

HARRY WHITE AND BARRA BOYDELL (EDS), *THE ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF MUSIC IN IRELAND*, 2 vols (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2013). ISBN 978-1-906359-78-2, 608pp+8 plates (vol. 1), 544pp+8 plates (vol. 2). €100/£85.

It's hard to tell in these post-theoretical days whether we still live in the 'postmodern conditions' in which reference books were such problematic and disrespected scholarly projects. As Don Randel memorably observed, just having finished revising the *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 'most readers do not turn to a dictionary to witness the free play of the signifier'.¹ Encyclopaedias have been 'opening', to use Italo Calvino's term; 'encyclopedia ... etymologically implies an attempt to exhaust knowledge of the world by enclosing it in a circle. But today we can no longer think in terms of a totality that is not potential, conjectural, and manifold'.² And Calvino's observation is apparently confirmed now by *Wikipedia's* overwhelming presence and its description of itself as a continually changing knowledge compendium to which anyone can contribute. 'Every day, hundreds of thousands of visitors from around the world collectively make tens of thousands of edits and create thousands of new articles to augment the knowledge held by the *Wikipedia* encyclopedia.'³ Open, indeed.

So perhaps we have come through the period when 'positivist' projects like reference works were greeted with automatic scorn (Randel offers a heartfelt description of this experience); nonetheless our era doesn't embrace them with much warmth, even though we know we need them. Which brings me to *The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland*.

Is Ireland the only country that has a musical instrument for its national symbol? In his article on the subject (one section of the entry HARP, IRISH; i: 464–7), Barra Boydell observes that the harp has been used to represent Ireland at least since the thirteenth century—on flags, coats of arms, coinage and currency—and that the likes of Vincenzo Galilei recognized it as such in a 1581 comment (i: 466).⁴ It makes a memorable statement, and it is certainly consonant with the popular view of the Irish as especially musical people. So in many ways it is surprising that, as far as I can tell, *The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland*—nicknamed *EMIR* (with its fortuitous mythic echo of Emer, Cú Chulainn's wife)—is the first of its kind in modern times.⁵ Its arrival was heralded

¹ Don M. Randel, 'Defining Music', *Notes*, 43/4 (1987), 752.

² Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, trans. Patrick Creagh (London: Penguin, 2002), 116.

³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About>.

⁴ See also Boydell's entry STAMPS AND CURRENCY (ii: 954–5).

⁵ Indeed, it is only the second encyclopaedia whose purview is the music of one nation. The first, which the editors acknowledged in the Foreword (i: xxiii) provided a model for *EMIR*, was the

by the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins, who reiterated the point: ‘*The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland* is both a celebration of the artistic empathy for which we, as a nation, are renowned and an affirmation of the great wealth of musical talent that has always existed in this country.’⁶

Its precise title signals an exceptionally wide-angle view prompted by a unique mission: not only to account for musical history and experience in the nation known as Ireland but also to account for what is by now an enormous and globally loved musical tradition (and marketing category), ‘Irish music’, and a fairly recent high visibility in rock music. Everything else can threaten to be overwhelmed by, as Harry White suggests in his introduction, ‘U2, The Chieftains or *Riverdance*’ (i: xxv), and the *Encyclopaedia* aims to rebalance the scales. In the real world, of course, the two aspects continually intermingle, but the coexistence of both—or multiple—realities makes the *Encyclopaedia* unusually rich and comprehensive. Indeed, it seems to have taken as its mission to find every mention of Irish music, even including fictional ones like Roddy Doyle’s 1987 novel *The Commitments*.

White’s substantial introduction, on behalf of the general editors, gives an interesting and thoughtful account of the project’s genesis and goals. He addresses my opening question from a different angle, focusing on the colossal impact *The New Grove* had on the practice of musicology, and on the discipline’s continuing debates about ‘positivism’ and information retrieval; and he too comments on ‘the gap between the lustre and prestige of Ireland’s commercial and traditional music and the country’s nevertheless sketchy sense of its own musical history’ (xxv). The sense we get is the wish to create a monument that at the same time tries to correct some of the mistakes of traditional monumental reference projects.

The *Encyclopaedia*, two handsome volumes in a slipcase, is entirely catholic as regards classical, popular and traditional musics, just as its mission statement promises. Roughly 230 authors contributed articles, whose total reach encompasses many categories from musical styles and forms to instruments, organizations and institutions, ensembles, places, research categories and people; the latter, over 1200 of them, reflecting an effort to be somewhat less composer-centric than some musical reference works have been, also include performers, patrons, publishers, collectors, scholars and instrument makers—among others. There are also entries for Irish writers who have contributed in some way to musical life: Swift, who monitored music as Dean of St

Encyclopedia of Music in Canada, edited by Helmut Kallmann, Gilles Potvin and Kenneth Winters (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1981).

⁶ His remarks on the occasion of the launch are at www.ucdpress.ie/display.asp?isbn=9781906359782&.

Patrick's Cathedral and may have known Carolan; Joyce, of whom Axel Klein says, 'in all his literary works his experience of Ireland through the agency of music is central' (i: 548); Wilde, whose works inspired composers from Richard Strauss to Noël Coward and Lowell Lieberman; Nahum Tate, memorable for his collaborations with Purcell; Synge and Yeats, whose works themselves betray musical characteristics and interests. The two volumes are fully indexed, with listings that reach into individual entries.

Of special interest, and perhaps especially indicative of the project's central preoccupations, is the composite article on IRELAND: IDEAS AND INFLUENCES IN MUSIC ABROAD (i: 523–6), written by Klein. He proceeds from traditional music to the legacy of Irish composers, then to external influences on them and also the reverse: the impact of Irish art and literature on European and American musical production. This major piece is further extended, and nuanced, by several more that turn the lens on the underlying picture of Ireland's music. PREHISTORIC IRELAND, MUSIC IN (Simon O'Dwyer; ii: 860–1) provides a fascinating picture of the archaeological record. His focus on surviving musical instruments allows him to speculate on the nature of music and its role in early life in the island. Finally, an array of differently tinged articles on traditional music (including aesthetics, performance contexts, revivals and transmission) add further rich detail and shades of meaning (ii: 994–1006).

And then there's CELTIC MUSIC (i: 185–6), a woefully familiar marketing category despite the fact that there haven't been any Celts since the Middle Ages at the latest. Martin Stokes, the author of this article, discusses the influence of romanticism, various national separatist movements and 'the North American heritage industry' in keeping the notion alive. Beyond all these accounts of the Irish musical heritage, careful perusal of the volumes will reveal even more, including for instance TELEVISION: TRADITIONAL MUSIC (ii: 977–9) by Adrian Scahill.

The role of the Irish language in a project like this is complex and very particular: unlike, say, a putative French or Chinese counterpart, this encyclopaedia obviously needed to be published in English rather than in the national language. But, of course, that is not to say that Irish disappears as a presence and an editorial consideration. On the contrary, the language not only names musical instruments, forms and genres, and innumerable musical institutions and ensembles; it also affects the spelling of personal names. Some names appear in the Irish spelling, and some in the English—Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh or Gerald O'Daly?—and readers need to be able to find them. Irish names like 'Sean' or 'Grainne' may be spelled with or without their *fada* accents, according to personal usage. All this requires exceptionally meticulous editing, and equally precise cross-referencing, preceded by thoughtful judgments as to which term should serve as the primary headword: 'Sean O'Boyle' is referred to SEÁN Ó BAOILL (ii: 740), but 'caoineadh' is referred to the English KEENING (i: 556–7) and 'uilleann pipes' to

BAGPIPES (i: 43–5). The clear assumption here is the perfectly reasonable one that most users of the *Encyclopaedia* will not be Irish speakers.

The inclusion of national headwords provides the opportunity to begin comparison of diasporic musical cultures, for instance in the United States, Canada, England and Australia, as local homes and performance sites for Irish traditional music. AMERICA, IRISH TRADITIONAL MUSIC (i: 14–21), by Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, goes well beyond the familiar strong Irish presence in urban centres like Boston, New York and Chicago, stressing the ways in which Irish immigration, and thus musical influence, followed American economic development from the beginning, from Irish regiments in the armies of New France to the California gold rush and beyond. Along with accounts of the music's popularity from the songs of Tin Pan Alley to the folk revival of the 1960s, there is a sly reminder of the Irish-Americans Billy 'the Kid' Bonney, Butch Cassidy and Jesse James, whose exploits supplied endless material for American folk culture, including songs.

There was also reverse influence, as American-made recordings and eventually print collections made their way back home for extensive use by Irish musicians. Gradually, the popularity of the music can be seen to outlive Irish-American communities themselves; a number of performance schools now train young people with no ethnic connection to Ireland at all. But the author has some sharp words for the overweening influence of 'the entertainment Goliath of America' (i: 20) and also for the somewhat grotesque enormous festivals and gatherings where Irish-Americans 'flaunt their sentimental nostalgia for the Old Country' (i: 19).

Somewhat less substantial articles on AUSTRALIA (by Helen O'Shea; i: 41–2), CANADA: IRISH TRADITIONAL MUSIC (by Liz Doherty; i: 152–4) and ENGLAND, TRADITIONAL MUSIC IN (by Simon Keegan-Phipps; i: 354–6) provide interesting comparisons. Nuanced differences among them, of course driven by the circumstances of Irish emigration to each country, have to do with the degree to which Irish traditional music has blended with indigenous musics or those of other immigrant groups, attitudes towards folk music in general or towards some mystic notion of 'Celtic' culture, and perhaps the varying ways in which a cultural 'melting pot' was experienced or advocated.

The *Encyclopaedia* mentions a number of familiar figures whose connections to Ireland are pretty marginal, like Amy Beach with her 'Gaelic' Symphony or Hector Berlioz with his 'Mélodies irlandaises' (not to mention Harriet Smithson). But what about actual Irish composers? Do they fare better, or differently, here than in a standard musical reference? Investigating a favourite of my own, Turlough Carolan (Toirdhealbhach Ó Cearbhalláin), I was interested to discover that the *Grove Music Online* entry was written by Gráinne Yeats, surely an unimpeachable authority, although

she seems to have more faith in his celebrated interest in Italian baroque style than does Sandra Joyce, the author of *EMIR*'s article (i: 162–4).

Risking an enquiry at odds with *EMIR*'s determination to avoid composer-centric emphasis, as a traditional musicologist I was still curious to know what an Irish composer already well known to the discipline gains by being represented in a specifically Irish encyclopaedia. I found a mixed situation. In the case of MICHAEL BALFE, the primary difference seems to be a significantly more detailed works list in *EMIR* (i: 45–9) than the one given in *Grove Music Online*. The essays on JOHN FIELD are substantially similar. In *Grove Music Online* Robin Langley provides an especially extensive and detailed discussion of the works; there is somewhat more current bibliography in *EMIR* (by Una Hunt and Julian Horton; i: 378–81). Jeremy Dibble is the author of entries on CHARLES VILLIERS STANFORD (ii: 955–8) in both sources, and differences between them are not major. What about entries that might be prominent in a general encyclopaedia of music? Do we learn anything special about them in their Irish context? Musicologists might be amused to see that for once BEETHOVEN is afforded only a brief article (by David Cooper; i: 74) about his arrangements of traditional melodies commissioned by George Thomson.

Finally, let's investigate the coverage of Ireland's best-known cameo appearance in the standard musicological world, the Dublin premiere of *Messiah*. *EMIR* provides rich information. HANDEL's visit in 1741–42 (as described in detail by Boydell; i: 459) was preceded by some years of great popularity of his music, and *Messiah* premiered to a capacity crowd. In the *Encyclopaedia's* entry on MESSIAH (ii: 665) Lisa Parker describes the very early establishment of a tradition of performing it annually in Dublin. As might be expected, DUBLIN itself rates an extensive article by Boydell and Scahill (i: 317–22), who remark on its eighteenth-century golden age as a prominent European cultural centre before the Act of Union subordinated it to London. A performance of *Acis and Galatea* in 1733 initiated a period of great popularity for Handel, and the rapid development of both concert life and performance venues made the city a natural site for *Messiah's* first performance. Barbara Strahan's entry on JONATHAN SWIFT (ii: 972–3) describes his fractious relationship to the outside activities of his cathedral singers, but he nonetheless did allow them to participate in the premiere of *Messiah*. Finally, a manuscript page of the 'Hallelujah chorus' is included among the illustrations. I wouldn't be surprised to discover even more references to the historic event, had I been able to imagine where else to look for them.

There are some entries that may surprise, being special to Irish circumstances. No other nation is likely to find tourism a significant topic for coverage in a music encyclopaedia, but as that article's author, Moya Kneafsey, remarks, 'traditional music is regarded as a major signifier of the living culture of the "real" Ireland that so many

tourists crave' (ii: 993)—in a nutshell, the situation of the entire *EMIR* project. In the same vein, the article *IDENTITY, MUSICAL* (by John O'Flynn; i: 515–17) addresses general anthropological and ontological questions raised by the topic but also specifies that 'the idea of national identity and music is attributed special consideration within the context of music and Ireland' (i: 516). I found especially intriguing Ann Buckley's brief entry on Irish *HIGH CROSSES* as organological sources (i: 486–7).

I have not recognized any particular absences or notable gaps in the *Encyclopaedia*, though with so many entries that would be a serendipitous matter at best. I confess to some surprise at not finding Irish county names as headwords, since counties play such a central role in the definition of style traditions and general markers of identity. (Throughout the two volumes, though, county names do appear frequently in these roles.)

Each of the two volumes includes a handsome glossy section of illustrations at the centre. There are some thirty-five altogether, including works of art, musical manuscripts and printed matter like programmes, advertisements and photographs of past and current performing groups; there are no further small illustrations within the text entries.

I have been unable to discover whether the press has any plans for an online presence; I've found no mention of one, despite the massive efforts in that area currently taken for granted by other publishers of major reference works. As a team of reference-work editors has recently observed, 'With so much information available online, the idea of periodically updating hard-copy encyclopaedias is losing much of its appeal, as information quickly becomes outdated and the cost to the publisher is often prohibitive'.⁷ While I admire and applaud the editors' aim not to privilege the music of print culture—richly exemplified by the list of topics—and to seek emancipation from 'concepts of the musical work' (xxx) in favour of portraying musical experience, I fear that exactly these properties of *EMIR* will be lost if only the print version remains to us over the long term. On the one hand, the project is a significant monument, and it's clear why its editors and contributors want it to be memorialized in hard covers. On the other, that version misses an important opportunity for users to see and especially to *hear* all those non-print musical styles and performances, the sounds of unfamiliar instruments, and so forth: *SEAN-NÓS SINGING* (ii: 923–5), the aforementioned *KEENING*, the rhythms of a *PLANXTY* (ii: 842) or *STRATHSPEY* (ii: 964–5), or for that matter the award-winning band *AFRO-CELT SOUND SYSTEM* (i: 7). It's un-

⁷ Jeffrey Ian Ross and Frank Shanty, 'Editing Encyclopedias for Fun and Aggravation', *Publishing Research Quarterly*, 25/3 (2009), 159–69: 169.

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necessary to belabour the point; all this is by now well understood. Perhaps the underlying question here is what audience is anticipated for the *Encyclopaedia*; an online version could substantially enlarge that audience, so one must hope that such a version is contemplated at some point.

The introduction closes with an *envoi* from the editors: *Go mbaine an léitheoir mórán suilt agus tairbhe as a bhfuil sna himleabhair seo!* (i: xxxii)—May the reader derive much pleasure and profit from what is in these volumes!

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