

The Music Association of Ireland

Fostering a Voice for Irish Composers and Compositions

TERESA O'DONNELL

■ teresaod@gmail.com

JMRO
www.jmro.org.au



www.musicaustralia.org.au

Introduction

In 1948, an association was founded in Dublin to improve the status of art music within the cultural life of Ireland. The Music Association of Ireland (MAI) sought to act as an umbrella group for all areas of classical music in Ireland, to create a musically educated audience in Ireland and to establish an Irish contemporary school of composition based on the European aesthetic (independent of the prevailing nationalist sentiment). The MAI Council produced a substantial policy document, *Music and the Nation: A Memorandum* ([Music Association of Ireland 1949a](#)) and had six objectives: to further musical education, to improve conditions for composers and musicians generally, to work for the establishment of a National Concert Hall, to submit recommendations on music policy to the relevant authorities, to encourage the formation of musical groups, societies and choirs throughout the country and to organise popular lectures, concerts and recitals with a view to awakening a regional and national musical consciousness ([Music Association of Ireland 1948a](#)). During its sixty-year lifespan (1948–2007), the MAI, a voluntary body, contributed considerably to the musical life of Ireland, particularly through its education initiatives and the creation of a musical infrastructure for composers¹. Initiatives, such as the Composers' Group (1953–1975), Countrywide Tours (1954–1980), Schools Recitals Scheme (1967–2003), Irish Youth Orchestra (1970–) and the Dublin Festival of Twentieth Century Music (1969–1986) were pioneered and championed at a time when government funding of the arts was limited.

This article examines the Association's second objective, i.e. to improve conditions for composers and musicians in Ireland. With established composers such as Aloys Fleischmann², Brian Boydell³ and Frederick May⁴ on the MAI's first committee, the plight of the composer in Ireland featured significantly on the fledgling association's agenda and activities. I explore the ideology of musical nationalism and the quandary faced by many composers in their attempts to reconcile national distinctiveness with musical modernity. In the face of this dilemma, I show how the MAI sought to shift Irish contemporary music from its parochial focus towards an international focus. By concentrating on MAI initiatives, such as the Composers' Group and the Dublin Twentieth Century Music Festival, I expound the major contribution of the MAI in fostering talented Irish composers from its inception and, most importantly, trace its



contribution towards the development of a musical infrastructure for indigenous Irish composers. These initiatives anticipated current professional organisations associated with contemporary music in Ireland. The latter part of MAI's second objective, namely to improve conditions for musicians, was achieved through the Association's employment of musicians for concerts and educational initiatives. Advocacy for musicians' rights was pursued by extant musicians' unions in Ireland and, apart from hiring musicians, the MAI did not actively pursue this latter part of the objective. Consequently, I have decided to focus on the first part of the objective in this article.

Forging Identities and Nation Building

Nationalistic discourse pervaded every aspect of politics, society and culture in Ireland throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Attitudes to culture, identity and, in particular, music in the twentieth century were shaped profoundly by the formation of various cultural nationalist movements in the closing decades of the nineteenth century⁵. Alarmed by the decline in Irish customs and with the possibility of Irish self-government becoming a reality, Ireland witnessed the emergence of new organisations and doctrines articulated in the form of self-help movements. Each movement made a significant and distinctive contribution to fostering a new shared identity for Irish people, emphasising their membership of a noble Gaelic nation, albeit an idealised one. Following the foundation of the Irish State in 1922, folk music, together with the Irish language and Catholic religion, were used to promote a particular Irish identity espoused by the majority. Classical music and the arts generally were perceived as remnants of colonialism patronised by a privileged elite and consequently were not part of the nationalist ideology promoted by the new Irish State and its associated cultural bodies ([McCarthy 1999: 73–4](#)).

Music became increasingly politicised: it became a cherished emblem of nationalism, cultural protectionism intensified and the schism between art music and the traditional repertory was magnified ([White 2001: 266](#)). As Irish musicologist Harry White succinctly articulated, music travelled 'a clear path from antiquarian zeal, through Romantic appropriation and political association, to full-blown nationalist ideology' ([White 2001: 267](#)). While the rediscovery of a Gaelic past provided inspiration for many cultural movements, White suggests that the long term effects arrested art music's development in Ireland. Such imposed notions of identity made it difficult for music to break free from cultural bondage. Nonetheless, composers, such as Herbert Hamilton Harty (1879–1941), Charles Villiers Stanford (1852–1924), Michèle Esposito (1855–1929), and Robert O'Dwyer (1862–1949) successfully contributed to classical music whilst also arranging Irish airs and incorporating Irish idioms into some of their compositions. Furthermore, the Feis Ceoil (1896)⁶ and An t-Oireachtas (1897)⁷, two leading music festivals and competitions, also bridged the gap between traditional and art music by including competitions for original compositions and arrangements in their programmes. Why these endeavours did not lead to a better acceptance of art music after independence remains an open question.

The challenge of expressing a national identity in music was also experienced by American and European composers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A significant number of European composers, such as Grieg, Sibelius and Borodin captured the character of their native country without employing folk melodies or motifs. In Ireland in the 1930s and early 1940s, a small number of composers rebelled against musical nationalism and believed the future of music in Ireland lay in external cultural networks. However, a complete disengagement from folk music was not possible in Ireland at this time as composers wishing to compose in a purely international style were few, had little hope of a receptive audience and simply could not make a living from this style of composition. According to Fleischmann, the composer had two choices: to either

chose the vocabulary of a pre-war generation, contriving to make it personal, or else he [had] 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 acclimatised to Moore ([Fleischmann 1936: 41](#)).

Nevertheless, Fleischmann believed that composers, regardless of school or style, could successfully incorporate folk song material cleverly into their works ([Fleischmann 1936: 42](#)).

Irish artists and writers also expressed their frustrations at Irish social conservatism which manifested an atmosphere of isolation, non-cosmopolitanism and alienation. The writer, Seán Ó Faoláin (1900–1991), articulated his disgust at the prevailing nationalist attitudes



which existed in ‘this sleeping country, these sleeping fields, those sleeping villages’ ([Brown 2004: 143](#)) and Frank O’Connor (1903–1966) lamented the cultural stagnation of the country and, unashamedly, pointed the finger of blame at An Taoiseach (the Irish Prime Minister) and later President, Éamon de Valera (1882–1975). President de Valera’s vision of a rural Catholic Gaelic Ireland stymied Ireland’s social, economic and cultural developments in the 1930s and 1940s. He described the music of Ireland, namely traditional music, as being:

of singular beauty ... characterized by perfection of form and variety of melodic content ... and our dance tunes — spirited and energetic, in keeping with the temperament of our people ([Kennedy 1990: 31](#)).

With such a limited focus, it is little wonder that classical music received any official attention and, pertinent to this study, it explains why the MAI sought to break free from such cultural bondage. As Kennedy notes, only cultural initiatives from which economic benefit could be derived would ‘win political and bureaucratic acceptance’ ([Kennedy 1990: 4](#)) and it is in this context that issues facing Irish composers at that time need to be understood.

Fostering a School of Irish Composition

The necessity to reconcile the ‘musical heritage of a traditional and colonial society with the music needs of a modern nation state’ ([McCarthy 1999: 116](#)) encouraged the MAI to forge a new identity for Irish composers. The Council of the MAI believed that it could effect positive change on the status of Irish composers and in attitudes towards contemporary Irish compositions. To this end, it sought the establishment of a musical infrastructure for composers where financial security, artistic freedom and social acceptance could be secured. The MAI attempted to foster musical creativity, offer creative and organisational support to composers, promote the work of contemporary composers and generate interest in, and an audience, for modern music. The following list, which I have compiled from various boxes in the MAI Archive identifies five important issues which were fundamental in cementing a network for composers:

1. development of a musically educated audience
2. establishment of links with foreign composers’ groups
3. formation of a Composers’ Group
4. agitating for increased performance, publication and recording of composers’ works
5. Dublin Twentieth Century Music Festival.

The MAI was well-positioned to create a new, modern Irish musical style and school of composition through the cosmopolitan influences of composers such as Fleischmann and Boydell. Fleischmann, an enigmatic figure because of his views and musical style, sought to create a compositional style that would ‘embody all techniques that contemporary music’ could boast while at the same time ‘be rooted in the folk-music spirit’ ([Fleischmann 1935: 124](#)). What differentiated Fleischmann from Boydell was the level of engagement with Irish traditional idioms. Perhaps this, together with the enormous task of preparing his tome, *Music in Ireland: A Symposium* ([Fleischmann 1952](#)), explains why Fleischmann did not figure as prominently as one might have expected after the initial euphoria at the fledgling MAI had settled.

Brian Boydell proved to be an influential figure in the MAI. It was his singular vision of contemporary Irish composition which mostly prevailed. He was deeply aware of the negative effects and shortcomings of the perceived national insularity of Ireland and feared it hindered musical development. Through background, education and musical experiences in London and Heidelberg, he acquired a cosmopolitan outlook. This cosmopolitanism affected his compositional style and shaped his vehement disavowal of the trend of musical nationalism where composers employed Irish idioms to make their compositions sound Irish. The simple folk arrangements of Stanford or Harty, which consistently enjoyed popularity in the first half of the twentieth century, were often perceived to be an unequal marriage of art and folk musics. In fact, Boydell described the evolution of his style as an antithesis to ‘the Stanford-Harty Anglo-Irish tradition’ ([Acton 1970: 104](#)). He asserted that composers should compose in an international language and absorb the atmosphere and traditions of their country into their creative personality rather than create something second-hand ([Acton 1970: 104](#)).



There was, in a sense, a musical ‘battle between two civilisations’⁸: one based on the belief that music could be used to create a distinctively national style and another which avoided the ‘folk music trap’ ([Graydon 2003: 56](#)) and aspired to create music in a universal style such as that of Boydell and May. The view of the MAI was not wholly dissimilar to Schönberg’s disapproval of the practice of absorbing folk music into classical music. Schönberg developed a unique system of musical organisation and he believed that:

A composer — a real creator — composes only if he has something to say which has not yet been said and which he feels must be said: a musical message to music-lovers. Under what circumstances can he feel the urge to write something that has already been said, as it has in the case of the static treatment of folk songs? ([Stein 1975: 165](#)).

In eschewing folk music, the MAI could only aspire to represent a minority of composers. Nevertheless, the challenges it faced were not insurmountable. The MAI Council believed that when a composers’ collective was established, other composers would follow the MAI’s separatist endeavours. However, a meaningful musical experience could only be created if three essential elements were secure: the composer, the performer and the audience, and each component depended on the others.

Developing an Audience for Contemporary Music at Home and Abroad

The MAI, like the League of Composers (1923–1954) and the Polish Composers’ Association (1925) (which became the Polish Composers’ Union in 1945), sought to create a musical environment wherein issues facing composers could be addressed. However, as expressed in its objectives and its memorandum, *Music and the Nation: A Memorandum* ([Music Association of Ireland 1949a](#)), these endeavours were reliant on the creation of a musically educated audience who could understand and appreciate contemporary Irish music (in a European aesthetic). For a number of years, Radio Éireann (RÉ) (the national broadcasting authority) had gently introduced Irish audiences to music by contemporary Irish composers. Of particular note is the final concert in the 1937–1938 Celebrity Concerts series which featured a programme that consisted entirely of music by living Irish composers. This concert, held on 24 April 1939, at the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin, featured works by Aloys Fleischmann, Ina Boyle (1889–1967), E.J. Moeran (1894–1950) (English-born of Irish parentage), Elizabeth Maconchy (1907–1994) (English-born, raised in Ireland) and Frederick May. Later, RÉ’s public symphony concert series at the Mansion House, Dublin (1941–1943) and the Capitol Theatre, Dublin (1943–1947), introduced Irish audiences to works by Stravinsky, Sibelius and Debussy. The MAI archive reveals that, whilst acknowledging efforts made to improve contemporary music in Ireland, it continually exerted pressure on RÉ to include more contemporary Irish and European music in its programming. The MAI sought to transform Irish musical tastes to what it believed befitted the Irish cultural consciousness, namely art music. In this regard, the MAI’s rhetoric is reminiscent of John F. Larchet’s criticism of Irish concertgoers’ musical appetite in his ‘Plea for Music’ of 1924. Larchet stated that the root of Dublin’s inability to cultivate an appreciative audience lay in the fact that Dubliners ‘have never been taught to do so’ ([Larchet 1924: 509](#)).

MAI Council member and *Irish Independent* music critic Joseph O’Neill expressed similar views. He stated that Irish people had ‘a superficial love of music’ which ‘must be both simple and familiar’ ([O’Neill 1951: 260](#)). At one level, O’Neill’s generalised slight against Irish people is exaggerated and offensive; however, at another level, it is difficult to refute his claim, because the ‘simple and familiar’ or predictable are characteristics of popular music. It begs the question: why did a minority of people believe their preference for the high arts should be imposed on others? Instead of adopting a condescending tone, the MAI and other individuals should have concentrated more on building up a regular musical audience for concerts, as outlined in its Memorandum ([Music Association of Ireland 1949a](#)), and gradually ensured that audiences were exposed to Irish as well as foreign contemporary music. In the short term, however, the MAI decided that one of the most pressing and appropriate ways of developing composition in Ireland was to connect with other composers’ groups in the UK and internationally with a view to establishing a similar group in Ireland.

In attempting to establish itself as the only ‘body solely dedicated with the advancement of music in this country’ ([Music Association of Ireland 1948b](#)) and, specifically, as the Irish representative body for composers, the MAI wrote to two UK-based composers’ organisations, the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM, founded in 1922) and the Committee for the Promotion of New Music (CPNM,



founded in 1943). MAI contacted the ISCM in July 1948 with the intention of establishing links between both organisations and, ultimately, arranging exchange performances between Ireland and the UK ([Music Association of Ireland 1948b](#)). Affiliation with the ISCM would 'ensure that at least one Irish work would be played at each annual festival' of the ISCM and this was a valuable tool in promoting the work of contemporary Irish composers abroad ([Music Association of Ireland 1948b](#)). The second composers' group approached by the MAI, the CPNM, was contacted with a view to exchanging new works and possibly securing performances of contemporary Irish works. Initial responses were enthusiastic. However, the MAI's modest resources and a lack of state funding arrested any efforts at meaningful engagement. Consequently, little progress beyond preliminary contact was made during the early years of the Association. The defeat of the Fianna Fáil government in February 1948 (which ended sixteen years of uninterrupted Fianna Fáil rule) heralded a new era for Irish politics and, in particular, arts policy in Ireland. The newly elected inter-party Government, under the leadership of John A. Costello (1891–1976) facilitated the establishment of the Cultural Relations Committee of Ireland (CRC) in January 1949, a non-statutory agency under the auspices of the Department of External Affairs. A joint copying scheme with the CRC provided the MAI with its first opportunity to promote and publish the works of contemporary Irish composers.⁹ Although the project took four years to complete, the CRC expressed interest in participating in further, similar schemes with the MAI ([Grocock 1961: 81](#)). However, the next collaboration did not occur until 1963 when the MAI approached the CRC to sponsor, *A Catalogue of Contemporary Irish Composers* ([Deale 1968](#)), a catalogue of works by Irish composers. The MAI and CRC joint enterprise was significant in that it engendered the establishment of the Composers' Group by the MAI in 1953. The precedent for the formation of a group representing composers occurred as early as 1919 with the foundation of a group called the Society of Irish Composers ('[Concert by the Irish Society of Composers' 1920](#))¹⁰ and the Irish Authors' and Composers' Association in 1933 ('[Authors and Composers' 1934](#))¹¹. Representation for composers had been a key objective of the MAI since its inception in 1948. One of the first meetings of composers organised by the MAI was held on 30 October 1949 but was poorly attended. However, the 'large number of enthusiastic letters received from those who were unable to attend' was interpreted as a signal of support for the establishment of a national representative body for composers ([Music Association of Ireland 1949b](#)). Accordingly, on 9 November 1949, Boydell wrote to 41 composers, inviting them and their composer friends to join the Association and he outlined the possible aims of a composers' representative group ([Music Association of Ireland 1949b](#)). But it took another five years before the MAI Composers' Group, with Brian Boydell as its first chairman, was formed. Composers in Europe and the USA faced the same challenges as those faced by Irish composers: lack of performance opportunities, publication of their works and poor pay. Composers' circles were united by a commonality of purpose and sought security, camaraderie and a sense of community in membership of a group or collective organisation. Organisations such as the Society for Private Performances (1918–1921)¹², the Finnish Composers' Association (1945) and the Society of Swedish Composers (1918) provided an outlet for living composers and brought artists and composers together through shared interests and challenges. The MAI wanted to emulate the activities of these organisations but it lacked funding and government support. Nonetheless, by the early 1950s, improvements in the musical infrastructure in Ireland (e.g. the establishment of the Radio Éireann Symphony Orchestra in 1948 and the Arts Council in 1951) gave reason to hope that, at last, the cultural life of the country was beginning to open up.

Early Activities of the MAI Composers' Group: Performance, Publication and Recording Opportunities

The performance, publication and recording of recent works by Irish composers were priorities for the MAI's Composers' Group from its inception in 1953. To this end, the group arranged four lunchtime concerts on 12, 19 and 26 November and 3 December 1954 at Trinity College, Dublin, with musicians providing their services *pro bono*. [Table 1](#) below indicates the diverse repertoire of compositions from established and promising young composers included in the programmes.

The series was a resounding success and marked the emergence of one young composer, Seóirse Bodley (1933–) who had sufficient talent and output to present an entire lunchtime concert of his own music. The critic at Bodley's concert on 26 November 1954 deemed it to be the highlight of the series and commented that Bodley's work signalled a welcome departure from musical nationalism and was:

... neither another late plodder in the footsteps of the folk-song enthusiasts, suffering from chromatic fever, nor a creaking imitator of fashionable modes. From his music it is clear that he has learned from Hindemith and Bartók, but what he has learned has served merely to feed and cultivate his own music thinking ('[Impressive Contributions', 1954](#)).



Table 1. Lunchtime Concerts held at the Graduates' Memorial Building, Trinity College, Dublin ([Music Association of Ireland n.d.](#))

| 1954 | Programme | Performers |
|-------------|---|--|
| 12 November | Songs by Arnold Bax, Frederick May, Charles Villiers Stanford, Daniel McNulty and Rhoda Coghill | Patricia Thomas (mezzo soprano) Frederick May (piano) |
| 19 November | <i>Six Songs from the Glens of Antrim</i> (A.J. Potter) <i>Five Epigrams</i> and <i>Sonatine</i> (John Reidy) Various songs by Herbert Hughes | A.J. Potter (bass), John O'Sullivan (piano) John Reidy (Seán Ó Riada) (piano) |
| 26 November | <i>Cré</i> (voice and piano) <i>Deire Fomhair</i> (voice and piano) <i>Paidir</i> I and II (voice and piano) <i>Do Bhádasá Uair</i> (voice and piano) <i>Stróll</i> (voice and piano) <i>Ná Déan Gáire</i> (voice and piano) <i>The Fairies</i> (voice and piano) <i>Capriccios No. 1 and 2</i> (violin and piano) <i>Scherzo</i> (piano) <i>Ceithre Píosaí Beaga</i> (piano) <i>Movement in B major</i> (piano) ¹³ (all by Seóirse Bodley) and poems recited by Seán Mac Réamuinn | Ruth Ticher (violin) Tomás Ó Súilleabháin (baritone) Seóirse Bodley (piano) Seán MacRéamuinn (recitations) |
| 3 December | <i>Divertimento for Three Music Makers</i> String Quartet No. 1 <i>Five Joyce Songs</i> (all by Brian Boydell) and poems recited by Seán Mac Réamuinn | Tomás Ó Súilleabháin (baritone) Wilhemina Sjoer (violin) Noel Jameson (violin) May Lord (viola) Betty Barrett (cello) Brian Boydell (oboe) Henry Dagg (clarinet) Christopher Haughey (bassoon) Joseph Groockock (piano) Seán Mac Réamuinn (recitations) |

The Composers' Group often dispensed with formalities and arranged concerts and record listening sessions at the homes of various members. On 16 April 1955, the composer, Ina Boyle (1889–1967), hosted a concert by the MacNaughton String Quartet¹⁴, at her house in Bushey Park, Enniskerry, Co. Wicklow. The Quartet performed music by Vaughan Williams, Purcell, Bloch and Elizabeth Maconchy who attended the concert. Other events organised by the group included record listening sessions at which members selected from Brian Boydell's audio collection of works by ten Irish composers ([Music Association of Ireland 1956a](#)). These meetings allowed members to examine each other's work and the works of other contemporary composers in a controlled environment free from the 'destructive and useless types of criticism' launched against composers who did not compose in a national style ([May 1952: 169](#)). The genesis of the group was no doubt influenced by Boydell's experience as a member of the Echo Club at Cambridge University, a group which came together to listen to gramophone recordings and to discuss compositions ([Klein 2004: 3](#)). Members of the Echo Club listened to the latest 'cult works', after which 'a period of meditation would follow during which no one would breathe a word that might disturb the magic spell' ([Boydell 1994: 4](#)).



The dynamism of the MAI Composers' Group was reflected in its many activities undertaken during the latter half of 1955. These included attendances at the UNESCO meeting in Paris, the Annual General Meeting of the Composers' Guild of Great Britain, correspondence with and affiliation to the ISCM and interviews with BBC Heads of Music in Belfast and London, all of which aimed to raise the profile of Irish composers abroad ([Music Association of Ireland 1956a](#)). On 5 September 1956, the pioneering American avant garde composer, Henry Cowell¹⁵, presented an illustrated lecture entitled *Contemporary Music in the USA* for the Composers' Group and in October 1957, he organised a concert at the Royal College of Physicians, Dublin, featuring the music of Irish composers or composers who had spent a considerable length of time in Ireland since 1597 (the year John Dowland's *First Book of Ayres* was published) ([Acton 1957](#)).

The MAI sought to create awareness of contemporary Irish compositions at home and abroad and highlighted the limited publishing opportunities for serious composers. Frederick May had previously voiced his concern at 'the lack of a good music-publishing firm in Ireland' and criticised publishing companies for publishing 'chiefly arrangements of folk song' and 'little original music of a serious kind' ([May 1952: 166](#)). From its inception, the MAI made representations to An Gúm (Government Publications) to expand its catalogue of Irish composers. The MAI described An Gúm's music catalogue as completely out of date and not cross-indexed and it suggested that the organisation made no endeavour to sell its publications ([Music Association of Ireland 1956b](#)). Some limited progress was made by the MAI with regard to An Gúm's catalogue and the MAI archive reveals that compositions by two of its members were included in the catalogue in 1955.

The MAI wrote to the Feis Ceoil and An t-Oireachtas suggesting that they submit winning compositions to An Gúm. The Feis Ceoil responded to the MAI on 26 September 1956 stating that it was not its responsibility to submit prize winning compositions to An Gúm ([Music Association of Ireland 1956d](#)). Correspondence from An t-Oireachtas was of a similar nature. Although both music festivals included competitions for original compositions and arrangements in their competitions, the Composers' Group still campaigned for increased exposure to contemporary compositions at festival competitions and concerts and pleaded with the organisations not to award prizes unless the composition was deemed worthy or capable of performance. The Feis Ceoil agreed that no award would be given unless the composition was of a good standard but argued that the MAI's suggestion of performing the previous year's winner's composition at the Feis Prizewinners' concert was not practical. The Feis Ceoil did, however, agree that prizewinning compositions deemed suitable by its committee could be used as test pieces providing the composer incurred the publishing costs ([Music Association of Ireland 1956d](#)).

Increased concert and performance opportunities were not the only areas explored by the Composers' Group in 1956. The Decca Record Label (New York) requested the group recommend works for a compilation album of six contemporary Irish compositions, *New Music from Old Erin* ([Music Association of Ireland 1956c](#)). Two volumes of *New Music from Old Erin* were recorded by the Radio Éireann Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Croatian conductor, Milan Horvat (1919–2014) and produced by American, Simon Rady ([Horvat 1956a, 1956b](#)). The final selection was notable for the prominence of Irish airs and dance tunes reworked into a classical idiom (see [Table 2](#)). Though the works were suggested by members of the Composers' Group, this was not the type of music the group wished to promote and the disc, though well recorded (by Deutsche Grammophon), was never released in Ireland (see [Fig. 1](#)). Apart from the criticism of the stereotypical representation of a rural Irish setting on the sleeve cover, the recording brought awareness of Irish contemporary music outside Ireland and was indicative of the MAI's efforts to promote awareness of Irish composers internationally.

From the experience of compiling works for the 1956 recording, Ina Boyle, a member of the Composers' Group, suggested an audit of contemporary composers and their works be made available particularly for dissemination abroad. This suggestion was eventually realised in 1968 with the publication of *A Catalogue of Contemporary Irish Composers* ([Deale 1968](#)) with financial assistance from the Department of External Affairs (through the CRC). Compiled by Edgar M. Deale (1902–1999), the catalogue records the works of 23 composers, provides information on instrumentation, duration, details of publication and, where appropriate, a discography. In 1973, the catalogue was revised by Deale and this edition was again funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs through the CRC. The next catalogue of contemporary Irish music, *A Catalogue of Contemporary Irish Music* ([Harrison 1982](#)) was published by the Irish Composers' Centre in 1982 and edited by Bernard Harrison (Research Officer with the Arts Council (of Ireland) from mid-1981). Although the MAI had no connection with this publication it is another example of an initiative started by the MAI which continues to this day.



Table 2. *New Music from Old Erin*, Volumes 1 and 2, as selected by members of the Composers' Group

| Composer | Work |
|-----------------|---|
| Volume 1 | |
| Brian Boydell | <i>Megalithic Ritual Dances</i> Op. 39 (1956) |
| Seóirse Bodley | <i>Music for Strings</i> (1952) |
| Frederick May | <i>An Sparainín, The King's Cave and I'll Travel to Mount Nebo</i> from <i>Suite of Irish Airs</i> (1953) |
| Volume 2 | |
| A.J. Potter | <i>Variations on a Popular Tune</i> (1955) |
| T.C. Kelly | <i>Three Pieces for Strings</i> (1949) |
| John F. Larchet | <i>Dirge for Ossian and MacAnat's Reel</i> (1940) |
| Arthur Duff | <i>Irish Suite for Strings</i> (1940) |

New Focus for the MAI Composers' Group

The resignation of Brian Boydell as chairman of the Composers' Group in 1966 and his replacement by Ireland's first avant-garde composer, Seóirse Bodley¹⁶, signalled a new focus for the Composers' Group in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Bodley's chairmanship of the Composers' Group was pivotal in leading it into an era free from cultural bondage. His music marked a major departure for Irish composition as he 'no longer sought to fuse the traditional with the sophisticated, but openly confronted the different musical materials, traditional melodies clashing with modern discords, triads with clusters' (Klein 2003: 178). Bodley achieved what the founders of the Composers' Group sought to accomplish. In many ways, he was a true successor of Boydell and his unique voice in Irish music delivered a long-awaited disengagement from the folk-music trap. The new emphasis during Bodley's chairmanship was on the performance of contemporary compositions at the Dublin Festival of Twentieth Century Music.

The need to promote contemporary music, at home and abroad, had always been one of the MAI and Composers' Group's priorities but, due to limited funding and minority appeal, its activities were curtailed. However, the highly successful Dublin Festival of Twentieth Century Music, first held on 5–10 January 1969 at Trinity College, Dublin, fulfilled many objectives of the MAI and its Composers' Group. The idea of the Festival arose out of a suggestion by composer and conductor, Gerard Schürmann (1924–) to Gerard Victory (1921–1995), composer and Director of Music at Raidió Teilifís Éireann, who in turn, approached the MAI to undertake its administration. During the lifetime of the Festival, internationally acclaimed artists and composers such as Karlheinz Stockhausen, Olivier Messiaen, Witold Lutoslawski, Elliott Carter and Andrzej Panufnik featured at festivals and this emphasised the significance of the Festival and its standing outside Ireland. Like other festivals dedicated to the promotion of contemporary music, such as the Warsaw Autumn Polish Festival of Contemporary Music (1956) and the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music, California (1963), the Dublin Twentieth Century Music Festival provided a platform or showcase for young Irish composers at its Young Composers' Concert. The Festival was unusual in that it was solely dedicated to the promotion of contemporary music. The MAI was to the fore in Irish contemporary music developments during this period¹⁷.

A Turning Point for the Festival and the MAI

By the early 1970s, the activities of the Composers' Group had declined. In 1976, the Composers' Group merged with the Association of Young Irish Composers (AYIC)¹⁸ and, in 1977, the Association of Irish Composers (AIC, the Irish representative of the ISCM) was established with funding from the Arts Council. The Arts Council expressed a 'special interest in the development of contemporary Irish music' which formed part of its crusade of professionalising arts activities at this time (Arts Council of Ireland 1978). For the MAI, the late 1970s and early 1980s emerged as one of the most exciting yet challenging in its history. Pioneering developments in the arts in Ireland from the 1970s, including the introduction of the second Arts Act (1973) and the restructuring of the Arts Council in 1973, led to unprecedented expansion in access to, and funding of, the arts. Official policy towards the arts had finally emerged from general indifference and, at times outright hostility, to an acceptance of the essential role of the arts as an important civilising influence in Irish society (Kennedy 1990: 207).

Figure 1. Sleeve of *New Music from Old Erin*, Volume I (Horvat 1956)



However, the MAI could not cope with the pace of change and was unable to restructure itself into a fully professional organisation, as requested by the Arts Council, and the relationship between the two deteriorated. Instead, the Arts Council embarked upon a number of its own initiatives to improve conditions for composers: the Arts Council set up the Composers' Commission Fund in 1980 (6 pieces were commissioned and performed in 1980 and 10 in 1981) and, in 1981, it established a joint administrative centre for the AIC and the Society of Irish Playwrights at Liberty Hall, Dublin with a grant of IR£9,500 and the Irish Contemporary Music Resource Centre with a grant of IR£19,500. The AIC, funded by the Arts Council, organised a composers in schools scheme and together with local authorities sponsored a summer school for young composers from 1983 which was directed by composer John Buckley.

Many of these initiatives had been envisaged by the MAI and its Composers' Group from their foundation but could only be realised through state support. The MAI was now surplus to requirements. Moreover, it had achieved its main objectives. Funding once earmarked for the MAI was redirected to organisations such as the Contemporary Music Centre (1985) and Music Network (1986). The year 1985 represented a nadir for the MAI, from which it never recovered. It administered its final Twentieth Century Music Festival, albeit a mini-festival for the European Music Year, and the year marked the beginning of a diminution of its influence. In 1985, the Arts Council sanctioned a grant of £20,000 for the 1986 Twentieth Century Music Festival and elaborate plans were drawn up for the visit of composer György Ligeti (1923–2006), a young composers' concert and five concerts by the London Sinfonietta for whom compositions by Raymond Deane (b.1953) and Dominic Muldowney (b.1952) had been commissioned and funded by the Arts Councils of Ireland and the UK respectively. By mid-1985, however, additional sponsorship had not been raised and the MAI 'was unable to fund its elaborate plans' due to a shortfall in funding of £12,800 (Dervan 1987). After much negotiation, the Arts Council withdrew its funding and the Festival was cancelled (RTÉ organised its own festival of modern music in 1986). Some eighteen months prior to this decision, music critic, Michael Dervan, claimed that the 'MAI's difficulties with the festival were an indication of a deeper malaise within the organisation' and, as former editor of MAI's magazine, *Soundpost* (1981–1984), he was only too well aware of the financial difficulties facing the Association at this time (Dervan 1984). Dervan astutely observed that the MAI's administration of the Festival was jeopardising the reputation of the Festival. The hegemony of the MAI in the musical life of Dublin was gradually being eroded and the Arts Council looked to other organisations to carry out its policies on a professional basis. However, one area the Arts Council did continue to support was the MAI's Schools Recitals' Scheme (SRS)¹⁹.

From the end of the 1980s, the SRS became the central focus of the Association and various attempts were made to expand and diversify the SRS so that it could distinguish itself from other music education projects but more importantly, to attract Arts Council funding²⁰. As the



MAI had a strong tradition of promoting contemporary Irish art music, it decided to commission a number of works by Irish composers for performance in schools. The MAI launched its Music Workshop Scheme in 1986. This scheme allowed secondary schools to choose works from a list of commissioned works by Irish composers for performance in their schools. These included, *The Harmonious Family* (Gerard Victory), *The Fiddler* (Seóirse Bodley), *The Eagle* (John Buckley), *The Magic Harp* (Denise Kelly) and *O What is that Sound?* (Philip Martin). Participating schools selected their preferred work, rehearsed it thoroughly in their own time and then rehearsed and performed the work at one-day workshops with professional musicians and often in the presence of the composer ([Music Association of Ireland 1989/1990](#)). The scheme remained popular until the mid-1990s but, with a serious decline in Arts Council funding and the establishment of new professional organisations, the MAI lost enthusiasm and relevance and was dissolved in 2007.

Conclusion

MAI founding member and composer, Frederick May, declared that a composer ‘who tried to make a living by composition in Ireland would be inviting death by slow, or perhaps not so slow, starvation’ ([May 1952: 168](#)). From its inception in 1948, the MAI and its Composers’ Group (1953) championed the plight of the composer in Ireland and agitated for improved conditions for composers. Its efforts prepared the way for a younger generation of Irish composers who ‘focused outwardly, espoused wider international influences and adopted the aesthetics and techniques of the avant-garde’ ([Mac Liam 2008: 117](#)). Despite the limited number of Irish composers interested and capable of composing in a modern style in the 1940s and 1950s, the early activities of the MAI and its Composers’ Group underline its dedication to improving conditions for Irish composers and fostering talented Irish composers. In developing a musical infrastructure for Irish composers, the MAI set about establishing links with international composers’ groups; establishing the Composers’ Group to act as the Irish representative body for Irish composers; promoting the performance, publication and recording of contemporary Irish works through organising concerts and lectures and through contact with RÉ, CRC, An Gúm, Feis Ceoil, An t-Oireachtas, recording companies and international bodies; compiling a catalogue of contemporary Irish composers; establishing the Dublin Twentieth Music Festival which was solely dedicated to the promotion and performance of contemporary works and finally commissioning works by Irish composers for performance in schools. The MAI improved conditions for composers and by extension for musicians through these initiatives.

An assessment of the legacy of the MAI’s Composers’ Group involves mediating the complex contrivance for dominance between two artistic mindsets: one that espoused a particular Irish identity and the other that eschewed any folk influence in favour of a more contemporary cosmopolitan European style. Both were perceived by Boydell and others as incompatible. Fleischmann and his followers sought ways of reconciling them within a personal voice which, he claimed, could provide as unique and valid a musical language as that of Bartók, Kodály, Vaughan Williams, Granados or other nationalist composers. The MAI’s most important legacy is its insistence on an artistic trajectory of development that sought to ensure an Ireland less parochial and more internationally focused.

The MAI’s search for cultural authenticity, though admirable, was a little over-ambitious considering the time of its formation. The country was then emerging from that period of social and economic difficulty called the Emergency (1939–1945)²¹ and, apart from mainly amateur involvement in church choirs, local choral or operatic societies, gramophone clubs and occasional concerts by semi-professional and professional musicians, the classical music infrastructure in Ireland was limited. Nevertheless, the establishment of the Radio Éireann Symphony Orchestra (1948) and the foundation of the Arts Council (1951) signalled the beginning of state support of the arts in Ireland. The MAI, therefore, was well-positioned to contribute to Ireland’s changing identity and to the development of an Irish musical infrastructure for composers. However, by setting itself above contemporary cultural movements, ignoring Ireland’s indigenous folk music and looking exclusively to the European art music tradition, the MAI did not appeal to the musical tastes of the majority of the population.

Though, undoubtedly, the founding members of the MAI and the Composers’ Group had higher aspirations for the organisation, its achievements and contribution to Irish musical life and infrastructure should be acknowledged and recognised, particularly as it was primarily a voluntary body. The MAI was steadfast in achieving its goals and many of its pioneering initiatives remain in place through organisations such as the Contemporary Music Centre, the AIC and the Irish Composers’ Collective. It is unfortunate that the activities of the Composers’ Group over twenty years have been largely forgotten, with improvements credited to more recent professional organisations associated with contemporary music in Ireland today.



ENDNOTES

1. Information about the MAI primarily derives from the MAI archive, shelfmark Acc. 6000 held in the National Library of Ireland, Dublin (IRL-Dn). Apart from a handful of references to the MAI in other writings, nothing substantial is available from published sources. Consequently, we may supplement information in the archive with references, albeit limited, in publications such as *Music in Ireland: A Symposium* (Fleischmann 1952), *To Talent Alone: The Royal Irish Academy of Music 1848–1998* (Pine and Acton 1998), *Music and Broadcasting in Ireland* (Pine 2005), *Passing It On: The Transmission of Music in Irish Culture* (McCarthy 1999) and *A General Survey of Music in the Republic of Ireland* (Grocock 1961). The writings and research on key musical figures associated with the MAI, such as Aloys Fleischmann and Brian Boydell, who played vital roles in the early years of the association, also fill information gaps in the archive. For further information on the MAI, see O'Donnell (2012 and 2014–2015: 3–22).
2. Aloys Fleischmann (1910–1992), Irish composer, conductor and Professor of Music at University College, Cork (1934–1980). Works include, *Suite for Piano* (1933), *Trí hAmhráin* (1937), *Clare's Dragoons* (1945) and *An Cóitín Dearg* (1951).
3. Brian Boydell (1917–2000), Irish composer, conductor and Professor of Music at Trinity College, Dublin (1962–1982). Works include *In Memoriam Mahatma Gandhi* Op. 30 (1948), String Quartet Op. 31 (1949), Violin Concerto Op. 36 (1953, rev. 1954) and *Symphonic Inscapes* (1968).
4. Frederick May (1911–1985), Irish composer and Music Director at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin (1936–1948). Works include, *Scherzo for Orchestra* (1933), String Quartet in C minor (1936) and *Songs from Prison* (1941).
5. The cooperation of disparate groupings, such as the Gaelic Athletic Association (1884), the Co-Operative Movement (1889), the Gaelic League (1893), Feis Ceoil (1896), An t-Oireachtas (1897) and the Irish Literary Theatre (1899), was essential in the revival and preservation of Irish sports, language, folklore and customs. For further information on cultural movements of this period, see *Revival: The Abbey Theatre, Sinn Féin, the Gaelic League and the Co-operative Movement* (Mathews 2003).
6. The Feis Ceoil is a competitive music festival founded in 1896 and first held in 1897.
7. An t-Oireachtas or Oireachtas na Gaeilge is a festival of Irish culture founded by Conradh na Gaeilge (Gaelic League) and first held in 1897.
8. 'The Battle of Two Civilisations' is the title of a chapter in *The Philosophy of Irish Ireland* (Moran 1905).
9. Works received by the CRC and accepted for publication included, *In Memoriam Mahatma Gandhi* and *Five Joyce Songs* (Brian Boydell), *The Four Masters* and *The Fountain of Magic* (Aloys Fleischmann), *Lyric Movement* and *Scherzo* (Frederick May), *Introduction, Fugue and Pastoral* (William Rea), *Ave Maria* (Ernest de Regge) and *Pageant of Human Life* (Edgar Deale).
10. The Society of Irish Composers, also known as the Irish Composers' Society, was founded in 1919 to support and promote the work of Irish composers. Michael Kavanagh was honorary secretary and the Society claimed the support of many of the leading figures in Irish musical life at the time, namely, Michèle Esposito, Robert O'Dwyer, Annie Patterson and W.S. Nabarro. On 17 December 1920 the Society organised a concert of music by Irish composers such as, W.S. Nabarro, E.J. Taylor, Charles Hardebeck, Charles Villiers Stanford, Paul McSwiney and Michael Kavanagh.
11. The Irish Authors' and Composers' Association was founded in 1933 by Patrick G. Kavanagh and had its offices at D'Olier Street and later Lower Abbey Street, Dublin. Committee members included, Seán Hynes and Joseph Milton. Although the Association's membership consisted mainly of composers of ballad songs, it campaigned for many of the issues which affected composers of all genres: it agitated for broadcasting and recording rights, increased performance and publishing opportunities for members and encouraged Irish people to purchase works by Irish authors and composers. It also organised (mainly ballad) song competitions.
12. The Society for Private Performances (*Verein für Musikalische Privataufführungen*) (1919–1921) was founded by Arnold Schönberg and organised concerts of modern music in Vienna.
13. This piece was also known as the first movement of an unfinished Sonata in B.
14. The McNaughton String Quartet consisted of Anne MacNaughton (violin), Elizabeth Rajna (violin), Margaret Major (viola) and Arnold Ashby (cello).
15. Henry Cowell (1897–1965) was an American composer and pianist. He was a prominent member of the International Composers' Guild (1921–1927) and founder of the New Music Society (1925–1936). The lecture took place at the Royal Irish Academy of Music, Dublin.



16. Seóirse Bodley (1933–), Irish composer and Professor of Music, University College, Dublin (1960–1998). Bodley became chairman of the Festival committee in 1974 and this explains its exclusive promotion of Irish and international avant-garde compositions. Works include, five orchestral symphonies, two chamber symphonies and *Chiaroscuro* (1999).
17. For further information on the Dublin Festival of Twentieth Century Music see *The Music Association of Ireland: A Cultural and Social History* (O'Donnell 2012). Northern Ireland's equivalent festival, Sonorities, was established in 1982.
18. The Association of Young Irish Composers was founded in 1972. John Gibson (president), Brian Beckett (secretary), Raymond Deane (treasurer), Derek Ball and Gerald Barry led the Association and it received funding from the Arts Council.
19. The Schools Recitals Scheme was launched in 1967 and provided regular concerts in schools throughout Ireland.
20. In 1985 the MAI received a grant of £36,500 from the Arts Council. In 1986 it received £21,800, of which £10,500 was allocated to the SRS. In 1987 it received £10,700, of which £9,500 was allocated to the SRS. In 1988 it received £13,950, of which £10,150 was allocated to the SRS. In 1989 it received £14,000, of which £10,000 was allocated to the SRS and £4,000 to its Music Workshop Scheme. In 1990 it received £18,000, of which £11,000 was allocated to the SRS, and £5,000 from a private sponsor (O'Donnell 2012: 254).
21. On 2 September 1939, as a consequence of the outbreak of World War II, An Taoiseach, Éamon de Valera declared that Ireland was in a state of emergency.

REFERENCES:

1. Acton, Charles. 1957. 'Anthology with Dublin Links'. *The Irish Times*. 22 October.
2. _____. 1970. 'Interview with Brian Boydell'. *Éire-Ireland*. 5 (4): 97–111.
3. Arts Council of Ireland. 1978. *1977 Arts Council Annual Report*. Dublin: The Arts Council.
4. 'Authors and Composers'. 1934. *Irish Independent*. 12 May.
5. Boydell, Barra. 1994. *The Roaring Forties and Thereabouts*. Unpublished autobiography.
6. Brown, Terence. 2004. *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922–2002*. London: Harper Perennial.
7. 'Concert by the Irish Society of Composers.' 1920. *The Irish Times*. 20 December.
8. Deale, Edgar M. 1968. (rev. 1973). *A Catalogue of Contemporary Irish Composers*. Dublin: Music Association of Ireland.
9. Dervan, Michael. 1984. 'The Right Note?' *The Sunday Tribune*, 30 December.
10. _____. 1987. 'Musical Highs and Lows of 1986.' *The Irish Times*. 1 January.
11. Fleischmann, Aloys. 1935. 'The Outlook of Music in Ireland'. *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review of Letters, Philosophy and Science*. 24 (93): 121–30.
12. _____. 1936. 'Composition and the Folk Idiom'. *Ireland Today*. 1 (6): 37–44.
13. _____. ed. 1952. *Music in Ireland: A Symposium*. Cork: Cork University Press.
14. Graydon, Philip. 2003. 'Modernism in Ireland and Its Cultural Context in the Music of Frederick May, Brian Boydell and Aloys Fleischmann'. In *Irish Music in the Twentieth Century: Irish Musical Studies 7*. Gareth Cox and Axel Klein, eds. Dublin: Four Courts Press. 56–79.
15. Grocock, Joseph. 1961. *A General Survey of Music in the Republic of Ireland*. Dublin: Forás Éireann.
16. Harrison, Bernard, ed. 1982. *A Catalogue of Contemporary Irish Music*. Dublin: Irish Composers' Centre.
17. 'Impressive Contributions to Recitals'. 1954. *The Irish Times*. 27 November.
18. Kennedy, Brian P. 1990. *Dreams and Responsibilities: The State and the Arts in Independent Ireland*. Dublin: Arts Council.
19. Klein, Axel. 2003. 'Root and Directions in Twentieth-century Irish Art Music'. In *Irish Music in the Twentieth Century: Irish Musical Studies 7*. Gareth Cox and Axel Klein, eds. Dublin: Four Courts Press. 183–204.
20. _____. 2004. 'Brian Boydell: Of Man and Music'. In *The Life and Music of Brian Boydell*. Gareth Cox, Axel Klein and Michael Taylor, eds. Dublin: Irish Academic Press. 1–29.
21. Larchet, John F. 1924. 'A Plea for Music'. In *The Voice of Ireland: A Survey of the Race and Nation from All Angles*. William G. Fitzgerald, ed. Dublin and London: Virtue and Company. 508–11.
22. Mac Liam, Seán. 2008. 'Review of Séamas de Barra's Aloys Fleischmann'. *Journal of the Irish Economic and Social History Society of Ireland*. (35): 115–21.



23. Mathews, P.J. 2003. *Revival: The Abbey Theatre, Sinn Féin, the Gaelic League and the Co-operative Movement*. Cork: Cork University Press.
24. May, Frederick. 1952. 'The Composer in Ireland'. In *Music in Ireland: A Symposium*. Aloys Fleischmann, ed. Cork: Cork University Press. 164–75.
25. McCarthy, Marie. 1999. *Passing It On: The Transmission of Music in Irish Culture*. Cork: Cork University Press.
26. Moran, D.P. 1905. *The Philosophy of Irish Ireland*. Dublin: James Duffy.
27. Music Association of Ireland. n.d. Information derived from concert brochures. Music Association of Ireland Archive, National Library of Ireland. IRL-Dn-Acc 6000, Box 7.
28. _____. 1948a. *MAI Memorandum of Association*. Music Association of Ireland Archive, National Library of Ireland. IRL-Dn-Acc 6000, Box 7.
29. _____. 1948b. *MAI Summary of Activities*. Music Association of Ireland Archive, National Library of Ireland. IRL-Dn-Acc 6000, Box 7.
30. _____. 1949a. *Music and the Nation: A Memorandum*. Music Association of Ireland Archive, National Library of Ireland. IRL-Dn-Acc 6000, Box 7.
31. _____. 1949b. Copy of a letter sent by Brian Boydell to 41 composers on 9 November. Music Association of Ireland Archive, National Library of Ireland. IRL-Dn-Acc 6000, Box 7.
32. _____. 1956a. Summary of Music Association of Ireland Composers' Group's Activities cited in a letter from A.J. Potter to John O'Sullivan on 5 January. Music Association of Ireland Archive, National Library of Ireland. IRL-Dn-Acc 6000, Box 7.
33. _____. 1956b. Minutes of Composers' Group Meeting on 17 February. Music Association of Ireland Archive, National Library of Ireland. IRL-Dn-Acc 6000, Box 7.
34. _____. 1956c. Letter from Simon Rady (Decca Company) to John O'Sullivan in April 1956. Music Association of Ireland Archive, National Library of Ireland. IRL-Dn-Acc 6000, Box 7.
35. _____. 1956d. Letter from Feis Ceoil to Music Association of Ireland on 26 September. Music Association of Ireland Archive, National Library of Ireland. IRL-Dn-Acc 6000, Box 7.
36. _____. 1989/1990. *MAI Music Workshop Scheme* pamphlet. Music Association of Ireland Archive, National Library of Ireland. IRL-Dn-Acc 6000, Box 23.
37. O'Donnell, Teresa. 2012. 'The Music Association of Ireland: A Cultural and Social History'. PhD Thesis, St. Patrick's College, Dublin.
38. _____. 2014–2015. 'Musical Legacies: The Contribution of the Music Association of Ireland to an Irish Musical Infrastructure.' In *Journal of the Society of Musicology Ireland*. 10: 3–22.
39. O'Neill, Joseph. 1951. 'Future of Music in Ireland.' *The Bell*. 17 (1): 13–18.
40. Pine, Richard. 2005. *Music and Broadcasting in Ireland*. Dublin: Four Courts Press.
41. Pine, Richard, and Charles Acton, eds. 1998. *To Talent Alone: The Royal Irish Academy of Music 1848–1998*. Cork and Dublin: Mercier Press.
42. Stein, Leonard, ed. and Leo Black, trans. 1975. *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*. London: Faber and Faber.
43. White, Harry. 2001. 'Nationalism, Colonialism and the Cultural Stasis of Music in Ireland.' In *Musical Constructions of Nationalism*. Harry White and Michael Murphy, eds. Cork: Cork University Press. 257–71.

DISCOGRAPHY

Horvat, Milan (conductor). 1956a. Radio Éireann Symphony Orchestra. *New Music from Old Erin*, Volume I. Decca (USA) DL 9843. LP 1958

Horvat, Milan (conductor). 1956b. Radio Éireann Symphony Orchestra. *New Music from Old Erin*, Volume II. Decca (USA) DL 9844. LP 1958



KEYWORDS. Irish musicology, Twentieth century Irish art music, Irish contemporary composition, post nationalism, Irish musical identity

ABSTRACT

The improvement of conditions for composers in Ireland was one of the primary objectives of the Music Association of Ireland (MAI) (founded in 1948). With the presence of composers such as Aloys Fleischmann, Brian Boydell and Frederick May on the MAI's first Council the plight of the composer in Ireland featured significantly on the MAI's agenda and activities. The Association sought to develop an audience for modern music and agitated for increased performance, publication and recording opportunities for works by Irish composers. It also attempted to shift Irish contemporary music from its parochial focus towards an international focus.

By concentrating on MAI initiatives such as the Composers' Group (1953–1975) and the Dublin Twentieth Century Music Festival (1969–1986), I expound the major contribution of the MAI in fostering talented Irish composers from its inception and, most importantly, trace its contribution towards the development of a musical infrastructure for indigenous Irish composers. It is unfortunate that these activities have been largely forgotten with improvements credited to more recent professional organisations associated with contemporary music in Ireland today.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Teresa O'Donnell was awarded a Foras Feasa Fellowship to undertake a PhD which she completed in 2012. Her research has been published in a number of academic journals, including the *Journal of the Society for Musicology in Ireland* and the *American Harp Journal*. O'Donnell lectured at St Patrick's College, Dublin City University, for six years and has given talks on various topics at academic and cultural centres throughout Ireland. Her monograph, *Sisters of the Revolutionaries: The Story of Margaret and Mary Brigid Pearse*, co-authored with her sister Mary Louise, will be published by Merrion Press in early 2017. O'Donnell is also a renowned harpist performing in Ireland and abroad.

Received by the editors 15 April 2015. Accepted for publication (in revised form) 15 September 2016.

© Teresa O'Donnell (2016)