

Musical Legacies: The Contribution of the Music Association of Ireland to an Irish Musical Infrastructure

TERESA O'DONNELL

Introduction

The Music Association of Ireland (henceforth MAI)¹ was founded in 1948 during a time in Irish history that witnessed the emergence of the country from decades of self-imposed isolation up to the end of World War II, when the process of establishing a modern nation began. In this postcolonial period, progress towards modernization began with the development of more outward-looking economic and social policies. This was facilitated through the activism of private and state-funded cultural initiatives, for example the founding of the Radio Éireann Symphony Orchestra (1948), the Cultural Relations Committee (1949), the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon (1951), Ceol Chumann na nÓg (1951), Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (1951) and the MAI.² It was also marked by the coming to power of the inter-party government of 1948–51, led by John A. Costello, which ended sixteen years of uninterrupted Fianna Fáil rule.³ Terence Brown described this time as ‘a period when the country’s own internal historical life was entering on a crucial phase’ and the MAI was eager to contribute to Ireland’s

¹ See Ian Fox, ‘Music Association of Ireland (MAI)’, in Harry White and Barra Boydell (eds), *The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland* (henceforth *EMIR*) (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2013), 706–7.

² See Richard Kearney, *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, Culture, Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1997) for a detailed discussion on post-nationalist cultural criticism, and Brian Fallon, *An Age of Innocence: Irish Culture 1930–1960* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1998) for a re-evaluation of Irish cultural history of the period.

³ For further information on the inter-party government see Joseph Lee, *Ireland 1912–1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 299–320.

changing identity.⁴ The MAI believed it could wholly represent music's contribution to modern Ireland and could foster and develop art music.

The establishment and early activities of the MAI reacted to the nationalist or cultural mono-centrism which prevailed in post-independent Ireland. In Dublin in the autumn of 1947, a group of three Irish composers, Brian Boydell (1917–2000),⁵ Edgar Deale (1902–99) and Frederick May (1911–85),⁶ and the music critic Michael McMullin⁷ met to discuss what they perceived to be the poor standing of music in Ireland, the music profession and how they might raise the status of music throughout the country. This core quartet was later joined by John Beckett, Brendan Dunne and Olive Smith. They decided to call a meeting of people receptive to their ideas and McMullin circulated a letter to their musical friends seeking their support and financial assistance. Thirty-four people were invited to a meeting on 30 March 1948 at 16A Lincoln Chambers, Dublin (the home of Dorothy Stokes, who would become a member of the MAI's first council), but only sixteen attended.⁸ At this meeting, the 'National Music Association' came into existence and set itself six challenging and diverse aims. It outlined its objectives as follows:

1. to further musical education;
2. to improve conditions for composers and musicians generally;
3. to work for the establishment of a National Concert Hall;
4. to submit recommendations on musical policy to the authorities concerned;
5. to encourage the formation of musical groups, societies and choirs throughout the country;
6. to organise popular lectures, concerts and recitals and to awaken a musical consciousness in the nation.⁹

Despite the disappointing attendance, another meeting was held on 13 April 1948, at the Presbyterian Association's rooms, 16 St Stephen's Green. Having changed its name to the 'Music Association of Ireland', the meeting immediately set about

⁴ Terence Brown, *Ireland, A Social and Cultural History 1922–2002* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), 180.

⁵ Professor of Music at Trinity College Dublin (1962–82).

⁶ Music Director at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin (1936–48).

⁷ Michael McMullin (1916–2010), music critic for *The Irish Times*. He is described as 'an outspoken virulent critic of the official musical establishment' on p. 68 of Brian Boydell's unpublished autobiography of 1994, *The Roaring Forties and Thereabouts* (kindly shown to me by Barra Boydell).

⁸ A report of the meeting appeared in *The Irish Times* on 21 May 1948.

⁹ Quoted from the 'Memorandum of Association' (1948), preserved in the MAI archive, shelfmark Acc 6000, held in the National Library of Ireland, Dublin (IRL–Dn), Box 7.

Musical Legacies: The Contribution of the MAI to an Irish Musical Infrastructure

drawing up a constitution and electing a council and honorary officers. The first council included academics, educationalists, composers and performers: Boydell (chairman), McMullin (honorary secretary), Smith (honorary treasurer), Deale, James Delany, Dunne, Aloys Fleischmann, Joseph Grocock, Anthony Hughes, Madeleine Larchet, Nancie Lord, May, Terry O'Connor, Joseph O'Neill, Dorothy Stokes and William F. Watt. During the association's first year of existence, membership totalled eighty-three. The council moved quickly to prepare a substantial policy document, *Music and the Nation: A Memorandum*, based on its six objectives (listed above) to ameliorate the position of classical music in Ireland. The memorandum was compiled by McMullin and it was envisaged that it would 'awaken people to the outstanding deficiencies' in musical life in Ireland.¹⁰ Completed as a typescript by 14 June 1949 (it remained unpublished), it consists of four parts:

| | |
|----------|--|
| Part I | Introduction |
| Part II | Music in General Education |
| | (i) The Function of Music in Education |
| | (ii) Musical Education in Schools |
| | (iii) Teachers in Music |
| | (iv) Adult Musical Education |
| Part III | The Music Profession |
| | (i) Criticism and the Importance of Standard |
| | (ii) Broadcasting |
| | (iii) The Orchestra |
| | (iv) A National Concert Hall |
| | (v) The Training of Musicians |
| | (vi) Composers |
| Part IV | Conclusion |

Though many of the issues raised were prefigured in the writings of Robert Prescott Stewart,¹¹ Annie Patterson,¹² John F. Larchet,¹³ Aloys Fleischmann,¹⁴ P. J. Little¹⁵ and

¹⁰ MAI, 1948 Honorary Secretary's Report, IRL-Dn, Acc 6000), Box 7. The memorandum is discussed in Richard Pine, *Music and Broadcasting in Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), 128–31, extensively in Karol Mullaney-Dignam, *State, Nation and Music in Independent Ireland, 1922–1951* (PhD diss., National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 2008), and briefly mentioned in Aloys Fleischmann, *Music in Ireland, A Symposium* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1952).

¹¹ Robert Prescott Stewart (1825–94), organist, conductor, composer and Professor of Music at Dublin University.

¹² Annie Patterson (1868–1934), composer, organist, conductor and founder of the Feis Ceoil (1897).

¹³ John F. Larchet (1884–1967), composer, music director at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, and Professor of Music at University College Dublin.

others, the memorandum represents one of the most significant contributions to the assessment of music and music-making in Ireland prior to Fleischmann's *Music in Ireland: A Symposium* (1952). Members were kept informed with updates on its progress through the MAI's monthly bulletin, which first appeared in November 1948.¹⁶

The MAI submitted certain sections of the memorandum to the government—part III sections (iii) and (v), 'The Orchestra' and 'The Training of Musicians', to the Department of Posts and Telegraphs by July 1948, and part II, 'Music in General Education', to the Department of Education in December 1949—but the documents were not received with the expected enthusiasm. There are a number of possible reasons for its poor reception by government officials. Firstly, though music had been introduced as a curriculum subject for secondary schools in 1879, it was not a priority for the Free State's Department of Education, other than through the singing of songs which could be used to integrate with other curricular areas, notably the Irish language.¹⁷ In its educational policy, the MAI emphasized the need to develop musical literacy and to nurture music appreciation as a means of educating audiences from primary-school level upwards. In doing so, the association hoped to establish Ireland as a formidable musical nation (in the European art-music tradition). The perceived weakness of this approach was its overt derogation of Ireland's indigenous folk-music tradition; the memorandum made little reference to, and limited acknowledgement of, any responsibility towards this tradition, which had been so prized among Irish nationalists since the late nineteenth century. Secondly, from its inception, the MAI questioned the

¹⁴ Aloys Fleischmann (1910–92), composer, musicologist and Professor of Music at University College Cork.

¹⁵ Patrick J. Little (1884–1963), Fianna Fáil TD (1927–54), Minister for Posts and Telegraphs (1939–48) and first chairman of the Arts Council (1951–56).

¹⁶ Early MAI bulletins informed members of upcoming concerts (particularly those featuring young Irish composers), festivals and competitions abroad, People's College lectures (which began in October 1948), correspondence with international bodies and concert dates, and included reviews of concerts. Council member Anthony Hughes was its first editor and he continued in this role for many years. IRL–Dn, Acc 6000, Box 34 contains all of the bulletins. The level of detail in the bulletins is impressive and members were constantly kept abreast of developments in the association at all levels. This was replaced by *Counterpoint* in 1969 and *Soundpost* in 1981. MAI members who did not wish to subscribe to *Soundpost* were kept updated on musical events with a *Diary of Events* and an *MAI News Sheet*. The MAI also published *MAI News* (from January 1984) and *MAI Diary* (from October 1992).

¹⁷ For a detailed discussion on the place of music in the education system in Ireland from the end of the nineteenth century and from the foundation of the Irish Free State, see Marie McCarthy, *Passing It On: The Transmission of Music in Irish Culture* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999).

musical qualifications of officials in the Department of Posts and Telegraphs to make musical appointments and decisions;¹⁸ it challenged the competence of Radio Éireann's Director of Music and proposed that the Director should not be allowed to exercise 'absolute dictatorial power in musical matters' as this often resulted in a 'narrow individual policy' likely to arrest musical progress.¹⁹ Proposals such as this were ill-advised, particularly as the MAI had aspirations to become a potential advisory board to the government and Radio Éireann (RÉ) on musical matters.²⁰ Secondly, RÉ was the 'principal source of patronage, employment and performance, and was subsequently party to practically every significant musical enterprise in the country'.²¹ Although the MAI's council was a formidable group, persons who undoubtedly had more musical experience than those in RÉ to advise on musical matters, the officials in RÉ and the government departments did not share the same view. Richard Pine writes that 'within R(T)É the MAI was commonly regarded as having been founded by a clique of largely Anglo-Irish citizens who saw "classical" music as their personal prerogative, were unconvinced of the propriety of native government, and of RÉ in particular as the custodian of the new symphony orchestra'.²²

Early initiatives

The first major project undertaken by the MAI (with Smith as its main organizer) was an ambitious and successful Bach Bicentenary festival of concerts and lectures in 1950.²³ The series, which took place between September and November 1950, was a

¹⁸ MAI, *Music and the Nation: A Memorandum*, part III, (ii) 'Broadcasting', IRL-Dn, Acc 6000, Box 7.

¹⁹ Letter from MAI secretary to James Everett, Minister for Posts and Telegraphs on 28 April 1948, IRL-Dn, Acc 6000, Box 7. This letter was also sent to the Ministers for Education, External Affairs and Social Welfare.

²⁰ Radio Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ) was formerly Radio Éireann from 1938 to 1966.

²¹ Joseph J. Ryan, *Nationalism and Music in Ireland* (PhD diss., National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 1991), 396.

²² Pine, 127.

²³ The first concert of the Bach Bicentenary was held on 29 September 1950 at the Metropolitan Hall, Abbey Street, Dublin, and featured Bach's Mass in B Minor performed by the Radio Éireann Symphony Orchestra (RÉSO), conducted by Otto Matzerath with Cór Radio Éireann and the Culwick Choral Society. This was followed by a second concert on 20 October which also featured the RÉSO joined by the Clontarf Choral Society. A number of ancillary Bach-related concerts and lectures took place at various venues in Dublin: Grocock spoke about the Mass in B Minor on 25 September and Boydell discussed Bach's choral and orchestral works on 9 October. On 8 November, F. C. J. Swanton presented an organ recital at Christ Church, Leeson Park, and the series closed with a joint organ

turning point as it generated publicity and encouraged the fledgling association to plan and organize similar large-scale projects. The MAI had now established itself as a credible musical organization and its new-found confidence marked the beginning of an exciting period in its history. Following the success of the Bach concerts, the MAI felt that there was a reasonable demand for a national concert hall in Dublin and believed that there was a general mood amongst music societies and music lovers such that a suitable performance space might soon become a reality.²⁴ The MAI suggested that the lack of such a hall in Ireland testified 'to a regrettably primitive state of affairs in certain respects, and gives an impression of a lack of esteem for cultural/spiritual values'.²⁵ Initially some members, such as Lord Moyne, felt that a new concert hall was not necessary and suggested converting the Round Room of the Rotunda Hospital, Dublin. The MAI emphasized the necessity to establish a committed core audience; as its numbers grew, so too would the demand for a larger venue.²⁶ In February 1951 the MAI formed a Concert Hall Committee to commence negotiations with government officials, representatives of Dublin Corporation and philanthropic individuals with a view to obtaining a suitable site for the hall. In December 1952 the organization was incorporated as a limited company, Concert and Assembly Hall Ltd. It envisaged a primary concert hall with a capacity of 1,500–2,000, suitable for concerts, *feiseanna* (competitions), public meetings, civic functions and conferences. Preliminary plans also included a number of ancillary rooms and a smaller hall which could be hired out as a rehearsal space or to facilitate recitals and meetings. A number of fundraising initiatives, including concerts and gramophone recitals were held countrywide.

This period, the early 1950s, experienced a phase of lively debate on the future of music in Ireland, particularly in *The Bell*.²⁷ Two articles from early 1952²⁸ deal specifically with the provision of a concert hall for Dublin with the contributors (Delany, Deale, James Chapman, Walter Beckett and Fleischmann) expressing their visions of

recital by Grocock and W. J. Watson at the Centenary Church, St Stephen's Green, on 15 November. The concert programmes are preserved in IRL-Dn, Acc 6000, Box 11.

²⁴ MAI, 1950 Honorary Secretary's Report, IRL-Dn, Acc 6000, Box 7.

²⁵ MAI, *Music and the Nation: A Memorandum*, part III, (iv), 'National Concert Hall', 1, 2.

²⁶ Letter from Lord Moyne, Knockmaroon, Castleknock, Dublin, to Olive Smith on 31 October 1950, IRL-Dn, Acc 6000, Box 11.

²⁷ *The Bell* (1940–54) was a literary and intellectual journal founded by Seán Ó Faoláin and Peadar O'Donnell, edited by Ó Faoláin (1940–46) and O'Donnell thereafter.

²⁸ Patrick Delany, 'A Concert Hall for Dublin?', *The Bell*, 17/10 (January 1952), 5–10, and 'A Concert Hall for Dublin?', *The Bell*, 17/11 (February 1952), 16–23, which consists of individual responses by Edgar M. Deale (16–19), James Chapman (19–20), Walter Beckett (21) and Aloys Fleischmann (21–3).

such a project. Although Delany, Deale and Fleischmann were on the first council of the MAI, their vision was not unanimous; Fleischman questioned Delany's assertion that a concert hall should have to justify its existence, arguing that a regular supply of concerts would create a regular demand for concerts and that such a hall would pay for itself in a generation.²⁹ He agreed with Delany (though not with Deale or Chapman) in claiming that a hall should not be a multi-purpose hall; rather, it should be devoted exclusively to music. Interestingly, none of the contributors recommended the adaptation of an existing hall or theatre, though Beckett opined that a theatre designed suitably could also be used as a concert hall.³⁰

The quest for a national concert hall consumed the energies of MAI committees for over three decades, reflecting political, social and cultural changes in Irish society and, ultimately, the path towards Ireland's development as a modern musical nation. A government statement in January 1964 brought to a close the Concert and Assembly Hall company's long search for a suitable site and its associated fundraising efforts. An Taoiseach, Seán T. Lemass, announced that the government proposed to build a national concert hall dedicated to the memory of the late President John F. Kennedy and that 'the entire costs of the project' would be borne by the state and not by public subscription.³¹ This was regarded as a significant development and the MAI and Concert and Assembly Hall Ltd. passed on, to those concerned, research and data relating to the concert-hall project that they had accumulated over fourteen years. However, it was not until University College Dublin's Examination Hall in Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin, was renovated, refurbished and formally opened on 9 September 1981 that the MAI witnessed the conclusion of the project initiated by its council three decades before. The chief agitator, Olive Smith, concluded that 'while it was a great pity that the Kennedy Hall wasn't built, the Terrace Hall, small though it may be in comparison, is certainly a step in the right direction'.³²

One can understand the MAI objective of providing a concert hall, but Dublin did have a number of concert halls at this time which, if adequately developed, might have suited the purposes of a national concert hall. If the various MAI committees had followed Lord Moyne's approach from the beginning—i.e., refurbishing a site, building up a dedicated audience and creating a demand for a purpose-built space—then a hall,

²⁹ Fleischmann, as note 28.

³⁰ Beckett, as note 28, 21.

³¹ Statement issued by the Government Information Bureau of the Department of the Taoiseach on 17 January 1964, IRL-Dn, Acc 6000, Box 18.

³² Mary Raftery, 'The New Concert Hall', *Soundpost*, 1 (April/May 1981), 11.

such as the current National Concert Hall, but with adequate assembly and ancillary rooms, might well have been achieved early in the campaign. Prior to the government's announcement of the Kennedy Memorial Hall, it was clear that such a space was unachievable and unaffordable. Accordingly, the MAI and the Concert and Assembly Hall company should have altered its objectives, but instead it pursued a campaign that seems to have garnered only limited support.

Though much of the early focus of the MAI agenda centred on Dublin and its environs, the association was also involved in countrywide activities. In March 1954 it organized two memorial concerts to celebrate the life and works of Arnold Bax. Pianist Charles Lynch and the New London String Quartet gave the first Irish performance of Bax's Piano Quintet in G minor on 30 March 1954 at the Octagonal Room, Civic Museum, Dublin, and at the Aula Maxima, University College Cork, on the following evening. The quartet returned in October of that year to perform at various venues throughout Ireland, enabling people from provincial towns and cities to experience live performances by international artists in their own locality. It was at these concerts that Smith met and befriended the members of the New London String Quartet. In order to keep costs to a minimum, hospitality and transportation were provided by members of the MAI.³³ Douglas Cameron, the quartet's cellist, related his experiences of the provincial music clubs in the UK which provided regional areas with performances by professional musicians and suggested that the MAI might establish a similar scheme in Ireland.³⁴ Due to the success of its first Irish tour, the quartet returned on 20 October 1955 for another series of concerts around Ireland which brought 'a string quartet to Mullingar, Birr, and Tralee for the first time'.³⁵ This tour paved the way for many such tours, involving Irish as well as international artists such as Benjamin Britten, Peter Pears and Victoria de los Angeles, through to the 1980s.³⁶

Towards an infrastructure for Irish composition

Considering the membership of the MAI's first council and its second objective, to 'improve conditions for composers and musicians generally', it is not surprising that,

³³ Olive Smith, 'Sir Arnold Bax Memorial Concert 1954', *Counterpoint* (May 1979), 5.

³⁴ Olive Smith, 'The Beginnings of Country Tours', *Counterpoint* (June–August 1979), 5.

³⁵ *The Irish Times*, 19 October 1955. In late October and early November the New London String Quartet performed in Mullingar, Sligo, Birr, Galway, Limerick, Tralee, Waterford, Kilkenny, Carlow and Wexford.

³⁶ For further information on the MAI's country tours, see Teresa O'Donnell, *The Music Association of Ireland: A Cultural and Social History* (PhD diss., St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, 2012), 134–7.

from the outset, the standing of composers and the performance and publication of their works would figure prominently in the association's activities. MAI composers sought an alternative means of expression to the prevailing nationalist *ethnie* and attempted to move away from cultural purism to cultural pluralism, from national to international. The separation of Irishness and Irish culture from 'otherness' (while still identifying with the other) was a challenging task, especially for a group such as the MAI, whose main composers did not always agree on the level of separation required. The association did not have a sufficient number of members composing competently in a modern style to establish a successful separatist movement, but it did have a clear vision of its objectives and, through the cosmopolitan influences and philosophies of composers such as Fleischmann and Boydell, the MAI was well positioned to engage with this artistic challenge.³⁷

The activities of the MAI in the late 1940s and early 1950s centred around addressing issues such as the lack of performance opportunities for contemporary composers, access to publishing firms, the encouragement and training of young composers in modern techniques and establishing connections with international associations. In its efforts to establish itself as the Irish representative body for composers and to break what Fleischmann called Ireland's 'disastrous isolation in music'³⁸ the MAI, in 1948, contacted two UK-based composers' organizations, the International Society for Contemporary Music and the Committee for the Promotion of New Music. Despite initial enthusiastic responses, the MAI's limited resources and the absence of state-funded bodies, such as the Arts Council (1951), hampered any serious attempt to engage fully with these organizations. However, the formation of the Cultural Relations Committee (CRC)³⁹ in January 1949 provided the MAI with its first opportunity to promote and publish the works of contemporary Irish composers through a joint copying scheme with the CRC. Though the scheme was not completed until 1953, un-

³⁷ Although May was a founder member of the MAI and 'the pioneer of Irish musical modernism by being the first composer to evade the "folk music trap"', his contribution to the MAI was negligible and does not merit discussion here. Philip Graydon, 'Modernism in Ireland and its Cultural Context in the Music of Frederick May, Brian Boydell and Aloys Fleischmann', in Gareth Cox and Axel Klein (eds), *Irish Music in the Twentieth Century*, Irish Musical Studies 7 (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), 56–79: 57.

³⁸ Quoted by Axel Klein in 'Brian Boydell: Of Man and Music', in Gareth Cox, Axel Klein and Michael Taylor (eds), *The Life and Music of Brian Boydell* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2004), 1–24: 9.

³⁹ The Cultural Relations Committee was a non-statutory agency under the auspices of the Department of External Affairs, established in January 1949. See Brian P. Kennedy, *Dreams and Responsibilities: The State and the Arts in Independent Ireland* (Dublin: Arts Council, 1998), 60–3, 66 and 68.

doubtedly the most significant achievement of the scheme was that it laid the groundwork for the establishment of the Composers' Group by the MAI.⁴⁰

The MAI's Composers' Group was founded in 1953, with Boydell as chairman and A. J. Potter as chief organizer. From the outset, the emphasis of the group was on the performance and recording of recent works by Irish composers. Initial efforts focused on the organization of a series of four lunchtime concerts in November and December 1954 held at the Graduates' Memorial Building, Trinity College, Dublin; in general, the series was deemed a success and critics applauded the endeavour and the compositions performed and, in some cases, premiered.⁴¹ The group also organized lectures for its members, including an illustrated lecture given by Henry Cowell on 'Contemporary Music in the USA', which took place on 5 September 1956 at the Royal Irish Academy of Music.⁴² Moreover, it was invited by the Decca label (New York) to suggest works for the first recording of orchestral music written by Irish composers, *New Music from Old Erin*, volumes 1 and 2 (1956).

Despite commendable efforts by such groups, Denis Donoghue painted a depressing picture of the future of music in Ireland in 1955 when writing that 'it is quite possible that Irish music may have *no* future existence' and asserted that he saw 'no grounds for optimism: quite the contrary'.⁴³ More recently, however, Axel Klein has contradicted Donoghue's view of the 'artistic poverty in Irish music' and suggested that the apparent paucity of creativity was, in fact, caused by a lack of awareness of compositions.⁴⁴ Klein contends that Irish composers 'often withdrew so far into their studios that the public became completely unaware of their existence'.⁴⁵ Compositions by Geoffrey Molyneux Palmer, Ina Boyle, Mary Dickenson-Auner and May were either unknown or rarely performed in Ireland at this time and this fact further supports Klein's thesis. The MAI and the Composers' Group placed the plight and promotion of the composer in Ireland at the centre of their early activities and attempted to challenge misconceptions, such as those articulated by Donoghue, which

⁴⁰ MAI, Summary of MAI/CRC Joint Copying Scheme, IRL-Dn, Acc 6000, Box 7.

⁴¹ 'Impressive Contributions to Recitals', *The Irish Times*, 27 November 1954.

⁴² Lecture flyer in IRL-Dn, Acc 6000, Box 7.

⁴³ Denis Donoghue, 'The Future of Irish Music', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review of Letters, Philosophy and Science*, 44 (Spring 1955), 109–14: 109.

⁴⁴ Axel Klein, 'Root and Directions in Twentieth-Century Irish Art Music', in Gareth Cox and Axel Klein (eds), *Irish Music in the Twentieth Century*, Irish Musical Studies 7 (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), 168–82: 171.

⁴⁵ Klein (2003), 170.

'say more about *our* failure to recognise, appreciate and promote what music there actually is'.⁴⁶

The Composers' Group's most successful endeavour was the Dublin Festival of Twentieth-Century Music (1969–86),⁴⁷ the genesis of which arose out of a suggestion by Gerard Schürmann to Gerard Victory, who approached the MAI to undertake its administration.⁴⁸ The aim of the festival was 'to present a broad spectrum of solo, chamber and orchestral music of the twentieth century' with particular attention given to works by Irish composers.⁴⁹ Leading Irish composers threw their weight behind the venture: Seóirse Bodley⁵⁰ was the Festival Director, Boydell arranged for the use of the Examination Hall at Trinity as a regular venue and Victory⁵¹ made the Radio Éireann Symphony Orchestra available for festival performances. The first festival took place on 5–10 January 1969; performances were well attended and, over the years, the festival committee successfully engaged internationally acclaimed artists and composers such as Witold Lutosławski (1978), Andrzej Panufnik (1978), Peter Maxwell Davies and The Fires of London (1978), Olivier Messiaen (1976), Elliott Carter (1980) and Karlheinz Stockhausen (1982). Critical reviews were undertaken by William Mann of *The Times* and Felix Aprahamian of *The Sunday Times*. The presence of such eminent musicians, composers and critics highlighted the importance of the festival and its recognition abroad. The festival was important for a number of reasons: it 'did much to foster an awareness and appreciation of contemporary music which had been largely missing from concert programmes',⁵² it was 'unique among festivals of its kind for its exclusive attention to twentieth-century work, and was responsible for the

⁴⁶ Klein (2003), 171.

⁴⁷ After the 1972 Festival, it was decided to hold a biennial festival (the next one took place in 1974). MAI, 'Report of the Organising Committee of the Twentieth-Century Music Festival', in *1972 MAI Annual Report*, 6, in IRL-Dn, Acc 6000, Box 38. Due to funding difficulties surrounding the 1986 Festival, the MAI did not contribute to the event and RTÉ organized its own festival of modern music in 1986. See Michael Dervan, 'Dublin Festival of Twentieth-Century Music', in *EMIR*, 323–4, and Axel Klein, *Die Musik Irlands im 20. Jahrhundert* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1996), 108–12.

⁴⁸ 'Art and Studies', *The Irish Times*, 20 January 1975. The MAI later provided administration for the Dublin International Organ Festival and Festival in Great Irish Houses (later known as Music in Great Irish Houses Festival).

⁴⁹ Dublin Festival of Twentieth Century Music (1969), programme.

⁵⁰ Seóirse Bodley (b. 1933) became chairman of the Dublin Festival of Twentieth-Century Music committee in 1974.

⁵¹ Gerard Victory (1921–95), Director of Music at RTÉ (1967–82).

⁵² Pine, 314.

increased toleration of, and interest in, contemporary music among Irish audiences'.⁵³ Some months after the first festival in 1969, Deale commented that 'the composers featured at the festival would have brought terror to the audiences of sixty years ago'⁵⁴ and he celebrated the significance of such a festival in Ireland. Most importantly, the festival emphasized the fact that the MAI was at the cutting edge of this significant event and other major developments in contemporary music in Ireland at this time.

Focus on youth: Coming Out recitals, the Schools' Recitals Scheme, Ógra Ceoil and the Irish Youth Orchestra

On 15 January 1957, the MAI sponsored the first in a series of 'Coming Out' recitals, which provided young promising musicians with a platform to launch their careers.⁵⁵ The Wigmore Hall's 'Artists' First' series in London, for gifted young British musicians, was used as a model for the MAI's recital series. Prospective performers were not required to audition but were encouraged to apply to a special subcommittee (set up in 1960), which, in turn, made recommendations to the MAI council. For many years P. J. Carroll's of Dundalk (a well known cigarette manufacturing company) sponsored the 'Coming Out' recitals, presenting some recitals in association with the MAI and others under the firm's own aegis. Artists such as Bernadette Greevy, Gerard Gillen, John O'Connor, Thérèse Timoney and Malcolm Proud used this platform to launch their careers and the MAI archive contains many letters of appreciation from musicians who took part in this scheme.⁵⁶ By the 1980s, the music scene in Ireland had changed considerably since the early years of the 'Coming Out' recitals. There were more opportunities to perform, more venues available and the possibility of funding from the Arts Council. In effect, the MAI 'Coming Out' recitals had achieved their objective and were, one could argue, no longer necessary by the mid 1980s.⁵⁷

One of the most enduring dimensions of the MAI's contribution to music education in Ireland was in the promotion of access to, and participation in, music by young people. A number of factors facilitated the success of these initiatives from the 1960s onwards, namely, educational reform under the principles of 'access, availability,

⁵³ Pine, 313–14.

⁵⁴ Edgar M. Deale, 'After the Festival', *Counterpoint* (April 1969), 5.

⁵⁵ Violinist Mary O'Brien was the first young musician to take part in the 'Coming Out' series and she was accompanied by pianist Kitty O'Callaghan. See 'Violin and Piano Recital', *The Irish Times*, 16 January, 1957.

⁵⁶ IRL-Dn, Acc 6000, Box 14.

⁵⁷ See Michael Dervan, 'Launching Pad', *Soundpost*, 12 (February/March 1983), 12.

exposure and opportunity', and a gradual shift from the purely educational value of the arts to the contribution which they could make to the economy.⁵⁸ The MAI's establishment of the Schools' Recitals Scheme (SRS) and Ógra Ceoil in 1967 marked a significant step in bringing music to a wider youth audience; the association approached the Gulbenkian Foundation in early 1967 to fund both schemes. It was envisaged that the SRS would provide regular concerts in schools across Ireland and Ógra Ceoil (the Irish equivalent of *Jeunesses Musicales*) would encourage young people to attend concerts at reduced rates. The SRS engaged many leading contemporary Irish instrumentalists and singers to perform at schools throughout the country, for example, John O'Connor, Veronica McSwiney, Anthony Byrne, Ellen Cranitch, Gráinne Yeats, Gillian Smith, Alan Smale and many others, some of whom had participated in the MAI's 'Coming Out' recitals. The scheme, which continued until 2004, did not always run smoothly, and strikes, budget cuts, a lack of suitable school halls, a dearth of suitable pianos and fluctuations in grants from the Arts Council and the Department of Education⁵⁹ over the years often hindered performances.

Building an educated young musical audience was a primary objective of organizations such as Ógra Ceoil (whose membership totalled 800 in its first year), but many groups and individuals who patronized the arts believed that, in addition to assuming the role of enthusiastic audiences, young people would also benefit from performing in amateur ensembles. In this pursuit, from 1958 to 1968, the Dorothy Mayer Foundation donated £7,000 to purchase instruments for schools and to establish small school orchestras.⁶⁰ The Irish Youth Orchestra (IYO), which was also funded by the Mayer Foundation, initially drew a number of its members from these newly-established orchestras as well as those already established in secondary schools and schools of music.⁶¹ The IYO was the brainchild of Gillian Smith and she regarded its success as her most significant achievement.⁶² In July 1970, Smith, through Ógra Ceoil, organized the first summer residential course for musicians aged between 14 and 20 years at Our

⁵⁸ Denis O'Sullivan, *Cultural Politics and Irish Education since the 1950s: Policy Paradigms and Power* (Dublin: Irish Public Administration, 2006), 247.

⁵⁹ The Department of Education, from 1997 the Department of Education and Science, was renamed the Department of Education and Skills in 2010.

⁶⁰ James Blanc, 'Lady Mayer: An Appreciation', *Counterpoint* (May 1974), 16. The Dorothy Mayer Foundation's donation complemented a tradition of secondary school orchestras dating back to the late nineteenth century. Statistics from the Department of Education reveal that twenty-five secondary school orchestras were examined by the Department in 1925 and forty-five in 1949.

⁶¹ '1970 Irish Youth Orchestra Application Form', IRL-Dn, Acc 6000, Box 24.

⁶² Gillian Smith, interviewed by the author, Dublin, 29 March 2010.

Lady's School, Rathnew, Co. Wicklow. Hugh Maguire⁶³ was appointed conductor and musical director and he guided sixty-three musicians through works such as Berlioz's *Carnival Roman*, Sibelius's *Karelia Suite* and Shostakovich's Symphony No. 1.⁶⁴ The formation of the IYO was undoubtedly influenced by the visit of the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain to Cork and Dublin in April 1958.⁶⁵ This trip, at the invitation of the MAI, made a lasting impression on Smith and many others throughout the country; Michael O'Callaghan founded the Cork Youth Orchestra in April 1958 after the British youth orchestra's visit.

The difficult transition from voluntary to professional

The MAI's initiatives, in particular those that led to the Schools' Recitals Scheme and the Irish Youth Orchestra, thrived in a climate which experienced pioneering developments in the arts and increased educational opportunities and leisure time. The period was marked by a gradual realization, by successive governments, of the value and vital service of the arts to society similar to other essential services such as 'health, education and social welfare'.⁶⁶ This slow, but gradual, realization of the value of the arts to Irish society, particularly to education and via education to the economy, was acknowledged through various initiatives, principally the development of national arts structures. The restructuring of the Arts Council in 1973 and, significantly, the introduction of the second Arts Act (1973) contributed to the creation of a positive arts climate in Ireland. In 1975, the appointment of the Arts Council's first full-time director, Colm Ó Briain, the publication of *Provision for the Arts* (1976) and *The Place of*

⁶³ Hugh Maguire (1926–2013), violinist with the Allegri Quartet (MAI Country Tour in 1964), leader of the London Symphony Orchestra and the BBC Symphony Orchestra and violin tutor with the National Youth of Orchestra of Great Britain.

⁶⁴ Grocock was the organizer of the IYO. '1970 Irish Youth Orchestra Application Form'.

⁶⁵ The National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain comprised 140 members aged between 13 and 19 years, with two members from Northern Ireland and three from the Republic. The orchestra held its residential course at the Metropole Hotel, Cork, and performed at the City Hall, Cork, on 18 April and at the Theatre Royal, Dublin, on 19 April. The concert in Cork was sold out and an informal children's concert and open rehearsal was held that morning. However, the concert in Dublin was not well attended. Ruth Railton, *Daring to Excel: The Story of the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1992), 273–4.

⁶⁶ Marie Bourke, 'Museum Learning Comes of Age in Ireland', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review of Letters, Philosophy and Science*, 91/363 (Autumn 2002), 239–51: 239.

Musical Legacies: The Contribution of the MAI to an Irish Musical Infrastructure

the Arts in Irish Education (1979)⁶⁷ provided further evidence of this positive shift in attitude towards increased arts activity and the professionalization of the sector. Resulting from this sanguinity, the Arts Council encouraged and enabled the MAI to employ its first full-time Music Organiser, P. J. Power, in September 1978. In so doing, the Arts Council hoped that the appointment would be 'the first step towards providing a full range of professional services to concert promoting groups, which will hopefully result in larger audiences and greater co-ordination of events between the various music clubs and societies'.⁶⁸ This was a clear signal of the Arts Council's support of the MAI at the end of the 1970s. Further, in its Annual Reports of 1978 and 1979, the Arts Council praised the role of the MAI in the musical life of Ireland and acknowledged the dedication and commitment of volunteers and amateur organizations to classical music.⁶⁹ It recognized the over-reliance on volunteer organizations, admitting that there 'is a danger that this voluntary commitment will be taken for granted when it comes to assessing what realistic financial provision is necessary for concerts and recitals throughout the country. In particular, a greater degree of full-time professional administration is required if the burden on voluntary workers is to be eased'.⁷⁰

Accordingly, the professionalization of arts organizations became a key objective of the Arts Council from the end of the 1970s. But although the MAI was well positioned to benefit from this, it failed to do so because it regarded its existing structures as having been sufficiently successful over the years and perceived no good reason to change them. It is ironic that, during a period when the state was beginning to take seriously its obligations towards the arts, the MAI remained stoically trapped in an earlier reality when it was the most important voluntary administrative and organizing association for music in the country. It was because of this that the MAI found it difficult to reconcile professionalization and volunteerism; in particular, its failure to follow Arts Council directives on restructuring its voluntary council resulted in the association becoming embroiled in conflicts which ultimately resulted in funding cuts as well as the loss of influence over the fortunes of art music in Ireland.

⁶⁷ James M. Richards (ed.), *Provision for the Arts* (Dublin: The Arts Council and The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1976); Ciarán Benson (ed.), *The Place of the Arts in Irish Education* (Dublin: The Arts Council, 1979).

⁶⁸ Arts Council, *1978 Arts Council Annual Report* (Dublin: The Arts Council, 1979), 23. P. J. Power was replaced by Eoin Garrett in July 1979. Garrett was editor of *Counterpoint* (1978–80), Assistant Secretary (1977–78) and Music Organiser (1979–85).

⁶⁹ Pat O'Kelly was chairman of the MAI at this time and Joan Cowle was Honorary Secretary.

⁷⁰ Arts Council, *1978 Arts Council Annual Report*, 41.

From the late 1980s the SRS was the only area of MAI activity funded by the Arts Council. Consequently, the association was effectively removed from concert-promoting activity and entered exclusively into the area of providing music recitals and workshops for schools. During this period, the MAI attempted to define a new role for itself and expressed its vision for the future in three main policy documents, namely, *The Music Association of Ireland: A Role for the 1990s* (1989), *Three Year Plan for the Arts in Ireland* (1994) and *Development Plan of the Music Association of Ireland* (1994).⁷¹ By this stage, however, it had achieved its principal objectives and many of its original roles were assumed by other Arts Council-funded bodies, such as Music Network (from 1986) and the Contemporary Music Centre (from 1985). The SRS and country tours should have followed the path of the Irish Youth Orchestra in establishing their own independent structures. Throughout the 1990s, the two main activities of the MAI were the SRS and administration of a FÁS Community Employment Scheme (1992–2003); it also organized the European Union Youth Orchestra auditions and published the *MAI Music Diary* (from October 1992). With its staff and activities seriously curtailed,⁷² the future of the MAI was bleak; a growing number of new state-funded organizations, undertaking functions that were previously the preserve of the MAI, indicated a dangerous turn of events for the future of the association. However, 1994 proved to be a significant year holding out some hope of revival. In that year, FÁS provided the association with up to fifteen part-time trainees under a full-time supervisor as part of its Community Employment Scheme. This offered the association the opportunity to reassess its position, augment its activities, diversify and find new direction. For the first time in its history, the MAI had found a reliable source of funding other than the Arts Council. The dramatic increase in the number of FÁS employees injected the MAI with a new buoyancy.

In 1997 the MAI launched a new education plan entitled *Music in Time*, a series, for primary and secondary school students, devised by the MAI's Music Education Officer, Caroline Wynne. The series followed international trends, encompassing a wide range of musical activities and genres, and proved to be a successful venture. The following year, 1998, marked the MAI's fiftieth anniversary, an occasion celebrated with a Gala Concert at the National Concert Hall on 19 October. Though 1998 was a year of celebration for the MAI, there was a considerable reduction in its Arts Council grant, resulting in a seriously curtailed SRS. In making the reduction, the Arts Council

⁷¹ These documents, not formally published, were typescripts prepared for MAI use and sent to the Arts Council with funding applications.

⁷² In the early 1990s, MAI employed one full-time member of staff, Eilish MacGabhann, who was supported by two part-time FÁS employees, Michael Hanson and Greta Morris.

highlighted the fact that many other organizations were delivering music-education initiatives in schools at this time, which suggested that the MAI was being squeezed out. Nonetheless, grants were secured from the Department of Education from 2000 to 2003 which allowed the SRS to continue its work until 2004 when it was discontinued because of a lack of funding. The FÁS Community Employment Scheme was also discontinued in 2003, when many FÁS programmes were reduced nationally. Without Arts Council, Department of Education and FÁS funding, the MAI was financially dependent on its members, despite little or no return for their subscriptions. Eventually, the MAI was dissolved in 2007 and key members of the association decided that its interests would be better served under a new title, the 'Friends of Classical Music'. The association's days of pioneering advocacy and lobbying were long over but its ideals would be continued.

Assessments

In drawing conclusions about the MAI, it is interesting to consider assessments provided by two of its members. Grocock, in his survey of music in Ireland in 1961, commented that the MAI had 'already made steady progress in carrying out all its aims and objects, most of which by their very nature are long-term projects'.⁷³ Several decades later, in 1998, Boydell reflected on the MAI's pioneering achievements: 'There is no doubt that the most significant achievements in the development and organization of musical endeavour during the second half of this century have been due to the MAI[,] a movement which focused positive endeavour to create so many of those organizations which are responsible today for such a vibrant musical scene in the country'.⁷⁴ Although both of these assessments were written by long-standing members, they do provide an appropriate preamble to the following assessment of its six original objectives of 1948.

(1) To further musical education.

Apart from the weekly music-appreciation lectures at the Peoples' College, Dublin, from September 1948, the MAI undertook other successful educational initiatives, namely, the 'Coming Out' or début recitals (1957), SRS (1967), Ógra Ceoil (1967) and the IYO (1972). All of these were successful initiatives and pre-dated current music education activities organized by private and state-funded organizations. The IYO (though independent of the MAI) continues to offer high-calibre orchestral training to talented young instrumentalists.

⁷³ Grocock, 84.

⁷⁴ Brian Boydell, *MAI 50th Anniversary Celebration Programme*, IRL-Dn, Acc 6000, Box 29, 8.

(2) To improve conditions for composers and musicians generally.

The presence of eminent composers such as Boydell and Fleischmann on the MAI's first council ensured that the standing of composers and the performance and publication of their works would figure prominently on the MAI agenda. The MAI Composers' Group laid the foundations for organizations such as the Association of Irish Composers, the Irish Composers' Collective, Concorde and, more importantly, the Contemporary Music Centre, which is dedicated solely to the promotion of Irish contemporary music. The latter part of this objective was largely pursued by the MAI through its engagement of concert musicians and in providing a platform for young musicians. Musicians were represented by the Federation of Musicians and other unions and, consequently, the MAI objective was essentially one of limited support.

(3) To work for the establishment of a national concert hall.

The major disappointment for the MAI was its unsuccessful efforts to establish a concert and assembly hall in Dublin. From correspondence in the MAI archive, it appears that the MAI believed that the public and/or a benefactor would fund a new hall, along the lines of the Carnegie libraries. However, the MAI's resolute determination to create a new space rather than renovate or adapt an existing building did not aid its cause. This uncompromising attitude attracted the ire of many would-be supporters and may well have delayed the delivery of the project considerably. The eventual realization of the National Concert Hall project in 1981, in the shape of a renovated campus of University College Dublin at Earlsfort Terrace, represented a major part of the MAI's original vision.

(4) To submit recommendations on musical policy to the authorities concerned.

The MAI's aspiration to become a potential music advisory board to the government and Radio Éireann severely hampered the acceptance of its recommendations on music policy. Although the membership of the MAI's council was formidable, with undoubtedly more musical expertise than RÉ to advise on musical matters, the officials in RÉ and government departments did not share its views. The MAI's recommendations in its memorandum *Music and the Nation* (1949) were regarded as being utopian, radical and 'beyond hope of realisation'.⁷⁵ After the publication of the memorandum and the subsequent debate on the future of music in Ireland in the early 1950s, the MAI was not as vociferous in debating policy issues. From the mid 1980s, it was too preoccupied with its financial difficulties to engage seriously with policy issues; in

⁷⁵ MAI, 1948 MAI Honorary Secretary's Report, IRL-Dn, Acc 6000, Box 7, 3.

the 1990s and beyond, it no longer commanded the respect or influence of the leading arts organizations.

(5) To encourage the formation of musical groups, societies and choirs throughout the country.

The MAI's vision of becoming an umbrella group for amateur and professional music societies, choirs and other music organizations throughout the country was not realized. The MAI was mainly Dublin-based and, for the most part, it attracted a 'select' upper- and middle-class membership. It failed to make an impact on Irish society more broadly, unlike organizations such as the Gaelic League, the Irish Country-women's Association, the Credit Union and the Irish Farmers' Association, whose broad appeal attracted members from different social and cultural backgrounds throughout the country. It should be noted, however, that subsequent efforts to create an umbrella group for music societies in Ireland have been similarly unsuccessful and, for that reason, one might question the viability of the concept. The strength of a local musical society is derived from within the community it serves rather than from outside agencies.

6. To organize popular lectures, concerts and recitals and to awaken a musical consciousness in the nation.

The MAI organized many successful concerts, recitals, tours and a limited number of lectures in Dublin and regional venues, particularly in the first thirty-five years of its existence. Financed mainly by the Arts Council, the MAI continued this promotional role until Music Network, also funded by the Arts Council, began organizing professional concert tours. In its later years, the MAI struggled to host even minor concerts in Dublin. The latter part of this objective, 'to awaken a musical consciousness in the nation', reveals the MAI's narrowly defined view of a musical consciousness and is characteristic of the association's early portrayal of Ireland and the musical needs of its people as being neglected. It was only in its later years that the MAI understood the need to embrace a broader definition of music. By then it had lost the confidence of its funding agency.

Conclusion

The MAI's achievement is notable and deserves to be remembered. The long-term nature of a number of its projects dictated that all six objectives could not be achieved by one voluntary organization. Some sixty years later, many of these objectives are only now being realized through professional, government-funded agencies. The evidence of the MAI archive shows that the MAI played a valuable role in developing music and music education in Ireland. The association's weakness lay in the fact that it was unable to keep abreast of national arts policy in the early 1980s. It was unable (or

unwilling) to make the transition from a voluntary organization to a professional one; it did not restructure its council or establish independent bodies for certain activities, as advised by the Arts Council, and instead relied for its favourable reception and funding on its past successes. When the Arts Council reduced its funding from the mid 1980s, the MAI did not source alternative independent funding. Ironically, the MAI went into decline at a time when the arts experienced unprecedented support and growth in Ireland. As Pine noted, the

1980s and 90s were decades of considerable change internationally, as all levels and sectors of society—politicians, civil servants, arts administrators, sociologists, social workers, community groups and the citizens in the streets—moved towards a new understanding of the role and status of culture in their lives. The Victorian paternalism of the concept of 'leisure' had given way, in the wake of the second world war, to a new kind of paternalism, with the state as provider of facilities and opportunities for its citizens.⁷⁶

For the MAI, the vitality and innovation of the early years of its existence had dissipated by the 1980s, particularly after the departure of figures such as Olive Smith in the mid 1970s. Despite efforts to follow Arts Council recommendations in the early 1980s, the level of debt incurred through various initiatives, such as the SRS, *Soundpost* magazine and the Dublin Twentieth-Century Music Festival, had grown substantially; most importantly, the association's relationship with the Arts Council had weakened considerably on that account. However, notwithstanding the manner of its demise, the MAI's contribution to music in Ireland has been significant and manifold and it enjoyed an important role in music advocacy in the state. During a period when government funding of the arts was limited, the MAI filled an important niche, provided a valuable musical service and acted as a voice for classical music, particularly in Dublin. While it may not have directly produced the National Concert Hall, Music Network or the Contemporary Music Centre, it did succeed in creating a climate for the establishment of such organizations and this, more than any other factor, is the MAI's enduring legacy.

Teresa O'Donnell

St. Patrick's College, Dublin City University

⁷⁶ Pine, 525.