

Jennifer O'Connor-Madsen, Laura Watson and Ita Beausang, *Women and Music in Ireland* (2022).

JENNIFER O'CONNOR-MADSEN, LAURA WATSON AND ITA BEAUSANG (ED.), *WOMEN AND MUSIC IN IRELAND*, Irish Musical Studies, 13 (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2022), ISBN: 9781783277551, 270pp, £80 (hardcover)

*Women and Music in Ireland* is the thirteenth volume of *Irish Musical Studies* to be published, marking the beginning of a new series. It is a most substantial achievement by its editors Jennifer O'Connor-Madsen, Laura Watson and Ita Beausang, each a distinguished musicologist in her own right. The authors comprise a range of researchers from Ireland, the USA, Austria, Germany, and the UK. This volume of fifteen essays is a wide-ranging collection of mostly musicological research, and one practice-based chapter focused on the contribution, role and legacy of women active in music in Ireland. Their work includes composition, performance, recording, and pedagogy, along with musicology, collection, cultural activism, and publication. Collectively, the research presented situates the writing in contemporary feminist theory, and thus enriches our understanding of Irish music and music in Ireland. As such it is a welcome, necessary and timely addition to the *Irish Musical Studies* series.

The book is divided into four parts: I. Establishing a Place for Women Musicians in Irish Society of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries; II. Women and Practice in Irish Traditional Music; III. Gaps and Gender Politics in the History of Twentieth-Century Women Composers and Performers; and IV. Situating Discourses of Women, Gender and Music in the Twenty-First Century. The volume paints a picture of pioneering women whose contributions are only now being recognised, documented and made known. The contribution of women to music in Ireland has been substantially and consistently omitted in musicology, even up to recently; in light of the research presented here, this can no longer be overlooked, ignored or at best, classed as 'of its time'.

#### **Part I: Establishing a Place for Women Musicians in Irish Society of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries**

In the opening chapter, 'Daughters of Hibernia: Seen and Not Heard?' Ita Beausang traces the progress of including women in a range of musical organisations in Ireland, from 1757 to contemporary examples today. For example, the Musical Academy founded in 1757 was the first to admit women members but without granting them voting rights. The overview provided by Beausang is far-reaching in its scope and provides a fascinating insight into the patchy inclusion and more frequent exclusion of women in musical life in Ireland across three centuries. Like several other contributors to this volume, Beausang cites the severe impact of the Irish state's marriage ban until

1973, which prevented women from working in any state employment after marriage. She notes the resulting unevenness in the presence of women in broadcasting, third level education, leadership, and representation as composers, while acknowledging the progress achieved thus far.

In the second chapter, 'No Accomplishment So Great for a Lady: Women and Music in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Elite Irish Household' by Karol Mullaney-Dignam depicts the role of music in the lives of women from a wealthier background. Mullaney-Dignam reminds us that historical records of the purchase of published collections of music and manuscript books in such households as Glin Castle, Co. Limerick provide a valuable source of information about women's musical activity: since they were not involved in business, politics, or inheriting property, there were far fewer women in public records. The author promotes the necessity of curating historical musical materials and items to enhance our understanding of cultural values relating to women.

Co-editor of the volume, Jennifer O'Connor-Madsen elucidates the development of women musicians in nineteenth-century Dublin. She places this in the context of recent progression in the growth of feminist musicology in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries, a development which is overdue. She notes that by 1900 some 48% of Dublin's private music teachers were women; and at the Royal Irish Academy of Music in Dublin, professor of piano Fanny Robinson, was its first female member of staff. O'Connor-Madsen highlights significant musical pioneers in pedagogy, composition, performance and cultural activism: examples include Annie Patterson, the first woman to receive a doctorate in music on these islands, and Edith Oldham who with Annie Patterson, did much to establish the Feis Ceoil. O'Connor-Madsen posits that women gained a level of equality in music, since it was a profession in which it was possible to earn the same salary as a male colleague. She also notes the championing of women's work by women, and the evident gender bias in the writing of histories.

In her chapter about the Glover Sisters, Mary-Louise O'Donnell chronicles the interesting musical careers in the nineteenth century of Erminia, Lina and Emilie Glover from Dublin. This story's significance lies partly in the equal encouragement and opportunity they received from their father in relation to their brothers. All three Glover daughters made careers in music: Lina authored a vocal tutor published both in Dublin and London, Emilie became an orchestral principal harpist, and Erminia was a pianist, composer and pedal harpist, who studied with John Thomas.

## Part II: Women and Practice in Irish Traditional Music

'The Daghdha, the Minstrel Boy and Convent Schools: Reflections on Gender and the Harp in Ireland' is an exploration by Helen Lawlor of the shifting gender associations with the harp in ancient Irish mythology to the present day. She traces harp playing by men in mythology through to the later role of Edward Bunting in maintaining continuity of the harping tradition, noting Bunting's mention of women learning the harp. Lawlor presents a useful contextualisation of the decline of Irish harp playing amid the changing tastes of the 1800s, when the harp had become a symbol for romanticism and Irishness. A popular instrument for the drawing room, it was furthered as a suitable instrument for young women, and here Lawlor notes the musical visionary leaders in Ireland's convent schools. Drawing attention to the continuing gender imbalance in Irish harping, she also highlights the opportunity to 'reintegrate women into the canon of artistic activists, teachers, and culture-bearers in traditional music scholarship' (85).

In his chapter, 'No Longer Second Fiddle: Due Recognition for Josephine Keegan' Daithí Kearney acknowledges the pressing need to make the presence, contribution, achievements and influence of women in Irish traditional music visible. He records the omission of women in many twentieth-century influential texts about traditional Irish music. He describes the socio-cultural context in Ireland's traditional music scene as one in which it was made difficult for women to gain equal entry (for example to pubs), and access to which depended on being someone's wife, girlfriend or daughter. This article is contextualised in current gender-musicology, citing among others the work of Tes Slominski, with whose discourse there are parallels in Part IV of this book. Kearney documents in detail the distinguished career and achievements of Scottish-born fiddler, pianist and composer Josephine Keegan (b1939). She was a prolific recording artist, composer and publisher of tune collections, in addition to performing internationally across the USA and Canada. This chapter is a most welcome addition to the recognition she is rightly being awarded over the last two decades.

Teresa O'Donnell selects the legacy of three harpists to feature in her discussion, 'Ireland's Female Harping Triumvirate: The Legacy of Sheila Larchet Cuthbert (b1923), Mercedes Garvey (1925–2013) and Gráinne Yeats (1925–2013).' Tracing their careers as performers, teachers and publishers, she documents their unique and valuable contributions to furthering the Irish harp in the twentieth century. These three were distinguished from their harpist peers by their cultural activism in the harp society, Cairde na Cruite (Friends of the Harp). O'Donnell gives an account of the provenance of Larchet Cuthbert's seminal *The Irish Harp Book* (1975) through the collective work of Cairde na Cruite. It is always difficult in research to include a wider selection of material, and in this respect the author mentions the unique and significant

contributions of Sr Eugene McCabe and Nancy Calthorpe, whose work merits research in its own right.

### **Part III: Gaps and Gender Politics in the History of Twentieth-Century Women Composers and Performers**

In 'A Daughter of Music: Alicia Adélaïde Needham's Anglo-Irish Life and Music' Axel Klein examines the autobiographical manuscript of her life. Born in 1863, composer Alicia Needham was a household name in these islands between 1890 and 1920. In 1906 she was made the first president of the National Eisteddfod of Wales, and was the first woman to conduct at the Royal Albert Hall. Klein provides a clear overview of her autobiography in a table of summary points, noting omissions and inconsistencies with contemporary sources.

Margarethe Engelhardt-Krajanek provides riveting insight into the eventful life and successful career of violinist and composer Mary Dickenson-Auner (1880-1965), who enjoyed significant success as an international concert artist. Despite being overlooked since her death in 1965, her substantial output of large- and small-scale works is now housed at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna. This chapter concludes with a most useful and complete index of Dickenson-Auner's works.

Ruth Stanley, in her chapter about the pianist and composer Joan Trimble (1915-2000), contextualises this composer/performer's work sociologically and culturally in a time of continuing discrimination against women. Despite Trimble's rigorous musical education and prestigious composition awards, press attention for her television opera *Blind Raftery* (1957) belittled her musical credentials by its focus on her domestic duties as a housewife and mother. Trimble was an active member of the Society of Women Musicians, an organisation formed in reaction to discrimination by the Society of British Composers who excluded women as members. The SWM campaigned for women examiners in the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, which was eventually brought about in 1956. Stanley shows how this exclusion added to the economic effects of gender discrimination over a longer period of time.

In 'Rhoda Coghill and the Gender Politics of Piano Performance', Laura Watson gives an account of the life and work of Rhoda Coghill in the contexts both of twentieth century Ireland, and of international attitudes towards women being pianists and/or accompanists. Coghill enjoyed major success as a solo concert pianist, an achievement often later overlooked. As staff accompanist at Radio Éireann, she was expected to assist in an educational role, linking the feminine with the task of nurturing. The author Watson helpfully provides a table of Coghill's concerto performances between 1941 and 1949 when she gave twelve performances of eight concerti. In spite of this, she was

omitted from Charles Lynch's chapter, 'The Concert Pianist' in the 1952 publication *Music in Ireland* (edited by Aloys Fleischmann). Watson undertakes the crucial task of appraising received narratives about performance, and ably illustrates the marginalising effect of gender discrimination on the artistic contribution and legacy of such fine performers as Rhoda Coghill.

#### **Part IV: Situating Discourses of Women, Gender and Music in the Twenty-First Century**

Composer Nicola LeFanu raises the question of progress for female artists in her chapter entitled, 'Women and Composition: Fifty Years of Progress?' As a case study, LeFanu explores the changing reception of the compositions of Ina Boyle (1889-1967) to demonstrate the kind of work that is required. The author asks how we might bring about lasting rather than transient change, identifying a cyclical pattern of recognition and neglect, usually in parallel with social and political movements. Notwithstanding some improvement, LeFanu cites that concert statistics in relation to women composers and conductors remain 'dreadful' (180). She exhorts us to ensure that recognition and opportunity is available to the next generation of women composers and artistic leaders to secure their legacy.

The presence of practice-based research by a composer is a welcome inclusion in this volume: in Rhona Clarke's chapter we encounter artistic practice itself. Clarke documents in detail the many stages of the creative process for three collaborative works from 2014, made jointly with visual artist Marie Hanlon, *Everything we see..., The Small Hours*, and *Cornerspace*. This chapter is a reminder of the distinctive, unique, and unreplicable voice of a composer at work. If one were to magnify this body of work alone by the generations of female artists who were silenced, marginalised, ignored, and deprived of opportunity to develop, it is difficult to imagine just how much artistic work has been lost. It is important we try to conceive the scale of the discrimination and deprivation to wider society of the loss of their potential work.

Barbara Jillian Dignam surveys the situation concerning women and electroacoustic music in Ireland; while she acknowledges the work being done through online initiatives and communities, she notes the lack of research in the area of women writing electroacoustic music. Through Dignam's survey, we learn that as recently as 2003 Paschal de Paor makes no mention of women in his work on the early development of electroacoustic music in Ireland. Dignam identifies that music is the most gender-imbalanced artistic discipline in Aosdána representation, with just a quarter of its composers being women. She calls for a study to examine the reason why so few females take up the study of electroacoustic music, music technology and sonic arts. Obstacles

faced by those working in this genre include unequal access to funding, posts in curation, programming for suitable performance spaces, and provision of support, to name just some. The demise of Bernard Clarke's visionary, imaginative and inclusive programme *Nova* on RTÉ lyric fm has also been a blow to composers of electroacoustic works. She wisely cautions against tokenism and ghettoising with positive discrimination, however well-intentioned.

In the final chapter of the book, 'We buried the Heteropatriarchy and Danced on its Grave: Towards a Liberation Movement for Irish Traditional Music' by Tes Slominski, we find out about the challenges for an unattached woman in gaining access to the Irish traditional music scene, which Slominski links to Gayle Rubin's 'traffic in women' theory (the patriarchal exchange of women). Slominski also draws on Adrienne Rich's concept of 'compulsory heterosexuality' (207) in her discussion of women in Irish traditional music. As Slominski points out, the very names of tunes reveal much about the dominance of the male perspective, and of heterosexuality. Slominski cautions against tokenist inclusion, such as during Pride month or *Nollaig na mBan*. Sadly, her own experience of sexual harassment is not unique, and she notes how so-called humour creates a higher tolerance of discrimination. The chapter concludes with practical advice to counter sexism and marginalisation.

Reading the volume through, a collective account comes into focus. Be it intentional or otherwise, it documents the systemic, prolonged, consistent, state-enforced and socially endorsed denial of the right of women to work outside the home, and the resulting negation of opportunity and visibility, not to mention the far-off lands of equality, equity and economic independence. The cumulative effect of such comprehensive discrimination is the denial to current and future generations of work that might have been. We will never truly know what has been missed. This book does not set out to be a manifesto, but among its aggregate messages is a call for greater awareness and activism with no room for complacency. A full reading of this volume with its diversity of subjects and wide range of scholarship is highly recommended to appreciate the conglomerate picture which unfolds. Without a volume such as this, our studies of the issues at hand would be a great deal poorer. This book illuminates many areas of women's artistic output which have been neglected, and others which currently deserve our attention. Ideally books and conferences about the work of women would not be necessary, because their output should simply be included as a matter of course. However, in the face of centuries of neglect and discrimination, it is necessary to begin rebalancing the account to more accurately reflect the true reality of women's artistic output. A book such as this does just that. I pay immense tribute to all those who have made this fine volume a reality.

Jennifer O'Connor-Madsen, Laura Watson and Ita Beausang, *Women and Music in Ireland* (2022).

Anne-Marie O'Farrell

Royal Northern College of Music