

Music Societies in Ireland during the Nineteenth Century

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The Irish Long Nineteenth Century

Before discussing the structure and history of Irish music societies it is necessary to outline the historical circumstances in which they existed. Ireland's history throughout the nineteenth century was shaped by events and dates different from those that were important for other countries; years such as 1789, 1815, 1848 or 1914 have much less relevance in Ireland than, say, in France or Germany. Ireland's long nineteenth century stretches not from 1789 to 1914 but rather from 1801 to 1922. It is centrally shaped by five events that reformed the Irish political and social landscape.

The Act of Union

While the French revolution undoubtedly had an impact on Irish intellectuals there was no attempt to implement its principles in an island tightly controlled by the British crown. However, in 1798 the Irish embarked on one of their many rebellions against the British occupation. It led to much bloodshed yet was ultimately unsuccessful. A consequence of this "Rising" was the Act of Union implemented in 1801. Until then Ireland had had its own parliament in Dublin (while the administration was appointed by London). Now Ireland's parliamentarians voted themselves out of existence and would join the House of Commons and the House of Lords in the British capital. This led to most aristocrats and many other policymakers moving from Dublin to London, and marked the end of the golden age

of cultural life in Dublin, when the Irish capital thought of itself as the second city of the empire:

*The Act of Union [...] caused a general exodus of the landed gentry from their town houses. Before 1800 there were 270 Peers and 300 Commoners of the Irish Parliament residing in the city; twenty years later only 34 Peers and 5 Commoners remained.*¹

Aristocratic patronage was now only in very marginal ways available in Dublin. However, with regard to music the rise of the middle classes to some extent compensated for that as Barra Boydell points out: “Following the Act of Union [...] Dublin declined as a social centre. However, the rise in amateur music-making ensured that musical activity continued to develop.”²

Catholic Emancipation

For centuries the British had suppressed Catholicism in Ireland – Catholics could neither worship freely in public nor inherit property, enrol in a university, vote or sit in parliament. Since the late eighteenth century this discrimination had been eased gradually, yet the Catholic Emancipation Act from 1829 was the symbolic high point of this development. It granted Catholics the right to be elected to Westminster (they had already been given the vote in 1793).

The Great Famine

From 1845 to 1852 Ireland experienced several years of famine since the potato – the main food of the poor in particular – was affected by the potato blight and the harvest failed. Ireland had then eight million inhabitants; it is estimated that of those one million died of starvation while at least another million emigrated.³ This traumatic experience is still a key element of Irish identity to this day. Today about 6.5 million people live in Ireland (North and South), making it one of the few European regions in which the population is smaller today than it was in 1845. The famine hit the West and the South of the country particularly hard, and with it the main remaining

- 1 Brian MacGiolla Phadraig, “Dublin One Hundred Years Ago,” *Dublin Historical Record* 23, no. 2/3 (Dec. 1969), 62; <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30087166>.
- 2 Barra Boydell and Adrian Scahill, “Dublin,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland*, vol. 1, eds. Harry White and Barra Boydell (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2013), 319.
- 3 Cormac Ó Gráda, *The Irish Famine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

areas in which Irish was spoken – apart from everything else it was also regarded as wiping out much of the indigenous culture (such as traditional music) together with many of the Irish speakers.

The Gaelic Revival

In the 1890s Irish society experienced the Gaelic Revival, a conscious attempt to revive the old Irish culture. It focused on three areas: a revival of the Irish language, an introduction of Irish sports (Irish football, hurling and camogie) and Irish traditional music. Many nationwide and local associations were founded to support these goals, while competitions and festivals were also organised.⁴

War of Independence and Civil War.

750 years of British rule in Ireland (or at least most of it) finally came to an end in the early twentieth century. Triggered by the Easter Rising of 1916, the War of Independence from 1919 to 1921 led to the partition of Ireland and the creation of Northern Ireland, which remained part of the British crown while the rest of the country became the Irish Free State. Many of the participants in the War of Independence did not accept the resulting treaty (particularly the requirement to swear an oath to the British king) so that an internal Civil War ensued (1922–23). It was, however, won by the supporters of the treaty. While for the rest of the world the First World War and the Treaty of Versailles marked the end of the long nineteenth century, for Ireland it was the foundation of the Free State and the end of the Civil War that marked the end of its equivalent period.

The Structure and Operations of Irish Music Societies

Music societies in Ireland differed from those in most continental European countries in that they had to operate in the total absence of any professional orchestra or permanent opera house on the entire island. All public and private concerts (apart from music associated with the churches) were organised and presented by them. This explains why many of them – not a majority yet probably more than in other countries – focused on instrumental music, or at least a combination of vocal and instrumental music.

4 Timothy G. McMahon, *Grand Opportunity: The Gaelic Revival and Irish Society, 1893–1910* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008).

The societies were private clubs whose main purpose was not organising and presenting public concerts but instead making music for the members' own, private edification. Their weekly gatherings were not called rehearsals but usually rather "meetings" and often included dinners after the practice sessions. Meetings to which only members had access were called "private"; the "Society for Antient Music" in Dublin alternated those events with so-called "Visitors Nights"⁵. These were semi-public concerts for which tickets were sold by the members – they decided whom to invite, or who to sell them to. Tickets could not be purchased by members of the public, except on a few occasions per year (perhaps between two and eight, depending on the period and the society) when public concerts were organised to support charitable causes. This allowed for a high degree of social control as Paul Rodmell has pointed out: "*Tickets were on public sale only exceptionally, so societies were not only able to control the social make-up of their membership but also of their audiences.*"⁶ At the beginning of the nineteenth century access to most music societies was restricted to Protestants; they were mainly populated by aristocrats and members of the upper middle class. New members had to be proposed by one or two existing ones and (after passing an audition with the artistic director, at least with regard to performing members) confirmed by a vote of all members; this way the social control of membership mentioned by Rodmell could be reinforced. Over the course of the nineteenth century – particularly after Catholic emancipation – some societies opened up to Catholics, while especially after 1850 new societies were founded that were mainly or entirely Catholic from the beginning.

Most members of music societies were amateurs (usually called "gentlemen" – women were excluded from the majority of societies), while there were also some professional musicians called "players". There were also performing and non-performing members; the latter's job was related to matters of organisation and logistics, as well as advertising those events that were public. They were also welcome as additional subscription payers, of course. In 1837, Dublin's "Society of Antient Music" had 60 members of whom 30 were non-performing – a significant percentage.⁷ In 1888 the "Or-

5 Patrick J. Stephenson, "The Antient Concert Rooms," *Dublin Historical Record* 5, no. 1 (Sep.–Nov. 1942): 5, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30080044>.

6 Paul Rodmell, "The Society of Antient Music, Dublin, 1834–64," in *Music in Nineteenth-Century Ireland [Irish Musical Studies 9]*, eds. Michael Murphy and Jan Smaczny (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), 213.

7 Stephenson, "The Antient Concert Rooms," 1.

chestral Union” in Dublin had 60 members while the “Dublin Instrumental Club” listed 30 members in 1896.⁸ The “University of Dublin Choral Society” initially limited the number of performing members to 18 yet later expanded it to 30; perhaps in order to perform larger pieces without exceeding the maximum number of performing members this society at least temporarily diversified membership categories to “performing members”, “performing associates, first class”, “performing associates, second class”, and “non-performing members” (associates had no voting rights regarding matters of the society).⁹

Newspapers and journals reporting on public events hosted by music societies always used a significant amount of ink describing the social aspects of the concerts, and often much less talking about the quality of the music (regularly not even mentioning which pieces were performed); Rodmell is certainly right when stating that “*the social function of Dublin concerts could be as great as the musical.*”¹⁰ It was extremely important for a society’s reputation to have aristocrats or other high-ranking persons as President, Vice-President and Patrons. However, over the course of the century societies open to the middle and lower classes gradually emerged. The “Dublin Sacred Harmonic Society” (1841–1847) was perhaps the most progressive of these; based in the Presbyterian Scots’ Church it was open to members from different classes and religions and also accepted women as members (Dublin’s “Anacreontic Society” also accepted Catholics, yet no “female sopranis” as they were often called).¹¹ Elsewhere most societies recruited boys from the cathedral choirs to sing the soprano and alto parts of the choruses while only female solo parts were sung by women. In 1856 the “Hibernian Catch Club” (founded ca. 1680 – Europe’s oldest music society still in existence today) allowed women to join their meetings, although they had to remain hidden behind a screen – yet this “experiment” was quickly abandoned.¹² All of this resulted in a social hierarchy of music societies, which Catherine Ferris describes as follows with regard to Dublin.

8 Ita Beausang, “Dublin Musical Societies 1850–1900,” *Irish Musical Studies* 5, no. 2, eds. Patrick Devine and Harry White (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1995), 175.

9 Gerald Fitz Gibbon, “‘College Choral’, 1837–1987,” *Hermathena*, no. 144 (Summer 1988): 39, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23042010>.

10 Rodmell, “The Society of Antient Music,” 214.

11 Catherine Ferris, “The Use of Newspapers as a Source for Musicological Research: A Case Study of Dublin Musical Life 1840–44” (PhD diss., Maynooth University, 2011), 179–182.

12 *Ibid.*, 89.

*the Hibernian Catch Club, Anacreontic Society and University Choral Society were the domain of the aristocracy; the upper middle classes and professional aristocracy were represented by the Philharmonic Society, Antient Concerts Society, Societa Armonica, University Church Music Society, Metropolitan Choral Society, Amateur Harmonic Society and Dublin Concordant Society; and the lower middle- and working-class societies were the Dublin Sacred Harmonic Society, Dublin Harmonic Society and Tradesmen's Harmonic Society.*¹³

Since the societies were private clubs, members had to pay an annual subscription. At the top end – for societies such as Dublin's "Society of Antient Music" and the "Metropolitan Choral Society" – this could be £1 (according to the British National Archive's currency converter £1 in 1850 is roughly equivalent to £80 today)¹⁴. Membership of the "Dublin Harmonic Society" cost 10s (one half of a pound) while the multi-denominational "Dublin Sacred Harmonic Society" charged its members 5s (one quarter of a pound). Members of the "Metropolitan Choral Society" in Dublin (1841-1847) had to pay no subscription at all; membership there was also not based on being proposed by an existing member. The "New Philharmonic Society" in Dublin (founded in 1872) also didn't charge its members a subscription fee. As the century progressed, more and more music societies catering for different classes, interests and tastes emerged.

Music Societies in Dublin

As the capital and administrative centre of Ireland, Dublin was the largest city on the island. In 1798 its population consisted of 198,000 people¹⁵ while the 1911 census counted 375,000 inhabitants.¹⁶

The *Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland* lists an impressive 85 music societies as being active in Dublin at one point or another during the nine-

13 Ibid., 212.

14 Currency Converter, The National Archives, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/>.

15 Patrick Fagan, "The Population of Dublin in the Eighteenth Century with Particular Reference to the Proportions of Protestants and Catholics," *Eighteenth-Century Ireland / Iris an dá chultúr* 6 (1991): 148, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30070912>.

16 Thomas A. Welton, "Notes on the Census of Ireland, 1911," *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 77, no. 2 (Jan. 1914): 205, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2339803>.

teenth century.¹⁷ However, many of these only lasted for between one and five seasons. Still, the number demonstrates that there was a demand for them and new ones were formed as quickly as old ones vanished. Rodmell tries to explain this fluctuation as follows:

*Part of the problem, it seems, was that many performed the same music and drew their membership and audiences from the same social group, Dublin's Anglican middle and upper classes; to compound this many societies permitted only men to be members.*¹⁸

Meetings of music societies took place on almost every day of the week: the "Anacreontic Society" met on Monday¹⁹, the "University Church Music Society" initially on Monday and later on Wednesday²⁰, the "Antient Music Society" on Thursday²¹ and both the "University of Dublin Choral Society" and the "Amateur Harmonic Society" on Friday²², to name just a few.

Like societies elsewhere in Europe, concerts of the Dublin music societies consisted of a mix of arias, choruses and occasionally some instrumental pieces stemming from many different works – only rarely were complete oratorios, cantatas, operas, symphonies or concertos presented. The "Society of Antient Music", a society dedicated to choral music which played a central part in Dublin's musical life from 1834–1864, provides a good example of this programming strategy. At a charity concert on 23 March 1838 the Society performed 25 pieces from 12 works by seven composers, led by Handel: six numbers from *Judas Maccabaeus*, two from *Jephta*, four from *Acis and Galathea*, the overture of *Esther* (the only instrumental piece which opened the evening) and an arrangement of "Zadok the Priest" on the text of "God Save the Queen". Haydn was represented by two numbers from *The Creation* and four from *The Seasons*. Of the 25 pieces 14 were by Handel and six by Haydn. Marcello, Mozart, Morley, Pepusch and Festa had one piece each in the programme.²³ At another concert on 4 June 1844 the Society presented extracts of Handel's *Jephta*, namely 16 out of the orato-

17 Ita Beausang, "Music Societies (Dublin)," in *The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland*, vol. 2, eds. Harry White and Barra Boydell (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2013), 712–13.

18 Rodmell, "The Society of Antient Music," 212.

19 Ferris, "The Use of Newspapers," 93.

20 Ibid., 173.

21 Ibid., 143.

22 Fitz Gibbon, "College Choral," 41; Ferris, "The Use of Newspapers," 198.

23 Rodmell, "The Society of Antient Music," 215.

rio's 71 musical numbers: six recitatives, three airs, six choruses and one quartet. At concerts in the late 1840s the society employed an orchestra of about 40 players; the Irish premiere of Mendelssohn's *Elijah* in December 1848 was presented by nine soloists, a chorus of 100 singers and a band of 37 players (including 19 strings).²⁴ These examples already indicate the strong role that both Handel and Haydn played in the programming (not just of the "Society of Antient Music"). *The Seasons* appear twelve times in their programmes, although normally just one season was performed in any given concert. However, despite their name this society also presented contemporary music; it particularly became a champion of Mendelssohn. Rodmell outlines that during the second half of its existence "*in terms of 'performance hours' Mendelssohn represented 20–25 per cent of the society's total output.*"²⁵ Between 1838 and 1840 it also ran a composition competition with a prize of ten guineas (a guinea is worth one pound and one shilling). Its first winner was Thomas A. Walmisley (who was Professor of Music in Cambridge). No award was handed out in 1839, while in 1840 Henry J. Gauntlett, an English organist and composer, won.²⁶ In its later years the "Society of Antient Music" started to include more orchestral and chamber music in its programmes; yet this was not unanimously welcomed by its patrons and the press.

Another important contribution of the "Society of Antient Music" was that in 1843 they opened Dublin's first dedicated concert hall, the "Antient Concert Rooms", which could accommodate an audience of 900–1,000 people. It was repeatedly enlarged, had a Telford organ installed in 1847 and dinner facilities added in 1850. Many of the other societies soon rented it for their concerts and also used its rooms for their meetings. The hall was in use until the 1920s when it was converted into a cinema.

European virtuosos would also work with the amateur societies when visiting Ireland. The "Philharmonic Society" welcomed Sigismond Thalberg, Franz Liszt, Anton Rubinstein, Clara Schumann and Charles Hallé to Dublin. The Anacreontic Societies in Dublin and Belfast (both dedicated to instrumental music) brought Friedrich Kalkbrenner to Ireland in 1824, and in 1831 Niccolò Paganini played two concerts in Dublin as part of the "Dublin Grand Musical Festival". That festival also witnessed the Irish premieres of Beethoven's Symphony No. 5, Mozart's *Jupiter* Symphony and Mendels-

24 Ibid., 221.

25 Ibid., 225.

26 Ibid., 225–6.

sohn's overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.²⁷ Virtuosos visiting Ireland usually didn't just play in Dublin; their itinerary would broadly lead them along the island's Eastern and Southern coast, stopping in Belfast, Dublin, Cork and possibly smaller towns along the way or in the vicinity. When Liszt toured Ireland in the winter of 1840/41 he performed in Dublin (six concerts), Cork, Clonmel, Limerick, Kilkenny, Donaghadee and Belfast – always with local music societies (in Dublin separately with both the Anacreontic and the Philharmonic Societies).²⁸

One reason why concerts by individual societies did not offer complete symphonies or large-scale vocal works such as oratorios was probably that they had neither enough high-quality performers nor enough “performing members” altogether to mount such an event successfully. In addition, many musicians were members of several societies:

*The involvement of the same amateur gentlemen and professional musicians in numerous different societies is [...] strikingly evident, and implies that each society fulfilled a particular purpose, despite the superficial similarities between them, particularly in repertoire.*²⁹

If a large-scale performance was staged it usually required many different societies to join forces. Ita Beausang mentions a full performance of *Israel in Egypt* in 1847 “for the relief of the poor of the city” (this was at the height of the famine) for which 400 performers from eleven music societies came together.³⁰

Music Societies in Belfast

Belfast was at the centre of the Northern region of Ireland that was most affected by the industrial revolution. A small market town at the beginning of the nineteenth century, by its end it had become the hub of the world's linen industry, producing both linen itself and also the machinery required to produce it. Since the 1860s it also had a quickly expanding shipbuilding

27 Catherine Ferris, “Dublin Grand Musical Festival, 1831,” *The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland*, vol. 1, eds. Harry White and Barra Boydell (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2013), 324–5.

28 Arthur Beesley, “An Irishman's Diary,” *The Irish Times*, May 31, 1999, <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/an-irishman-s-diary-1.190784>. This tour was commercially unsuccessful and lost over £1,000.

29 Rodmell, “The Society of Antient Music,” 214.

30 Beausang, “Music Societies (Dublin),” 711.

industry: The Harland & Wolff shipyard was at one point the largest one in the world; the ill-fated *Titanic* and her two sister ships were built there (the running gag in Belfast still is “She was fine when she left us”). Consequently few other Irish cities grew as much as Belfast particularly during the second half of the century; its population rose from 35,000 in 1820 to 70,000 in 1840, 110,000 in the mid-1850s and 385,000 in 1911³¹ – in that year Belfast had 11,000 more inhabitants than Dublin. This meant that a number of rich industrialists emerged in the city, some of whom were willing to act as philanthropists and support cultural endeavours.

However, this was not yet the case at the beginning of the century. The first “Belfast Musical Society” had been formed in the 1760s, yet no longer existed by 1800. There were occasional concerts by travelling artists passing through Belfast – for example, in 1813 Edward Bunting (famous for transcribing and thus preserving the music he heard at the Belfast Harp Festival of 1792) organised a series of three sacred and three secular concerts, mainly with visiting performers. In 1814 the “Belfast Anacreontic Society” was founded, yet like similar societies in Dublin its focus was on private meetings rather than public events (between 1820 and 1824, no public concert organised by this society is recorded at all).³² There was also no adequate performance space available, particularly once the city started to grow. Initially meetings of the society took place in the smallish “Exchange Rooms”, in 1829 it moved to an upstairs room in the new building of the Belfast Savings Bank. From the 1820s onwards occasional public concerts took place in a hall in the new “Commercial Buildings” which again soon proved to be too small. (All these names already indicate the importance of commerce and industry for the cultural developments in Belfast, very much unlike in Dublin.) There was also a theatre available since the 1790s that could occasionally be used for concerts. In 1824 Kalkbrenner played there, followed in 1831 by Paganini (who gave three concerts in Belfast), Ole Bull in 1837 (four concerts) and Thalberg in 1837/38 (two concerts).³³ Eventually the “Anacreontic Society” decided that a purpose-built concert hall was required, and so a “Music Hall” seating an audience of 700 was opened in 1840. Liszt played there during the last stop of his Irish tour in January 1841. Just like the Antient Music Rooms in Dublin at the same time, this hall quickly be-

31 Roy Johnston, “Concert Auditoria in Nineteenth-Century Belfast,” in *Music in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* [*Irish Musical Studies* 9], eds. Michael Murphy and Jan Smaczny (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), 245.

32 Ibid., 240.

33 Ibid., 241.

came the centre of musical life and was rented by other societies as well. However, the city kept growing, and the society refused to install an organ (important for the performance of oratorios and other sacred pieces) as this would have reduced the number of seats.

While the “Anacreontic Society” engaged with vocal and instrumental music, a number of choral societies emerged in parallel, yet were promoted from a different direction: “*Choral societies came into being in Belfast because of the desire of the churches to improve their congregational singing.*”³⁴ The “Belfast Choral Society” was established in 1839 and the “Classical Harmonists” in 1851. The latter society proved adept at connecting with industrialists (who soon occupied important positions on its committee) and securing financial support which enabled it to open another concert venue, the “Victoria Hall”, in 1854. It contained an organ so that oratorios could now be performed much more easily – after all, Handel was just as popular in Belfast as he was in Dublin. Yet still the demand for space grew, so that a new, larger hall was eventually built – the Ulster Hall which opened in 1862 and is still in use today. Equipped with a capacity of 2,000 (1,500 in the stalls and 500 in the gallery, with space for 200–250 performers), it was opened with *Messiah* and a concert performance of *Der Freischütz*.³⁵ The growing influence of the financiers made itself felt in the simultaneous sacking of the artistic directors of both the “Anacreontic Society” and the “Classical Harmonists” at this point; the British organist and composer Edmund Thomas Chipp was installed as the new head of both societies instead (if only for three years, until he moved back to England). The large hall was suitable for famous visiting artists, yet local societies struggled to fill it and started fading away – the “Anacreontic Society” ceased to exist in 1866.³⁶ Its place was taken in 1872 by the “Belfast Music Society” which focused on orchestral music. In 1874 this society merged with the singers of the “Classical Harmonists” to form the “Belfast Philharmonic Society” following a trend that Roy Johnston describes as follows.

The mode proved, as elsewhere in Europe, to be the consolidation of concert life in its modern form: a town's concert life having at its

34 Roy Johnston and Martin Dowling, “Belfast,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland*, vol. 1, eds. Harry White and Barra Boydell (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2013), 76.

35 Johnston, “Concert Auditoria in Nineteenth-Century Belfast,” 247.

36 Peter Downey, “Belfast Philharmonic Society,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland*, vol. 1, eds. Harry White and Barra Boydell (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2013), 82.

*apex a single society with its own chorus and orchestra and access to a large modern concert hall.*³⁷

The “Philharmonic Society” initially offered four annual concerts on a subscription basis, taking place on Fridays. With this society’s formation began what Roy Johnston and Declan Plummer call the “philharmonic era” in Belfast’s musical life.³⁸ During these years Belfast also became a regular stop on the circuit of travelling British opera companies (such as the Carl Rosa Company).³⁹ It was now among the 15 largest cities in Britain and Ireland, and its cultural life reflected this position – until the decline of its industries, particularly after the Second World War, also started to affect its abilities to maintain a rich international concert life.

Music Societies in Armagh

Armagh is the smallest of the cities discussed in this essay; the 1821 census counted 8,493 inhabitants – and the number would not have changed much over the course of the century (in 2011 its population was just under 15,000).⁴⁰ It is thus much smaller than Dublin or Belfast, and less cultural and musical activity is to be expected. Its importance stems from the fact that St Patrick is supposed to have built a church there, so that it later became Ireland’s “ecclesiastical capital”. Today it is the seat of both the Catholic and Protestant Primates of All Ireland. Just like in Dublin, the old, medieval cathedral is still being occupied by the Protestants, while the Catholics built a new one once it became possible after the Catholic Emancipation. In Armagh the two cathedrals (both named after St Patrick) now face each other on top of two hills in the middle of the city.

The archives of the Protestant cathedral contain a broad range of musical sources: 429 volumes with some 4,000 pieces of music, including secular as well as sacred works.⁴¹ According to a study by Anne Dempsey the music covers the period from the early seventeenth to the early twentieth

37 Johnston, “Concert Auditoria in Nineteenth-Century Belfast,” 248.

38 Roy Johnston and Declan Plummer, *The Musical Life of Nineteenth-Century Belfast* (London, New York: Routledge, 2016), 261–308.

39 See: Ibid., 309–30.

40 L. A. Clarkson, “Household and Family Structure in Armagh City, 1770,” *Local Population Studies* 20 (1978): 19, http://www.localpopulationstudies.org.uk/PDF/LPS20/LPS20_1978_14-31.pdf.

41 Anne Dempsey, “The Armagh Cathedral Collection in the Fabric of Ireland’s Musical History,” in *Music in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* [*Irish Musical Studies* 9], eds. Michael Murphy and Jan Smaczny (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), 130.

centuries. 70 per cent of the collection consists of a cappella music, the remaining 30 per cent of vocal music with instrumental/orchestral accompaniment and pure instrumental music.⁴² Overall Handel is the composer represented most prominently in the archive, yet five per cent of all pieces are by Mendelssohn and two per cent by Haydn. Of the vocal pieces, 80 per cent are anthems and services. A surprising third of all composers of vocal music is English, and almost half of the vocal pieces archived in the collection are by English composers, most prominently Thomas Attwood, William Boyce, John Goss and Maurice Greene.⁴³ Eight of the composers were organists based in Armagh. The most prominent of these is John Clarke (also known as John Clarke-Whitfield), later professor of music in Cambridge.

The instrumental music in the collection reaches from the early Baroque to the early Romantic age, with composers such as Corelli, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Weber, Rossini and Mendelssohn well represented.⁴⁴ It is much more conservative than the vocal collection, apart from Mendelssohn post-Beethovenian composers are rare – exceptions are the Irish singer and composer William Balfe and Jan Křtitel Václav Kalivoda (often spelled Kalliwoda; he was also popular in Dublin and Belfast). Only two per cent of instrumental music is by English composers. Many of the instrumental pieces are arranged for chamber ensemble; a string quartet plus flute or clarinet is very common. Brass instruments are rarely used; trumpeters, horn players and trombonists may have been in short supply in the small town. Instrumental pieces (except organ music) were not performed in the cathedral, yet the musicians active in the cathedral would also have been involved in secular musical events.

The first regular extra-religious space for the performance of music was the Music Hall on Vicar's Hill, as indicated by an entry in a contemporary minute book:

weekly practices, commonly called concerts, were held in the Music Hall, Vicar's Hill, by members of the Cathedral Choir, under the

42 Slightly confusingly Dempsey calls the first category "vocal" and the second one "instrumental", which would make *Messiah* an instrumental piece. See: Dempsey, "The Armagh Cathedral Collection", 131–40.

43 Ibid., 132.

44 Ibid., 139–40.

*direction of the organist, the late Mr Robert Turle; these concerts, however, were not open to the public.*⁴⁵

Just like in Dublin and Belfast, these “concerts” were only accessible to members. In 1845 an “Armagh Music Society” was founded yet didn’t survive long. The “Cathedral Music Society” (established in 1846) was to operate for about 80 years. In 1878 another “Armagh Music Society” emerged, which changed its name to “Armagh Philharmonic Society” in 1887. To solve continuing financial difficulties subscriptions for the now public concerts were introduced:

*one guinea and upwards annually [for members of the public to subscribe to the concert series], seven shillings and sixpence for performing members and five shillings yearly in advance for non-performing members.*⁴⁶

The “Armagh Philharmonic Society” was finally disbanded in 1917. Apart from these societies there were also an “Armagh Amateur Harmonic Society”, an “Orchestral Society” and a “Cathedral Orchestral Society” at one point or another. Leading members of the clergy often populated the committees of these societies and acted as patrons.⁴⁷

Overall music societies emerged in Armagh a bit later than in Dublin and Belfast yet given its small size there was quite a bit of activity – fuelled (at least initially) mainly by the musical personnel of the Protestant cathedral and sponsored by the clergy.

Music and the Temperance Movement

In the middle of the century musical developments in Ireland were influenced from an unexpected angle: the temperance movement, which was at least temporarily enormously successful, probably more so than in other countries. Temperance movements had first arisen in Great Britain and the United States in the 1820s and 30s, yet in Ireland the idea only took off in a meaningful way in 1838 when Father Theobald Mathew, a Capuchin priest, became President of the Cork Total Abstinence Society. Mathew was a highly charismatic preacher whose influence quickly spread beyond Cork. He spoke to thousands and sometimes tens of thousands of people, convincing many to commit to “the pledge”, the formal promise to abstain

45 Ibid., 142.

46 Ibid., 144.

47 Ibid., 131.

from alcohol for the rest of their lives. It is said that on one occasion he took the pledge from between 120,000 and 150,000 people during a three-day period in Limerick. Over the course of his career as leader of the temperance movement between 1838 and his death in 1856 he administered the pledge to several million people. The highpoint of his successes was reached in 1842/43 while the famine put a temporary end to much of his activities (in those years Mathew began travelling abroad, preaching temperance in Scotland, England and the US). Later attempts to revive the temperance movement in Ireland in the 1870s and 1890s were much less successful.

Yet the temperance movement consisted not just of preaching, it developed an entire infrastructure as Father Mathew and his fellow temperance campaigners realised that adherence to the pledge needed to be monitored, as well as giving people who no longer go to the pub something else to do. This was where music became important. As Maria McHale points out, “[m]usical expression satisfied a number of criteria as it provided suitable recreation in which temperance and religious sentiments could be promulgated.”⁴⁸ The movement created a large number of brass bands that accompanied the singing of hymns during the open-air mass events – at one point there were 33 temperance bands in Cork alone.⁴⁹ Some of these bands still exist today, albeit now detached from their original function.

Brass bands were not for everybody, though, and more emphasis was put on singing as an activity that required less training and less expensive “equipment” in the shape of instruments. In 1842 Mathew invited the renowned German singing teacher Joseph Mainzer to Cork who offered sight-singing classes for large numbers of people. Mainzer – a member of the British “singing-class movement” – had published his instruction manual *Singing for the Masses* in 1841 and now put his method to good use in the service of the teetotallers, stating: “I hope that for the future the motto for your standard will be ‘Music and sobriety, sobriety and music.’”⁵⁰ According to Maria McHale

Mathew was keen that the people adopt the system not only for their own benefit and for the purposes of healthy distraction and amuse-

48 Maria McHale, “Singing and Sobriety: Music and the Temperance Movement,” in *Music in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* [Irish Musical Studies 9], eds. Michael Murphy and Jan Smaczny (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), 178.

49 Gavin Holman, “Thirsty Work – Brass Bands and the Temperance Movement in the 19th Century,” *Humanities Commons* (2018): 2, <http://dx.doi.org/10.17613/bm-fa-3k07>.

50 Mainzer quoted in McHale, “Singing and Sobriety,” 175.

*ment, but also to enhance the temperance processions of which they were so proud.*⁵¹

Soon singing classes were offered all over the country.

The movement also wanted to provide its singers with suitable material to perform. Hence hymns and arrangements of music for the temperance movement were created as well, including the publication of twenty temperance hymns in *The Catholic Choralist* in 1842 “for the use of the choir, drawing room, cloister and cottage. Harmonized and arranged for the voice, band pianoforte and organ.”⁵² However, the *Temperance Melodies for the Teetotallers of Ireland* from 1843 by William McNamara Downes were much more successful (going through three editions in their year of publication alone). Using well-known tunes from Thomas Moore’s *Irish Melodies*, they connected more easily with the people than the hymns in *The Catholic Choralist*, which had adapted melodies by continental composers.

Apart from the free or very cheap singing classes the temperance movement also offered musical instruction of other types. An example of this is the “Drogheda Harp Society” which existed between 1839 and 1845. Unlike the music societies discussed above its function was not making music for the entertainment of its members but rather teaching children the harp in order to keep them away from the booze (and, as a side effect, revive the playing of Ireland’s traditional instrument).

The use of Irish tunes and instruments brought the movement in connection with nationalist sentiments:

*By setting the Temperance movement’s success story to Irish music, the ‘revolution’ took on a nationalist slant. However, the type of nationalism promoted was in accordance with Mathew’s views that it should be patriotic and celebratory in nature, rather than aggressive and political.*⁵³

Still, not all of his followers shared his views, and this made things difficult for the priest: Mathew

frequently and harshly condemned secret societies and deplored efforts to align the crusade with nationalist movements, notably with O’Connell’s repeal campaign. But many of his supporters

51 Ibid., 174.

52 Ibid., 178.

53 Ibid., 184.

*were nationalists and such an alignment did occur, despite his own preferences.*⁵⁴

Soon the movement found itself between the cracks, being criticised by the British political authorities for its alignment with nationalist Irish ideals while also being looked at askance by much of the Catholic hierarchy due to the involvement of Protestants (the earlier movements of the 1820s and 30s had mainly been Protestant affairs) and Father Mathew's tendency to operate in parallel to the Catholic leadership in Ireland.

Despite its relatively brief flourishing, the temperance movement had a deep impact on musical life in Ireland.

Music and the Gaelic Revival Movement

There had been collectors of Irish Music since the late eighteenth century; Edward Bunting, Thomas Moore and George Petrie were prominent among them. Yet most of them were associated with the ruling class – the “Protestant ascendancy” (of the aforementioned three, only Moore was a Catholic). They were interested in a nostalgic, Romantic longing for a lost past represented by this music more than in its utilisation as part of a nationalist agenda. This is what the Gaelic Revival movement would focus on. Emerging in the 1890s, it created a number of institutions and societies that would be important for the further development of music in Ireland. In 1893 the Gaelic League was formed with the main aim to promote the understanding and use of the Irish language (at this point Irish was only spoken in very few remote, rural areas in the West of Ireland anymore). Yet it also championed Irish traditional music, for its first President Douglas Hyde stated that “[i]f Ireland loses her music, she loses what is, after the Gaelic language and literature, her most valuable and most characteristic expression.”⁵⁵ The League's members also recognised that singing songs in Irish would create more interest in the language. In 1897 the “An tOireachtas” (The Assembly) Festival was established, an annual series of events and competitions to celebrate Irish language and culture. From the beginning traditional music was an important part of its proceedings.⁵⁶ In the same year, 1897, the first

54 Elizabeth Malcolm, “The Catholic Church and the Irish Temperance Movement, 1838–1901,” *Irish Historical Studies* 24, no. 89 (May 1982): 5.

55 Adrian Scahill, “Gaelic League,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland*, vol. 1, eds. Harry White and Barra Boydell (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2013), 415.

56 Róisín Nic Dhonncha, “Oireachtas na Gaeilge,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland*, vol. 2, eds. Harry White and Barra Boydell (Dublin: University College Dublin

“Feis Ceoil” (Music Festival) took place under the guidance of Annie Patterson. This annual series of competitions still continues today. Although inspired by the Gaelic Revival movement, its initially 32 (and nowadays ca. 180) different competitions focused mainly on classical music; in 1897 just three of them were dedicated to traditional music. Its categories include individual performers as well as all sorts of ensembles.⁵⁷ In 1904 James Joyce won a Bronze medal for singing at the Feis. The competition’s location initially alternated between Dublin, Belfast and Cork; yet Dublin quickly became its permanent home.⁵⁸

The Gaelic Revival movement influenced the development of music in Ireland directly – through the institutions just mentioned – yet also indirectly in that the existing music societies started to orient themselves towards including more music by Irish composers (sometimes even commissioning pieces), as well as performing more music based on Irish tunes or with Irish subject matters. The period also witnessed an expansion of musical research, particularly aiming to uncover the history of Celtic music and of musicians in Ireland. A first major result of these efforts was William Henry Grattan Flood’s *A History of Irish Music*.⁵⁹ Published in 1905, the book was a landmark in the development of musical research in Ireland.

Conclusion

Music societies played an important part in Ireland’s musical life, possibly more so than in that of many other European regions and countries – particularly given that there were no state-sponsored opera houses or orchestras. Apart from the churches they were pretty much the only providers

Press, 2013), 768.

- 57 Part of the reason the Feis Ceoil had a strong classical orientation was – alongside the advice of Annie Patterson – the influence of Michele Esposito, an Italian pianist, composer and educator who played a dominant role in Dublin’s musical life between 1882 and 1928. He also established the “Dublin Orchestral Society” (active 1899–1914), Dublin’s foremost orchestra in the early twentieth century. See: Philip Shields, “Dublin Orchestral Society,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland*, vol. 1, eds. Harry White and Barra Boydell (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2013), 329–30; Jeremy Dibble, “Michele Esposito,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland*, vol. 1, eds. Harry White and Barra Boydell (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2013), 358–61.
- 58 Karol Mullaney-Dignam and Jimmy O’Brien Moran, “Feis Ceoil,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland*, vol. 1, eds. Harry White and Barra Boydell (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2013), 372–3.
- 59 William Henry Grattan Flood, *A History of Irish Music* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1905).

of musical performances, even though many of them were not accessible to the general public. Our look at the musical activities in an administrative, an industrial and a religious centre revealed that even in smaller towns there were many societies, and that their activities and repertoires in different locations were not too dissimilar. The tastes were generally rather conservative, with Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Mendelssohn and the nowadays largely forgotten Kalivoda highly popular composers. Sacred vocal music by English and Irish organist-composers also formed a prominent part of the repertoire. Specific Irish drivers of musical developments were the temperance movement in the middle third of the nineteenth century and the Gaelic Revival movement at its end. Particularly the latter exerts a strong influence over musical life in Ireland to this day.

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