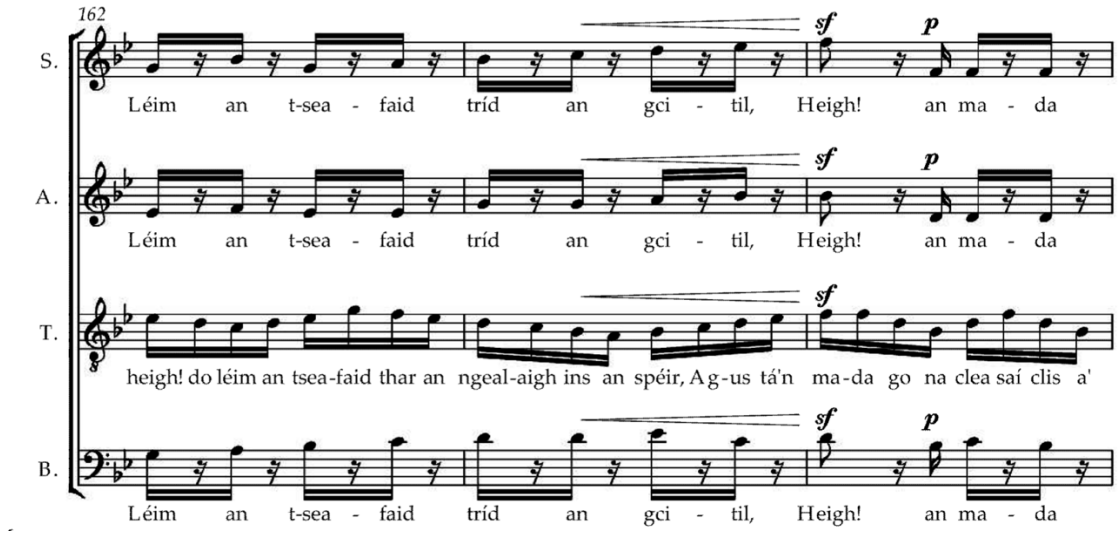
30. Aloys Fleischmann, *Cill Chais.* Dublin: Contemporary Music Center, 1952.

Figure 5. Na Trí Captaení Loinge, Fleischmann. m 74-77[31]



He later evolves the tune and tempo to a hornpipe, which creates the feeling of a paired set, though the outline of the tune is still intact (Figure 6). In traditional music sessions, groups often use two separate but related tunes as a paired group. Fleischmann's invocation of this natural tendency in a single work with a single tune further demonstrates his innovation at work.

Figure 6. Na Trí Captaení Loinge, Fleischmann. m 162-164[32]



In the 1960s, despite critical acclaim and audience appreciation, Fleischmann expressed personal discontent with his compositional style. Throughout the decade, he apologized for his music, saying, "The style is, I fear, very conservative and

31. Aloys Fleischmann, *Na Trí Captaení Loinge.* Dublin: Contemporary Music Center, 1956.
32. Aloys Fleischmann, *Na Trí Captaení Loinge.* Dublin: Contemporary Music Center, 1956.

intended for a popular occasion."[33] It is plausible that he desired to be considered a serious composer like his contemporaries, who lived exclusively in the realm of serialism and avant-garde but in a manner that was truer to himself. Then, in the 1970s, there was a revolt against anything that appeared nationalistic in Ireland. The IRA activities in Northern Ireland had everyone questioning what it meant to be a nationalist.

Fleischmann's *Poet in the Suburbs* was born in this political climate. The Thomas Kinsella text from 1973 seemed an inspiration for him to find his new voice. Charles Acton said of the piece that it was "hard of outline, unusually unromantic."[34] Critical reviews of the time sought to determine if a new work was contemporary enough to merit its worth. Fleischmann seemed to have met this challenge in *Poet*. The choir is set in a bi-rhythmic 12/16 under 2/4, simultaneously eliciting dance and ballad. The harmonic language here is anything but traditional, with unusual and unexcepted harmonic progressions and chordal language (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Poet in the Suburbs, Fleischmann m 3-6[35]

The setting is incredibly progressive, but the choice of text and poet and the overall feel assured his work kept an Irishness about it. Many of his choral works from this time pushed the boundaries of choral repertoire while maintaining a quieter nationalistic voice. Through his evolution, Fleischmann demonstrated how a composer could speak in a modern language and retain elements that identify the music as nationalistic.

33. Séamus de Barra, *Aloys Fleischmann* 127.

34. Séamus de Barra, *Aloys Fleischmann,* 131.

35. Aloys Fleischmann, *Na Trí Captaení Loinge.* Dublin: Contemporary Music Center, 1956.

Seán Ó Riada

Seán Ó Riada (1931-1971) was a contemporary of Fleischmann's who was also fascinated with the traditional music of his homeland and is considered a co-founder of modern Irish Nationalism. Ó Riada began piano and organ lessons at a relatively young age at his mother's insistence. Ó Riada advanced quickly in his musical studies and eventually attended University College Cork, where he studied with John Larchet, an outspoken advocate for an Irish approach, and had an occasional lecture by burgeoning composer Aloys Fleischmann. In 1953, he was appointed Assistant Director of Music at Radio Éireann, but he resigned in 1955 to explore music on the European continent. After returning to Ireland, Ó Riada began what would become the most prolific period of his life, completing numerous original orchestral and vocal scores and arrangements for the *Radio Éireann* Singers. He experimented in combining ideas and tunes of traditional music in the context of his flowering classical European expression. The most popular result was the film music for *Mise Eire* in 1959, which had a dramatic and national impact on the people and culture of Ireland. He then undertook a very in-depth study of Irish traditional music and began the radio series "Our Musical Heritage".

Ó Riada began experimentations with various combinations of musicians with a group called *Ceoltoiri Chualann*. Many of these musicians later became the founding members of the well-known traditional ensemble the Chieftains. Not long before his death in 1971, Ó Riada gave a series of interviews to Danish television and described his views on Irish traditional music.

There is not a European Classical music tradition [in Ireland]. There is, on the other hand, a highly developed traditional music, which because it is orally transmitted must not be considered essentially as folk music. For example in the Orient, you have music, which is orally transmitted but is still highly developed. Here we also have highly developed traditional music, very complex, very sophisticated.[36]

In his *Our Musical Heritage*, Ó Riada discussed how traditional Irish music, meaning that which had been orally-transmitted and passed through the ages is not, by nature, European. Rather, it existed long before and in spite of external influence. His metaphor beautifully exemplified how the Irish language survived:

> You might compare the progress of tradition in Ireland to the flow of a river. Foreign bodies may fall in, or be dropped in, but they do not divert the course of the river, nor do they stop it flowing; it absorbs them, carrying them with it as it flows onwards. Our innate conservatism is responsible for this… it has kept Irish music alive for us, its basic characteristics unchanged, with very little outside influence.[37]

36. Seán Ó Riada. Interview for Danish Television (1970) [transcribed by author] under http://youtu.be/bSn07vfWwKM, (accessed October 10, 2014).

37 Sean Ó Riada, *Our Musical Heritage*. An Riadiagh: The Dolmen Press, 1982, 19-20.

Generally regarded as one of the most important Irish composers during his lifetime, Ó Riada's promise was only partially realized due to his short life and small body of compositions. He visualized and advocated for a kind of music that would combine all the elements of the native Irish music into something inherently new but simultaneously expanded upon centuries of music to which he was heir. His music from 1972 onward represented a bridge connecting what Fleischmann began to what was expanded upon by Bodley. Ó Riada's music, vocally rooted in arrangements of songs and instrumentally progressive, raised awareness of what would become a true synthesis of traditional and classical music in a uniquely Irish manner. His impact was monumental.

Both Fleischman and Ó Riada greatly influenced the national sound of Irish music. That influence is still visible in events like the Cork Choral Festival, where the composition award is named after Ó Riada and the performance award after Fleischmann. Together they were responsible for inspiring the next generation of Irish composers.

Seóirse Bodley

Seóirse Bodley (1933-2023) strongly identified with his Irish heritage even from a young age. He changed his given name, George, to the Irish name *Seóirse* in his late teens. He felt he would have more credibility as a voice of Irish music if his name reflected his heritage instead of the patron saint of England. Even his early music demonstrated a deep engagement with the Irish language and folk music, which was unusual then. Over a period of twenty-five years, Bodley sought to achieve a "synthesis of Irish folk music and European modernism in a style uniquely and very recognizably his own."[38]

With degrees from the Royal Irish Academy of Music and University College Dublin, Bodley's music ranges from European Avant-garde to Irish traditional music.[39] In 1956, only one year after completion of his Bachelor of Music degree, Bodley was cited by Fleischmann in *Music in Ireland: A Symposium* as the "future of Irish Music." The following year, Charles Action wrote in the *Irish Times* that Bodley was expected to become "Ireland's equivalent of Sibelius or Bartók." However, it was generally agreed that he needed time to develop.[40]

In a 1970 interview, Bodley stated he began "to explore the possibility of evolving a compositional idiom influenced by Irish folk music" and expressed his desire to see a "national composer writing in a national idiom."[41] It was near this time Bodley also began his in-depth study of Irish music, particularly the *sean-nós*

38. Garreth Cox, *Seóirse Bodley*, 12.

39. Lorraine Byrne Bodley. "Seóirse Bodley," *Contemporary Music Center*. https://www.cmc.ie/composers/seoirse-bodley (accessed 25 March 2024).

40. Garreth Cox, *Seóirse Bodley*, 72.

41. Garreth Cox, *Seóirse Bodley*, 73.

style of singing. He concerned himself with notating this highly ornamented music, believed to be some of the oldest Irish traditional music solo songs, and addressed the tone color and vowel utterance characteristics.

Nearly a decade after Ó Riada died in 1981, Bodley published an article assessing Ó Riada's original compositions. He concluded that Ó Riada's work raised "at least the possibility of a style which would [constitute] a synthesis of folk music and art music."[42] It is suggested that Bodley's compositions from 1982 onward represent that combination of the two forms. While it is possible Bodley might have composed in the same manner had he not been exposed to Ó Riada's music, it is not unreasonable to believe Ó Riada was a source of inspiration or at least influence. Bodley's works for chorus represent a combination of styles and influences that served as a model for the next and most recent generation of composers.

Early choral writings consist of a number of settings and arrangements of traditional texts including *Cúl and Tí* (1654) and *Cuach mo Londubh Buí* (1955) for mixed voices, and *Cuirfimid Deaindí Deaindí* (1960), and *Caoineadh na dTrí Muire* (1660) for treble voices. Most of these arrangements are in a homophonic or semi-homophonic setting using triadic, diatonic harmonies with the occasional pedal tone or suspension, not unlike the harmonies found in part songs throughout the ages. *Cúl and Tí* (Figure 8) uses poetry by Seán Ó Ríordáin and has been often listed among the top 100 Irish poems. The poem, which speaks about feeling at home in the land of youth, retains the well-known tune as well as the lilt and the heavy dotted melodic line.

Figure 8. Seóirse Bodley, Cúl and Tí, Treatment of the Tune, m 1-4[43]

During the late 1960s, Bodley struggled to rectify self-perceived technical issues in his compositional style. It was then he came across the poetry of fluent Irish speaker and Co. Kerry native Brendan Kennelly, from whose poetry came ***A Chill Wind*** for Mixed Chorus (1970), a work that would be a very successful combination

42. Garreth Cox, *Seóirse Bodley*, 76.

43. Seóirse Bodley, *Cúl and Tí.* Dublin: Contemporary Music Center, 1954.

of two different types of musical material- modernism and folk tradition- in which he was able to demonstrate his stylistic and nationalistic goals. Throughout the movements in this work, he touched upon multiple characteristics deemed authentically Irish. The opening movement, *On the Murder of David Gleeson*, Bailiff, tells the story of the demise of a not-so-beloved figure. The treatment of the text and delivery of the story proves an incredibly successful opening to the work (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Seóirse Bodley, On the Murder of David Gleeson, m 21-24[44]

The second movement, *Etain*, evokes an Irish mythological story of a legendary heroine of great beauty and asks for it to be sung in the style of a reel. The fourth movement, *Knockmealdown* attempts to depict the highest peak in the mountain range as well as the desolate winter landscape. The final movement, *The Old Women of Beare* is a translation of an Old Irish poem from the tenth century. Depending on the interpretation, it is either an old lament over loss of youth or the story of an ancient winter mythological being. These settings are each achieved through a new and innovative musical language which does in fact seem to merge the old and the new.[45]

Bodley's **Symphony No. 3**, titled *Ceol*[46] (1980) bears mention as it used large choral forces including both an SATB choir, semi-chorus, and children's choir. Throughout the work and again to new poetry written by Kennelly, Bodley employed Irish vocal ornamentation, dance rhythms, and the Irish language. Additionally, the ending of the first movement, of which the section bears the title *"An Ceol agus an Náire"* [Music and Shame], is a depiction of "the terrible fate that awaits those ashamed of their own internal music, condemned as they are to a 'very respectable corner of

44. Seóirse Bodley, *A Chill Wind.* Dublin: Contemporary Music Center, 1970.

45. Garreth Cox, *Seóirse Bodley*, 86-92.

46. Irish word for music

hell'".[47] After the premiere, reporter MacGoris said it is "a finely-wrought work which without being calculatedly 'Irish' gently reveals its native inspiration."[48]

Though Bodley still sought to incorporate Irish folk and avant-garde in a meaningful way, others felt the entire concept (if folk music was simply incompatible with those modern, avant-garde techniques and were vocal as to how several of Bodley's later choral compositions) became trite or cliché in their attempts. It appears he struggled in a similar manner as did Fleischmann. The need to be accepted as an accomplished composer changed his voice and the manner of his compositional output. Eventually in the 1990s it seems Bodley changed direction and ended his infatuation with an Irish sound, but in his earlier years, the musical material he created did set the stage for the next generation to once again move the initiative forward.

Michael McGlynn

Dublin-born composer Michael McGlynn (b. 1964), is considered by many choral scholars outside of Ireland as the current representative sound of Irish choral music. His compositions are widely known through the many recordings and international tours of the three ensembles he founded, *Anúna*, *M'aman*, and *Systir*. It is safe to assert, outside of Ireland his original choral works and arrangements are the most performed works by an Irish composer. Although his compositional style elicits the traditional music or Ireland, traditional folk music did and does not serve as his primary source of inspiration.

McGlynn's parents, Clare and Andrew, worked in the hotel industry though his father later turned to photography. Michael, his twin brother John, and their younger brother Tom were all musically inclined and enjoyed singing in three-part harmonies at a young age. Though not musically inclined themselves, McGlynn's parents saw the value of music in their family's life. Clare and Andrew did seek to instill within their children a sense of pride in their heritage. Though the family were not native Irish speakers, at the ages of nine and ten, the boys lived for a year as boarders at the Irish speaking school of *Coláiste na Rinne* in *Dún Garbhán* (Dungarvan, Co. Waterford). This *Gaeltacht* (Irish-speaking community) is where McGlynn gained fluency in the Irish language and, more importantly, provided his first exposure to traditional Irish song.[49]

McGlynn's first formal musical training was though piano lessons, but much of his early musical influence was from rock musicians such as the Beatles and David Bowie. He was introduced to large-scale orchestral and choral classical music in secondary school and was particularly attracted to the music of Debussy,

47. Garreth Cox, *Seóirse Bodley*, 105.
48. Garreth Cox, *Seóirse Bodley*, 105.
49. Michael McGlynn, interview by author, Ft. Lauderdale, FL, February 2010.

Britten, and Ligeti.[50] When the time came to enter college in 1982, McGlynn elected to study music and English literature at University College, Dublin (UCD). It was at UCD he first received an introduction to early Western Medieval music. He began studies in both English and music and, after receiving his Bachelor of Arts degree in English (1985), continued and completed his Bachelor of Music degree (1986). It was during his studies at UCD he first sang in a choir. Though Seóirse Bodley was one of his professors and his music was inspirational to him, McGlynn never studied composition formally. He was most intrigued by musical forms and the structure of music. He entered the field of music from a non-classical perspective, and the UCD choral ensemble introduced him to the choral music of the great master composers. McGlynn stated in a 2010 interview:

> One of the things that has put me in a unique position among professional choral directors is that I took up choral music quite late. I had never sung in a choir before the age of nineteen. I first sang in college in a chamber choir, the UCD Chamber Choir, which I went on to conduct. I later went on to conduct the Trinity College Singers as well. This has allowed me to look at choral music as a completely fresh and new form.[51]

Soon after graduation he composed his earliest substantial work, a setting of four Rimbaud poems for soprano and piano. It was upon completion of this composition, McGlynn became compelled to make his living as a composer.[52]

Upon completion of his collegiate studies, McGlynn was wholly captivated by the choral medium. In 1987 he founded the small Irish choral ensemble *An Uaithne* in order to more fully explore choral music. *An Uaithne,* is the collective term in the Irish language that describes the three ancient kinds of Irish music: *Suantraí* (lullaby), *Geantraí* (happy song), and *Goltraí* (lament). The ensemble name was changed to Anúna in 1991, a transliteration of the original Irish that was easier for non-Irish speakers to pronounce and recognize. When asked about the reason for creating an ensemble of this kind McGlynn stated, "Anúna developed from that idea [of bringing choral music to more people]. It developed from the need to reinterpret the choral canvas."[53]

Anúna has become one of the world's leading professional choral ensembles. The ensemble now in its thirty-fifth year, is recognized for its interpretations of traditional Irish songs, reconstructions of medieval Irish music, McGlynn's original music, and for its unique staging. Additionally, Anúna has produced over seventeen recordings, recorded for film, TV, and video games, and most recently performed for the 20th anniversary of the iconic video game *Xenogears*. When McGlynn was asked why he chose to form a new ensemble instead of work within the framework

50. Michael McGlynn, interview by author, Dublin, Ireland, October 2009.

51. Michael McGlynn, interview by author, Ft. Lauderdale, FL, February 2010.

52. Michael McGlynn, interview by author, Dublin, Ireland, October 2009.

53. Stacie Lee Rossow. *The Choral Music of Irish Composer Michael McGlynn.* Coral Gables: The University of Miami, 2010: 7.

of the existing choral infrastructure of Ireland, he stated that he created Anúna because he felt that there was a "need to find a choral voice that was distinctly Irish"[54]

In the over three decades that McGlynn has been the director of Anúna, he has become an advocate for change within the choral organization of Ireland. In 2006, McGlynn wrote for *The Irish Times*: "Choral music transmits the poetry and the language of a nation through song in a unique manner, something that should be of particular interest and importance in a country that prides itself in its literary heroes."[55] Through Anúna, he has succeeded in bringing the literary heritage of Ireland, the culture, the Irish language, and a sense of Irish choral music to the rest of the world. His compositional style combines the sounds and forms of Irish traditional and medieval music into a modern, individual idiom. While sources influence his harmonic language as varied as Gesualdo and Debussy, his compositional output is individual and reflects his culture and history. McGlynn has moved beyond the mere creation of choral arrangements from existing solo songs and has combined the musical elements of his heritage to create a choral compositional voice that assimilated traditions into a new style worthy of Ireland's musical heritage. In this way, he has done what Fleischmann, Ó Riada, and Bodley did before him: forge the past into a modern expression.

McGlynn began his compositional output with both arrangements of Irish tunes and reinventions of chant. The interesting thing is how he arranged the tunes. Many of these early works retain the solo aspect of the song by setting the tune in a solo voice over a chordal accompaniment by the chorus. In many ways, he returned the tune to what might have been the first possible evolution into accompaniment. The most natural progression of a solo line when monophonic singing was the norm would have been adding a pedal point or duplicating the melody at a fixed pitch level. In his approach, McGlynn appears to have done this and simultaneously imitated instrumental sounds that might have been prevalent in the homes when the tune was created. These "drone" chords often begin with the same intervallic structure as the *uilleann* pipes. His manipulation of ancient chants into original compositions follows the same path and progression; however, he admittedly does not attempt to preserve the song's original melody. Rather, he strives to reinterpret the song's impression by retaining something familiar. Many of his Irish traditional song settings come from his memory of his time at the *Gaeltacht* rather than from a specific source, which from the beginning means they are part of the living tradition.

54. Michael McGlynn, interview with author, Ft. Lauderdale, FL, February 2010.

55. Michael McGlynn, "A Way to Find Different Voices in this Multi-Ethnic Age," *The Irish Times*. June 5, 2006, https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/a-way-to-find-different-voices-in-this-multi-ethnic-age-1.1012408 (accessed 23 April 2018).

> One of the misapprehensions about my music is that I am not actually concerned with saving Irish traditional music; I am not a traditionalist. The only exposure I had [to traditional Irish song] was during my year at *Coláiste na Rinne* in *Dún Garbhán.* The songs that I set are not from a specific collection; they are more impressions of the songs I remembered.[56]

As a composer, McGlynn was and is still highly influenced by Western European medieval music, reflected in his use of parallel motion, modality, and chant. The use of modal structures demonstrated one manner in which McGlynn has captured something that is "uniquely Irish" in his compositions; they are the elements through which his music takes on nationalist characteristics.[57] Examples of this treatment are evident in works such as *Sí do Mhaimeo Í* and *Siúil, a Rúin,* from the traditional repertoire, and *Cormacus Scripsit*, from chant.

McGlynn did not purposefully use early Medieval compositional techniques to recreate these sounds; it was simply the music with which he most identified and felt the most natural for him to create. He began adding drones and chordal accompaniments to single melodic lines and harmonic ideas from his other influences to achieve a texture that is simultaneously full of motion yet serene. This compositional texture evokes picturesque images of the landscape of Ireland, which is full of traditions and myths and a natural world for which he has a great love. In this way, his compositions have taken on an Irish existence without his consciously borrowing from any one medium.

In other cases, McGlynn completely disregarded both the tune and rhythmic structure of the traditional Irish songs and used the language and story of the text to create something completely new. *Dúlamán* is just such a composition. *Dúlamán* is a well-known song in the traditional Irish repertoire; however, McGlynn's setting bears no resemblance to the original tune aside from the words. The *Amhrain Chuige Uladh,* as compiled by Méith,[58] includes a version of the tune (Figure 10) that several contemporary, traditional Irish music groups, including Altan, Clannad, and the Kingston Céilí Band, have recorded. In these versions, the tune is a reel in a moderate lilting tempo, a far cry from McGlynn's setting in this same text.

56. Michael McGlynn, interview with author, Ft. Lauderdale, FL, February 2010.
57. Michael McGlynn, interview by author, Ft. Lauderdale, FL, February 2010.
58. Muireadhach Méith compiled traditional Irish songs in the 1970s and 1980s.

Figure 10. Dúlamán, tune from Amhráin Chúige Uladh[59]

McGlynn was first drawn to this text because of the inflection of the Irish language. When he set this text in 1995 for a male ensemble, it was the rhythm of the language that most intrigued him. The Irish is intricately placed in the fast-changing meter to accentuate the natural syllabic stresses (Figure 11). In his version, the tenor solo sings the bulk of the text, while the chorus refrain is rhythmically energized with a limited amount of Irish (Figure 12).

Figure 11. Dúlamán, solo entrance, mm. 1-5[60]

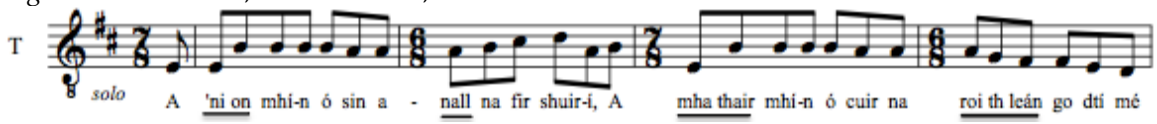


Figure 12. Dúlamán, chorus refrain, mm. 6-9

The overall structure of McGlynn's *Dúlamán* is still very much in keeping with the traditional verse and refrain (or *curfá*) song form. Here, the soloist has a great deal of rapidly moving text in the verse set in a rapid and near virtuosic manner. The chorus provides vitality and energy in an asymmetrical rhythm refrain.

McGlynn always favored ancient texts found in Ireland or the surrounding areas, works of Irish poets, and his original words that often depict various facets or ideas of Irish life or landscape. His attention and treatment of the language bring ancient musical ideas into a fresh and modern setting, breathing new life into them through his other influences of jazz, rock, and impressionism. It furthers the evolution of choral music in Ireland.

59. Muireadhach Méith. "Dúlamán," *Amhráin Chúige Uladh*. Baile Átha Cliath: Gilbert Dalton, 1977.

60. Michael McGlynn. *Dúlamán*. Dublin: Michael McGlynn and Warner Chappell, 1995.

Poetry by Francis Ledwidge (1887-1917), an Irish wartime poet and soldier from County Meath, has greatly inspired McGlynn.[61] He has returned to Ledwidge's poems several times over the last thirty years. As they demonstrate different times in his compositional career, these signature melodic and harmonic settings demonstrate McGlynn's unique and ever-developing compositional language. Included are modal structures, chromatic melodic passages and sequences, and possibly the most distinguishable feature found in McGlynn's repertoire, the extensive use of augmented chords with the major seventh and other extensions. Though these techniques are prominent throughout all McGlynn's compositions, the development of the deliberate and unique compositional voice and his ability to meld a uniquely Irish idea into a new language find full fruition.

Here, McGlynn's compositions elicit a feel of old-world origin, possibly because his music appears to have been composed in a more horizontal or melodic construct rather than with a vertical or harmonic orientation. Though harmonically complex, the ear is still drawn to tonality through diatonic and modal scales, though they often have little or no relevance to the stated key signature. It is for this reason that while complex harmonies are certainly in play, the melodic centers are far more difficult to identify and name according to standard theoretical principles, and often, several options are simultaneously apparent. It is important to remember that Irish traditional music was a modal art form due largely to the stringing of the ancient harps. The intentionality of this similarity aside, it is one of the reasons McGlynn's music is so strongly associated with Ireland's traditional and sean-nós music. As delineated in Table 5, the modal structures and notated keys provide an overview of tonalities used in each of the works set to the poetry of Francis Ledwidge. A look at the chart vertically shows the highly complex and varied modes used in each work (Table 5).

Table 5. Modal and Scale use in Ledwidge settings with notated Key Signatures

Midnight	**August**	**Where all Roses Go**	**When the War is Over**	**My Songs Shall Rise**	**May**
C Major Key	D Major Key	D major Key	A♭ Major Key	C Major Key	D major Key
E♭ natural minor	G1 pentatonic (melody)	B minor (melodic and harmonic)	F minor	G minor	A minor/ a mixolydian ♭6
C♭ Lydian	G2 pentatonic (melody)	E Dorian	F pentatonic	C melodic minor	C major
E♭ Lydian	E♭ minor	B Pentatonic	C locrian/ C pentatonic	G Locrian	
	D♭ mixolydian				

61. "Francis Ledwidge Museum." http://www.francisledwidge.com (accessed 6 May 2018).

Take, for instance, the opening passage of *Midnight*. The melody carried by the soprano solo (Figure 13) is set in E♭ natural minor (aeolian mode). At the same time, the other voices begin on E♭ and ascend and descend chromatically with the use of controlled dissonance. While the E♭ is certainly perceived as the tonal center, all voices settle a mere five measures later into C♭ Lydian.

Figure 13. Mode use, Midnight, mm 1-5[62]

As the next phrase progresses, the repetition of the D♭, E♭, F, G♭ sequence (Figure 2) alludes to D♭ as a tonal center. Still, the C♭ Lydian is sustained by the bass voice, which acts as the ground and leads to an extended dominant chord to complete the opening phrase. The juxtaposition of these two modes creates fluidity, instability, and a sense of modernity over what can be called an older-sounding, simple melody.

Another example of McGlynn's unique use of scales and modes is in *When the War is Over*. Though the opening section is tonally ambiguous, McGlynn settles in measure 21 into the rarely used C Locrian mode (Figure 14). Interestingly, the melody in the solo line exists as a variation of the same mode, omitting a specific tone of the scale. In this example, the D is notably absent from the solo melody but acts as an important harmonic tone in the accompaniment. The complete structure is only visible when the accompaniment, present in the other voices, is analyzed.

62. Michael McGlynn, *Midnight*. Dublin: Michael McGlynn and Warner Chappell, 1997.

Figure 14. Mode use, When the War is Over, mm. 21-24[63]

McGlynn also strongly identifies with the natural Irish landscape around him and has said that Ireland's language and folk songs are part of the essence of his ancestry and heritage. It is through the transmission of that heritage where his nationalistic voice becomes apparent and through his music that he wants others to learn the "history and ethos of Ireland so they can have respect for the music and understand it." McGlynn also feels that some of the commercialism of "Celticism" is polluting the tradition, and it is that which he tries to avoid with his ensemble, Anúna.[64]

Michael McGlynn is a composer who actively and sometimes confrontationally seeks to bring choral music to a place of importance in Ireland. His goal has been to provide Irish choral music with a prominent and unique voice worldwide. Through his compositions, workshops, recordings, and concerts, he has gained a reputation not only as a composer and arranger of Irish traditional music but also as a viable contemporary classical composer who uses the native sounds of his country. The songs he knew as a child, the Irish language, the poets, the sounds of the ocean, the impressions of the landscape, and the ancient structures of Ireland have all aided in forming his compositional style. McGlynn is a product of a land that has been steeped in musical tradition since antiquity, and his objective is to bring choral music to a place of prominence in that vast musical heritage.

Within McGlynn's music lies a corpus of compositions in which nearly all of them body feature an intrinsic aspect of the elements of nationalist music. His passion for creating an authentic Irish sound was not rooted in the traditional songs and dances; rather, it reached back to the time before the British occupation. Throughout his over three decades of compositional activity, his use of the Irish

63. McGlynn, Michael. *When the War is Over*, Dublin: Michael McGlynn and Warner Chappell, 1999.

64. Michael McGlynn, interview by author, Dublin, February 2015.

language, modal inflection, traditional tunes or texts, and evocation of the landscape in which he lives is visible and why his choral works are identified as an authentically Irish sound by so many choral conductors. McGlynn's contribution to the solidification of national music has been treated much like how Vaughn Williams' music was belittled due to its accessibility to the masses, and his compositional contribution to British National music was downplayed. Simply put, McGlynn has achieved in this century what Fleishman began in the last. His compositional techniques are unifying features from across the ages and are the concepts that provide his unique voice that is very closely associated with the Irish ethos.

Conclusion

Though delayed by occupation and outside influence, the music of Ireland began to take on a nationalistic nature through the work of many; however, it was only recently achieved in choral music through the outspoken determination of a small lineage of composers. Aloys Fleischmann, Sean Ó Riada, Seóirse Bodley, and Michael McGlynn represent different generations and the progression of specific musical ideas found in the ancient music of Ireland. Each, in turn, added their modern musical language to a distinctively Irish compositional voice. Whether through the native language, retelling of age-old stories, or musical devices of harmony and rhythm, their music is deeply rooted in the soundtrack of Ireland. Further examination of each composer's contributions will likely elicit further evidence and insight into where the next generation might voyage.

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