

SÉAMAS DE BARRA, *ALOYS FLEISCHMANN* (Dublin: Field Day Publications, 2006) ISBN 0-946755-32-9, x + 190pp, €25.00/\$34.77

This book launches the Field Day Music series, planned to augment the body of historical and analytical literature on composition in the art music tradition in Ireland and to stimulate further discussion and commentary. Series editors, Séamas de Barra and Patrick Zuk, write that the series is aimed to provide an account of 'the careers and creative achievements of some of the most significant figures in Irish composition' (viii). Monographs in the series will appear annually in pairs, one describing the life of an historical figure and the other a living composer. The first book in the series, authored by Séamas de Barra, is devoted to the life and achievements of Aloys Fleischmann.

In the first four chapters, de Barra provides important biographical information that is set within a richly woven narrative of Irish political, cultural and social history. He presents the story of the Fleischmanns in Cork in a way that illuminates several aspects of Aloys Fleischmann's life, including his family roots in Germany and his father's wish to return there; the strong musical heritage of his family members and their role in musical life in Cork since around 1880 when Fleischmann's maternal grandfather, Hans Conrad Swertz, came to Cork; the impact of World War I and the War of Independence on his family's life in Cork; the network of family friends with whom Fleischmann came into contact as he grew up—Carl Hardebeck, Daniel Corkery, and John P. Horgan, among others; and the state of musical culture in Cork in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. De Barra's setting of Fleischmann's story in this cultural milieu adds considerably to the reader's understanding of how his musicality was nurtured during his youth and how his career was shaped.

His parents, Tilly and Aloys, were hardly provincial Irish citizens. Although Tilly was born in Cork, a significant part of her musical education was at the Royal Academy of Music in Munich. It was during one of her visits to Munich in 1909–10 that Aloys Óg (as he was known to distinguish him from his father) was born. In the second chapter de Barra focuses on Fleischmann's years of study at University College Cork, 1927–32. He passes quickly over his childhood and youth and while he does capture some of the essential elements of Fleischmann's character development, he moves immediately to a detailed description of the development of music at UCC. The reader has come to know the Fleischmann family by this stage, and is curious about how the musical life therein impacted Fleischmann's early musical development as a performer and composer. But it is only later in the chapter that his early musical training is described and this material might have been better placed at the chapter's beginning, when other aspects of his childhood are considered.

The inclusion of background information on the beginnings of music at UCC serves as a foundation for understanding Fleischmann's training in composition and the influence of his mentors, Frederick St. John Lacy, Annie Patterson, and Carl Hardebeck. De Barra's conclusion that Fleischmann remained 'unimpressed and uninfluenced by Lacy and Patterson as composers' (17) seems too strong and not adequately supported by primary sources. The author goes on, however, to illustrate effectively how the threads of early influence—personal and musical—came together in his leadership in founding the University Art Society and his inaugural address on the role of regionalism in creative authenticity. De Barra shows how this address was prophetic of Fleischmann's commitment to a national music that drew on native material as its inspiration.

A further stage of his musical education and development as a composer is highlighted with the focus on Fleischmann's time at the State Academy of Music in Munich, 1932–4. Tensions between his father's wishes for him to become an accomplished organist and his own desire to study composition as his principal subject were tempered by his mother's reassurance of his choice. Fleischmann's reaction to his father's objection shows a young man who knew exactly the kind of musical career he wanted, evident in his choice of composition and conducting at the Academy and musicological research at the University of Munich. The intensity of his training, particularly with his composition teacher Joseph Haas, is well documented by the author, drawing on appropriate primary sources such as letters between Fleischmann and his parents. The content of these letters is quoted liberally throughout the chapter and it provides abundant evidence of Fleischmann's deep commitment to returning to Ireland and his plans for continuing his musical leadership at UCC, anticipating his return to Cork and to UCC in 1934 as Acting Professor of Music.

De Barra also presents the unsatisfactory state of music and music education in Ireland in the 1930s, and Fleischmann's perception of and reaction to that situation. The urgency that Fleischmann felt and the intensity and breadth of his agenda to affect change are presented in a compelling, succinct manner, supported by evidence from publications and set in the context of Cork's cultural leadership in this decade. Fleischmann's artistic vision, unflagging energy, and musical leadership and growing reputation represent the foundations upon which he flourished in subsequent decades.

After this careful documentation of Fleischmann's training, influences, and early achievements, de Barra then concentrates on Fleischmann's compositions and compositional trajectory. In separate chapters he arranges the various stages of his development along chronological lines that are matched with themes from each period: developing the idea of a Gaelic art music, consolidation of reputation, composing for the ballet, achievements recognized, stylistic change, and retirement and final

works. In the interest of focusing on his compositional development, it would likely have been more satisfying if de Barra had based chapter titles on the content or influences of the compositions rather than periods of Fleischmann's life or times of special recognition.

Although earlier chapters had pointed to Fleischmann's commitment to Irish culture and its central role in artistic expression, de Barra returns to this theme and takes it to new heights and deeper insights through an evaluation of the dialogue on native art music by Fleischmann, Éamonn Ó Gallchobhair, E. J. Moeran and Seán Neeson, among others. Just as Fleischmann experienced tension in his childhood based on how he was perceived by others due to his German family roots, he now experienced other kinds of tension: for example, that which arose between his vision for a native art music and the lack of musical culture to produce it, or if produced, to perform and appreciate it; and his commitment to native culture and being identified as Irish, evidenced in his adoption of a pseudonym (Muiris Ó Rónáin/Maurice Ronan) between 1934 and the early 1940s, and composing in a native, regional style, while simultaneously seeking to be cosmopolitan. De Barra points out that even at this early stage Fleischmann was collecting Irish folk song, an activity that came to occupy him in the later stages of his career and culminated in the posthumous publication of *Sources of Irish Traditional Music c. 1600–1855* (New York and London: Garland, 1998).

If one is to associate the importance of particular compositions with the attention de Barra devotes to their analysis, then the compositions *Trí hAmhráin* (1935), *Piano Quintet* (1938), *Prelude and Dance* (1940), and the *Humours of Carolan* (1941–42?) may be regarded as the first group of works that established Fleischmann's reputation as a composer. They also represent the period in which he presented his compositions under a pseudonym. In the analysis of these and later works, de Barra shows a deep knowledge of musical style, compositional processes, and schools of composition in various eras. He also provides critique and rationalizes why Fleischmann used particular sources and styles. The ideal way of studying works like these is to listen to the music as one reads background and analysis, and it is regrettable that for the most part, according to de Barra's catalogue, the compositions have not been recorded.

As Fleischmann continued to experiment with and explore the use of native music and literature as a basis for his compositions, surrounding cultural institutions supported him and provided opportunities to continue in this direction. In the 1940s, as de Barra describes, Fleischmann received commissions that were of national significance: to commemorate the death of one of the Four Masters which resulted in a work for orchestra entitled *The Four Masters* (1944); and, a second invitation to compose a work on the occasion of the centenary of Thomas Davis to which Fleischmann responded with *Clare's Dragoons* (1945). In analysing works such as

Clare's Dragoons, de Barra is meticulous in his description of the musical forces used; he includes excerpts from the score to illustrate various features of the composition, and he provides a detailed description of the literary or programmatic sources. Providing background context for compositions is essential and interesting; however, de Barra's descriptions are sometimes too elaborate and they interrupt the flow of the text and the focus on a particular composition.

Fleischmann's artistic partnership with Joan Denise Moriarty is well documented and not only does de Barra describe the works that evolved from this partnership (*The Golden Bell of Ko*, 1947; *An Cóitín Dearg*, 1951; *Macha Ruadh*, 1955; and *Bata na bPlanndála*, 1957) but he also locates his analysis within the story of the Cork Ballet Company and ballet and theatre in Ireland in the 1940s and 50s. He also illustrates how Fleischmann used the medium of the ballet score to develop further an art music that drew on the wellsprings of Irish literature and culture.

Fleischmann's contributions as a composer were not limited to his own output. As de Barra highlights, he was also an advocate for composers and keen to promote new works. As part of the Cork International Choral Festival, which he initiated in 1954, he organized the Seminar on Contemporary Choral Music beginning in 1962. The commissioning of new choral works and their analysis in the seminar proved to be quite successful, and this unique initiative in Ireland in the 1960s and 70s elicited works from Seóirse Bodley, Brian Boydell, Seán Ó Riada and Egon Wellesz, among other prominent composers. In addition to this form of musical leadership in the 1960s, de Barra shows that it was a decade that saw recognition of his achievements and 'the peak of his reputation as a composer [since] critical and popular enthusiasm for his music never again reached quite the same level' (126). De Barra includes analyses of *Introduction and Funeral March* (1960), *Amhráin na gCúigí/Song of the Provinces* (1963), and *Songs of Colmcille* (1964), as representative of that decade.

Based on a number of private and published sources written by Fleischmann, de Barra traces Fleischmann's dissatisfaction with and uncertainty about the idiom in his music and his skepticism about avant-garde music. The author attributes this change in thinking partly to the changing social and political values in Ireland at the time, where Irish identity (and thus the identity of an Irish composer) was in flux. Even in his last works in the 1980s, de Barra shows a composer who continues to respond to 'the problem of shaping a distinctly Irish utterance' (147). This thread of Fleischmann's artistic vision and output is woven throughout de Barra's presentation of an eminent figure in Irish music.

The first volume in the Field Day Music series is a valuable contribution to the literature on music in Ireland in the twentieth century, specifically the life and times of Aloys Fleischmann. De Barra had several options in determining the scope of the

book. He chose to situate Fleischmann's compositions in the Irish context and to document Fleischmann's other achievements as a conductor, academic, scholar and musical leader. He could have also situated Fleischmann's works in the context of national and international composition trends and developments in the twentieth century. The present book is closer to a musical biography of Fleischmann, rich in personal, cultural and historical background, than to an exclusive study of his compositions. Using a wide range of primary source material, de Barra not only documents his life and times but also presents the artistic tensions and personal struggles of his life—from the effects of his bi-national heritage, the quest to be an Irish composer, and the many disappointments which de Barra reports that he experienced in his later years. In de Barra's portrayal of Fleischmann, the reader gets to know a person of sharp intellect, scrupulous ethics, unusual loyalty to the nation, broad artistic and cultural vision, and boundless energy and enthusiasm for the progress of music in Ireland.

Parallel to presenting a profile of the musician and his life and works, de Barra integrates the story of musical life in Cork from the time the Fleischmanns came there in the 1880s. The vibrancy of cultural life in that city is a major sub-theme of the book, a theme that surfaced time and again in my own research on Irish music education. I have already noted the positive impact of the rich archival material that de Barra used. Use of more photographs other than the 1935 portrait of Fleischmann at the outset, and prints of artifacts, would have enlivened the narrative considerably. De Barra's comprehensive and meticulous seventeen-page catalogue of Fleischmann's compositions is a major contribution to the history of music composition in Ireland. When this catalogue of Fleischmann's works is compared to that on the website of the Contemporary Music Centre Ireland, there are several discrepancies there which ought to be examined and clarified. De Barra has uncovered much new material in his research and it ought to replace or add to current historical records. He also provides a list of Fleischmann's published writings. It would have been helpful if he had also included a list of the unpublished writings he used in the book; for example, a footnote on page 39 describing the Music Department at UCC in the 1930s cites 'Fleischmann, Music Department'. A detailed description of the source in the references would have provided context for the source.

De Barra is to be congratulated for writing a scholarly and richly contextualized volume describing the life and achievements of a great voice in music in twentieth-century Ireland. At the outset, he acknowledges Fleischmann's varied achievements as a scholar, educator, and conductor, but argues that his corpus of original compositions is 'his most enduring legacy' (1). I questioned the validity of that statement at the book's beginning, and, based on my own knowledge of Fleischmann's many and varied contributions to music education in Ireland (from public and private schools to

higher education and community) and de Barra's own exposition of Fleischmann's musical achievements, I continue to doubt it as an overall evaluative statement of his career. Perhaps the compositions are the most enduring artifact of Fleischmann's legacy, the most concrete testimony of the struggles of an Irish composer in twentieth-century Ireland. De Barra's analysis and evaluation of several compositions in this volume will surely cause musicians in their varied roles as performers, researchers and educators to bring Fleischmann's works to life in twenty-first-century Ireland, honouring their artistic value and historical significance.

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