

**University College, Cork  
Department of Music**

Tristan LE GOVIC

**The development of the contemporary  
repertoire for the Irish harp**

Supervisor : Ms. Méabh NÍ FHUARTHÁIN  
2001-2002

## Acknowledgements

- Mrs. **Méabh NÍ FHUARTHÁIN**,  
University College, Cork,  
For her advice and her tutoring.

- Professor **Marie-Claire MUSSAT**,  
Université Rennes 2 (Bretagne, France),  
To have allowed me to realize this project.

- The Music Department of the University College, Cork and  
Professor **David Harold COX**,  
For their welcome and their material assistance.

And M. **Mel MERCIER**,  
For his advice.

- The Contemporary Music Centre, Dublin,  
And particularly Mrs. **Anne-Marie CASEY**.

- Mrs. **Bonnie SHALJEAN**,  
Harpist and teacher at University College, Cork.

- M. and Mrs. **LEHANE**,  
For their kindness and their practical help in Cork.

- M. and Mrs. **McMURRY**,  
Professors at Trinity College, Dublin,  
For their welcome and the help they provided me in Dublin.

A part of this report is based on a correspondence with composers and harpists, who play an active role in the development of the Irish harp nowadays. Among the forty-seven persons contacted, fifteen have reply.

For the use of their time, I would like to thank:

(in alphabetical order)

- Mrs. **Elaine AGNEW**, composer.
- M. **Derek BALL**, composer,  
Particularly for his work *Sans Embellissement*, for celtic harp,  
composed after our correspondence.
- M. **Derek BELL**, composer and harpist (classical and Irish harp).
- Mrs. **Rhona CLARKE**, composer.
- M. **Shaun DAVEY**, composer.
- Mrs. **Madeleine DOHERTY**, harpist (classical and Irish harp).
- Mrs. **Mercedes GARVEY**, harpist (classical and Irish harp).
- M. **Fergus JOHNSTON**, composer.
- M. **John KINSELLA**, composer.
- Mrs. **Sheila LARCHET CUTHBERT**, harpist (classical and Irish harp).
- Mrs. **Kathleen LOUGHNANE**, harpist (Irish harp).
- M. **Kevin O'CONNELL**, composer.
- M. **Martin O'LEARY**, composer.
- Mrs. **Claire ROCHE**, harpist (classical and Irish harp).
- M. **James WILSON**, composer.

# Summary

Acknowledgements  
Summary

Foreword p.6

INTRODUCTION p.8

|   |      |
|---|------|
| I – Image of the Irish harp in contemporary music | p.10 |
|---|------|

1.1 – Some definitions p.10

1.1.1 – Contemporary music, traditional music p.10

1.1.2 – The different small harps p.11

1.1.3 – The *Cláirseach* case p.13

1.2 – Image of the Irish harp p.14

1.3 – The search for a new sounding world p.15

1.3.1 – Irish traditional instruments in art music p.15

1.3.2 – Irish harp in the art repertoire p.16

|  |      |
|--|------|
| II – The development of contemporary repertoire for Irish harp | p.18 |
|--|------|

2.1 – Irish harp or classical harp? p.18

2.1.1 – The instruments have a musical connection p.18

2.1.2 – The classical harp in Irish contemporary music p.19

2.2 – The contributors to these developments p.20

2.2.1 – Commissioned works p.20

2.2.2 – The role of performers p.22

2.2.3 – The role of musical publications p.22

2.2.4 – The development of harp making p.23

2.3 – Is there an audience for the contemporary repertoire of Irish harp? p.23

|   |      |
|---|------|
| III – The contemporary music for Irish harp | p.24 |
|---|------|

|   |      |
|---|------|
| 3.1 – The different repertoires of the Irish harp nowadays        | p.24 |
| 3.2 – Realization of the catalogue of contemporary music          | p.26 |
| 3.3 – Different musical genres                                    | p.29 |
| 3.4 – The languages used in the contemporary music for Irish harp | p.31 |
| 3.4.1 – The difficulties of writing for the instrument            | p.31 |
| 3.4.2 – Different languages                                       | p.34 |

|            |      |
|------------|------|
| CONCLUSION | p.39 |
|------------|------|

|              |      |
|--------------|------|
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | p.40 |
|--------------|------|

|            |
|------------|
| APPENDICES |
|------------|

|   |      |
|---|------|
| Appendix 1 : Catalogue of contemporary music for the Irish harp                 | p.45 |
| Appendix 2 : Questionnaire  | p.59 |
| Appendix 3 : <i>Sans Embellissement</i> (2001), for Celtic harp, by Derek BALL. | p.62 |

## Foreword

Music is an art, and is also a language with its own conventions, particularities, and differences from one region or one country to another. It talks to us through what we could call by analogy accents with sometimes very different local colours. The music of the Irish harp carries an important cultural background, sometimes created, re-created or artificial, but often authentic and linked to the history of Ireland. If formerly, the instrument and the musicians were already famous outside the country, as the historical pieces of writings testify it, without, however, permitting us to judge their value; nowadays we can completely appreciate the qualities and differences of these harpists thanks to the development of means of communication.

What is the contemporary language of the instrument then? In 1981, in an article published to celebrate the tenth birthday of the death of the Irish composer Seán Ó RIADA (1931-1971), Gráinne YEATS<sup>1</sup> wrote:

« At the present time no composer seems to be interested in writing for the traditional harp, and this is a pity, because though it will never regain its position as the chief instrument of the Irish, yet there is still a place for it in the musical arena of today »<sup>2</sup>.

Ó RIADA had led the way for an art music with Irish colours and his premature death had the accents of national mourning. For all that, and in a surprising way, Irish harp had been replaced by harpsichord in his group *Ceoltóirí Cualann* made up of traditional musicians and he qualified as a classical one. The instrument is never represented in his work of classical music associating traditional Irish themes to the orchestra.

If the Irish harp is certainly not the *chief instrument* of Ireland anymore, nowadays composers of art music are being interested in it again. Some twenty years after Gráinne YEATS' article, we can see how the instrument has evolved. This study is focused on contemporary art music, though there are other repertoires maybe more significant, at least for the image of the Irish harp today. Historically, Irish harp has never been a traditional instrument and its appearance within this music is the product of a recent appropriation by the musicians. Thus, this traditional repertoire is not significant for today's Irish music, even if its development is more important than the contemporary art music one.

---

<sup>1</sup> Harpist, Gráinne YEATS is the daughter in law of W.B. YEATS, Nobel prize of literature.

<sup>2</sup> YEATS, Gráinne, *The Rediscovery of Carolan*, in: *Integrating Tradition – The Achievement of Seán O'RIADA*, published by Bernard HARRIS et Grattan FREYER, Terrybaun Co. Mayo, Irish Humanities Centre & Keohanes, 1981, p.93.

To comprehend better the current position of this music, I directly interviewed contributors to contemporary art music composition of Irish harp, that is to say about fifty harpists and/or composers. People I contacted have contributed, through their role or their works, to the evolution of the contemporary repertoire of Irish harp. I proposed them to fill a questionnaire made up of two parts: the first one was a reflection on the image of the instrument in the contemporary art music, the second one was directly linked to their compositions, how the small harp integrated in their musical work<sup>3</sup>.

The first result of this questionnaire shows that each of them refers to the image of the instrument differently and that the music that emerges from it is subsequently influenced. If for some of them the place of the instrument is first within the traditional instruments, for the other ones, its technical qualities give them an important potential in art music. An original repertoire, with different styles and very varied instrumental groups, has been developing. People who answered sometimes did it succinctly, sometimes more thoroughly, but always with interest and passion for music. In the interpretation of these answers, I tried to be the most representative possible of contemporary music for Irish harp and trust the synthesis won't betray the authors' thoughts.

---

<sup>3</sup> This questionnaire is to be found in the appendix of this report.

## Introduction

While Irish harp was facing its twilight during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, thus putting an end to more than eight hundred years of musical tradition in Ireland, a last burst was to mark this heralded end. The 1792 Belfast Harp Festival could have allowed people to hope for a renewal of the small harp, but among the eleven harpists who were present, there was only the old Denis HEMPSON (1695-1807) who could claim to be the heir to the Middle-Ages tradition of wire-strung harps. From then on, the new gut-strung harp, played with fingertips and not anymore with nails (like it was taught by the ancient technique), influenced by the classical harp, but which is still being called 'Irish', was to replace the historical harp.

While ancient texts were honouring the music of the Gaelic society and particularly harpists, the Irish upper class and some of the middle classes influenced by the European courts' society, mainly represented by the English occupier, turned to the art music of this society to the detriment of their own musical tradition. Even if one might well think that harpists knew the popular Irish music, music which was played in the Irish courts was in the first place a music that we would also qualified as an « art » one. Persecutions harpists were subjected to would finally put an end to their tradition and, with it, to the Irish art music.

The European courts' music was henceforth well integrated to the upper class of the country and the publications of the tunes played by the harpists during the 1792 Belfast festival, transcribed by Edward BUNTING (1773-1843), were intended for the piano<sup>4</sup>. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a small harp was still going to have some success with wealthy classes. The model made by the Dubliner instrument maker John EGAN was a hybrid of the Irish and the classical harp. This harp, whose size was halfway between the two models of reference, had gut strings whose tuning could be changed thanks to levers.

However, the success of EGAN's harp was relative and we had to wait the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to see the appearance of the Irish harp renewal, mainly under the influence of traditional musicians who appropriated the instrument. The contemporary Irish harp and the Breton Celtic harp directly come from this model. If the few harpists of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century could seem as being pioneers in the rediscovery of their instrument, they are now more numerous but too discreet in the musical Irish scene compared to the past image. Some of the art music composers also became attached to it and found a modern object of their creative expression in it.

The image of the instrument often has an historical or cultural connotation, sometimes enlivened with legends and mythology which give it a magic nature. Thus the small harp suggests « inaccuracy, freedom, mystery » (D. BALL)<sup>5</sup>. But it is first and foremost a musical

---

<sup>4</sup> BUNTING, Edward, *The ancient Music of Ireland, arranged for the piano-forte*, Dublin, Hodges & Smith, 1840.

<sup>5</sup> Except when it is mentioned, the quotations come from a private interview linked to the questionnaire sent to them.

instrument whose possibilities, given for some, are thought to be restricting for others. Is it to be thought that Irish harp is « Irish » because of its music? If the answer is yes, what is this music? Maybe, Irish traditional music? Again, opinion is divided. Even if its system of one movement levers destines it for a mainly modal or tonal repertoire, in accordance with the system used in traditional music, it is primarily its image and the impact it provokes in mentalities that intend it to this repertoire.

Irish harp found itself in contact with the popular musicians by necessity, when the ancient Gaelic society and then the *Big Houses* – that is to say big houses of landowners-disappeared under English repression. By losing their protectors, harpists lost at the same time their means of subsistence. From then on they turned to the modestest classes of the Irish society. If harp had real meaning within popular musicians, tradition would have endured in any possible form. But harpists have been progressively disappearing from the Irish musical scene, replaced by performers from then on influenced by European art music.

Contemporary composers appropriated the instrument, developing an original and varied repertoire for it. From soloist and music chamber pieces to the full orchestra's one, from vocal to electroacoustic works, most of the important genres of art music are now represented. The most varied musical languages are used: next to the tonal or the modal, other languages which are more modern are developing: from atonal to concrete music, from jazz to lighter music. Technical and musical potentials of Irish harp give composers a scale of effects peculiar to enrich their musical expression and ask for a careful consideration in the writing. The instrument has entered modernity with all its sounding body.

# I – Image of the Irish harp in contemporary music

## 1.1 – Some definitions

### 1.1.1– Contemporary music, traditional music

Before completely dealing with our subject, let's establish the meaning given to the terms « contemporary music » and « traditional music ». A work is considered as « contemporary » when its musical language or spirit is characteristic of our time, or developed since the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This dissociation corresponds to the substitution of tonal language to new musical systems, among which the serial and then the dodecaphonic system of SCHOENBERG School are influential representatives. Composers are trying more beyond tonality, which was, until that time, the system of reference of the European art music. WAGNER's works (1813-1883) had reached the limits of this language, leaving few space for personal expression of the composers following him. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, too confined in this system, modality had come back in a tonal context with FAURE (1845-1924), and then more widely with DEBUSSY (1862-1918) further to the discovery of oriental music from Bali and Java during the 1889 World Fair in Paris. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, STRAVINSKY (1882-1971) had developed a harmonic system influenced by Russian music and partly based on a chords' superposition. For his part, BARTOK (1881-1945) had turned to Hungarian and Bulgarian traditional music to develop his language. The research of new forms of musical expressions had opened the way to a new sounding world.

One can define a « contemporary » work thanks to several parameters and, among them, the following notions intervene: melodic, rhythmic, harmonic, instrumental or of spatialization. Thus a work could be tonal and for all that be considered as being in a contemporary spirit, since one of its parameters comes from the evolution of the language since the last century. The main systems which have been developed during this century are: the serial, dodecaphonic or atonal system, the polytonal or polymodal language, and finally the concrete music or the one using electronic devices or computing. Some forms are also associated to contemporary music, among others the open or aleatoric works.

\*  
\* \*

In this Irish context, the term « traditional » designates the repertoire of tunes and dances coming from a musical background anonymous. Even though most of this repertoire is arranged, compositions in this musical spirit are also part of this group. Breandán BREATHNACH uses more gladly the term *folk music* to talk about traditional music. In an article of 1985, he quotes the definition of the *International Folk Music Council* :

«Folk music is the product of a musical tradition that has been evolved through the process of oral transmission. The factors that shape the tradition are: (1) continuity which links the present with the past; (2) variation which springs from the creative impulse of the individual or the group; (3) selection by the community, which determines the form or forms in which the music survives »<sup>6</sup>.

The notions of arrangements or appropriation of the repertoire are part of the definition of the traditional music term. Tonal language is still most of the time used in Irish music, particularly the tonalities of *G major* and *D major*. Most of the traditional instruments are tuned on these tonalities and rarely strays from them. There is a distinction between slow tunes, more free in their form, and dances tunes whose bar is strict and mainly at 4/4 (*reel*, *hornpipes*), 6/8 (*jig*) or 9/8 (*slip jig*). The general musical form of these dances is made up of two indissociable parts: the *tune* followed by the *turn*, most of the time of eight bars with repeat. Some tunes have one or several supplementary phrases, but in most cases dance tunes are based on this model.

### 1.1.2 – The different small harps

Half the harpists or composers interviewed think that the term « Irish harp », as symbol of the country, has to be connected with its historical and cultural origins. For the others, it is first and foremost all an instrument of the harp family and the term « Irish » has few meaning on the music they dedicate to it: *Irish* doesn't mean « traditional ». There are several distinctions between composers: Derek BELL dissociates the ancient wire-strung Irish harp from the gut-strung Neo-Irish harp. As for Derek BALL, in his compositions, he uses more widely the terms *Cláirseach* or the more recent one *Celtic harp*, without for all that specifying which harp he is referring to. *Irish harp* remains the most often used term.

The reference to a precise instrument is important because the sounding result can vary a lot from a harp to another. Terms used to talk about the levers harp often lead to confusion. In the early texts, the difference between *harp*, *lyre* or *cithara* was already not very precise, indeed even contradictory. Still in the 16<sup>th</sup>, there were often misinterpretations in the English language between the harps and lyres' family, for the terms designated sometimes one and sometimes the other<sup>7</sup>. Even if nowadays terms have changed, there is still a confusion on which name is to be given to some types of harp, including among Irish harpists. Thus the term Irish harp is often used as a synonym of Celtic harp, Cláirseach, Neo-Irish harp, and also of the ancient term *Cruit*, which designates a very different instrument however.

In Gaelic the term *Cruit* appeared in the most ancient manuscripts to designate stringed instruments without, however, being able to certify that it was effectively a harp, but

---

<sup>6</sup> BREATHNACH, Breandán, *The Use of Notation in the Transmission of Irish Folk Music*, O RIADA Memorial Lecture 1, Irish Traditional Music Society, UCC, 1985.

<sup>7</sup> NEW GROVE Dictionary of Music, Stanley SADIE (ed.), London, Macmillan, 1980 (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1845), p.191a.

probably rather a lyre with five and then six strings. It would come from the Indo-European root *Ker* meaning ‘curved’, whereas the term harp would come from the word *Kereb*<sup>8</sup>. The term *Cruit* seems to be related to other names like *Crwth*, *Chrotta*, *rota* or *rote* (the last two ones are also to be found in the Middle Ages to designate a small harp). The *Cruit* designates the small bardic wire-strung harp, whereas the *cláirseach* – term that would come from the 15<sup>th</sup> – is the name of the instrument of a more important size, also a wire-strung one. Some historical acceptances came to us:

« When gut- or wire-strung harps appeared together, as they did at the Court of the Scottish Kings, they were referred to by separate names – *clarsach* for wire, *harp* for gut. A player was a ‘clarschaar’ or a ‘harper on the clarsach’; gut-strung harps were played by a ‘harper’ or a ‘harper on the harp’ »<sup>9</sup>.

The first time the word *Celtic harp* appeared seems to be in a 1912 article, mentioning a Breton musician without for all that indicating again which harp it was about:

« Le barde-harpiste LE DIVERRES a tenu le public sous le charme magique de ses airs joués à la harpe celtique »<sup>10</sup>.

The names *Celtic harp* or *Irish harp* are not really meaningful on a musical point of view and lead as much to confusion. I would use them as synonyms to designate the modern levers harp which is a gut-strung or more generally a nylon-strung one. The *cláirseach* designating the small wire-strung harp according to the historical acceptance. In the rhapsody *Aiste ó na Gleannta* (1953) for orchestra, Archibald James POTTER (1918-1980) uses the Gaelic names of the instruments. However, the part intended for *cláirseach* remains only assigned to the classical harp for technical reasons.

---

<sup>8</sup> RIMMER, Joan, *The Irish Harp*, Dublin, The Mercier Press, 1981 (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1969), p.22.

<sup>9</sup> KINNAIRD, Alison, *When is a clarsach not a clarsach?*, in: *Sounding Strings – the magazine of the small harp*, n°4, june 1994, quoted by Rudolf FRICK, *Origine des petites harpes modernes*, in: *Harpa*, n°16, winter 1994, p.44.

<sup>10</sup> Newspaper *Ar bobl*, 1912, CRBC BREST : « the bard-harpist LE DIVERRES kept the public under the spell of his tunes played with the Celtic harp ».

### 1.1.3 – The *Cláirseach* case

It is important that the composer precisely defines what kind of harp he intends his work for, as the sounding result and the possibilities would be very different. The material of the strings changes between the different harps: it is generally gut for the classical one, nylon or wire and sometimes composite for the small harp. The technique of the harpist playing Irish harp is close to the one for classical harp, with complements, particularly for ornaments. The technique of the harpist playing *cláirseach* changes more. The technique of the nails on wire-strungs develops a different sound associated to mufflings characteristic of the instrument. Historically, the Middle Ages Irish harp's strings were in wire and played according to this technique. However, the playing on the *cláirseach* has evolved compared to the ancient tradition and harpists are proposing more contemporary arrangements (in harmony and rhythm), including when they appropriate the ancient repertoire.

The ancient tradition of the Irish harp remains dark on many points. In the first exclusive edition of O'CAROLAN's works<sup>11</sup>, the characteristic of the line of bass is to follow or precede the melodic line of a beat or half a beat, which so makes a series of consecutive octaves. Even though there is sometimes a doubt about the authenticity of this bass, this arrangement is maybe the product of a real practice of O'CAROLAN's time and would be linked to the longer vibrations of wire-strungs, associated to a muffling technique<sup>12</sup>. In his introduction to *The Ancient Music of Ireland*, BUNTING described the technique of the harpist Denis HEMPSON (1695-1807), considered as the last harpist who played according to the ancient tradition, that is to say with the nails on the wire-strungs:

« His fingers lay over the strings in such a manner, that when he struck them with one finger, the other was instantly ready to stop the vibration »<sup>13</sup>.

In fact to muffle the strings which are vibrating before plucking the others permits clearer playing and the harmonic perception is all the more precise. The double movement (to pluck – to muffle) is however more technically difficult and diminishes all the more the melodic, harmonic, or rhythmic possibilities. Nowadays, arrangements have developed new harmonic, rhythmic and melodic conventions very different from the ancient tradition. The line of bass is also very different, partly influenced by art music.

Some harpists are trying to rediscover the traces of the ancient harp tradition. They are helped by instrument makers who make small harps from ancient models who came to us<sup>14</sup>.

---

<sup>11</sup> Collected by his son in collaboration with Patrick DELANY, then professor in Trinity College Dublin, his works were published in 1748. Some pages of this collection are nowadays missing.

<sup>12</sup> By Gráinne YEATS, *The Rediscovery of Carolan*, in: *Integrating Tradition – The Achievement of Sean O'RIADA*, published by Bernard HARRIS and Grattan FREYER, Terrybaun Co. Mayo, Irish Humanities Centre & Keohanes, 1981, p.89.

<sup>13</sup> BUNTING, Edward, *The Ancient Music of Ireland*, Dublin, Hodges & Smith, 1840, p.73. Mentioned by Colette MOLONEY, *Style and Repertoire in the Gaelic Harp Tradition: Evidence from the Bunting Manuscripts and Prints*, in: Patrick F. DEVINE and Harry WHITE, *Irish Musical Studies*, 4, Blackrock Co. Dublin, Four Courts Press, 1996, p.311-312.

<sup>14</sup> A detailed description of these models is to be found in Joan RIMMER's work, op. cit, p.1-3.

Thus, Peter KILROY is trying to rediscover the ancient making technique from the 14<sup>th</sup> century harp model kept in Trinity College (Dublin). He describes the forgotten sound:

« The practical advantage of all this to the harper was that his instrument had a sonorous and brilliant tone; it stayed in tune for longer than a modern harp does; and a wide dynamic range was possible, from a quiet tinkling to a strident brazen hammering, free from the ‘wow’ distortion inherent in the lower-tension strings required for the neo-Irish harp »<sup>15</sup>.

## 1.2 – Image of the Irish harp

If nowadays Irish harp has the image of a traditional instrument and that essentially with traditional harpists and relieved by the audience, historically, as a court instrument, it is associated to the Middle Ages Irish art music. Nowadays, the development of the art repertoire for the instrument clearly dissociates it from traditional instruments. Relatively, few composers of contemporary music, who wrote one or several works for Irish harp, have already made compositions for these instruments. Among them, those who appropriate themselves traditional Irish tunes have generally arranged them for classical musical instruments and not for traditional instruments. Irish harp ranks somewhere between those two worlds: present within traditional musicians, it also tends to develop an art repertoire and so can be distinguished from these instruments. As for the Middle Ages harp played with the nails on wire-strung, it keeps the image of the authentic Irish instrument.

While a majority of harpists evoke the ancient tradition of the harp in Ireland, composers (most of the time non-harpists) pay more interest to the potential of the instrument: it is primarily a harp with a singular and meaningful sound for their work. It is the original sounding colour that comes out, a « primitive » sound which has held the composer Kevin O’CONNELL’s attention. In his piece *Kolor* (1999), he sought for something fundamentally different, more original in the writing for the instrument. For James WILSON, an English composer living in Ireland, to write for the Irish instrument is firstly a musical action: « I am interested in music, not in nationality ». For composers are predominantly and in the first place appealing to the musical instrument and not to some music; to the lever harp and not to the harp called « Irish » or « Celtic ».

The image of the « Celtic » instrument, wrongly associated to a certain music from Celtic countries (that we are often beware of defining), distinguishes it from the classical instrument, itself associated to the European art music. The impact of Irish harp on the wide audience, quite often paying few attention to the authentic history, is strongly marked by the symbolic side of the instrument. On his side, when a harpist is going to play Irish music, he will have a tendency to choose the small harp, whereas he will opt for the big harp if he wants to play classical or contemporary music, thus adding a barrier of genres between the two instruments. For Derek BELL, the meaning of the term « Irish harp » (or Neo-Irish harp) is

---

<sup>15</sup> Mentioned in *Harpa*, International Harp Journal, Dornach, Odilia (Switzerland), n°2, 1991, p.24.

directly linked to the music he performs and which will be different if he plays for the Irish group the *Chieftains*<sup>16</sup>, or when he plays classical harp within an orchestra. The big harp remains associated to art music, whereas the small harp is the popular musical instrument.

If the classical harpist is also more trained for contemporary music, as much in scores' reading as in their interpretation, the traditional musician learns essentially how to play his instrument orally. He also develops his own arrangements, sometimes associated with improvisations and so in which the score has no reason to exist. The classical musician, with a few exceptions, has clearly dissociated the role of interpretation from the one of creative action and that, at the opposite of traditional musicians who take both roles. The classical harpist is first a performer, whereas the traditional one is an arranger-performer. From that point, it is not surprising to notice that it is first the classical musician, who will seek compound works for Irish harp, whereas the traditional musician will ignore a repertoire he hasn't written. Finally, contemporary music and traditional music are aimed at a different audience.

Other musicians attach Irish harp to a more important handiness and flexibility as to the moving of the instrument. The smaller size favours some creations of works, which necessitate transporting instruments for different performances. *John de Courcy's Travels* (1992), for violin, bassoon and Irish harp, by Elaine AGNEW, was a work ordered by the Arts Council in Northern Ireland to mark the restoration of Carrickfergus castle (Northern Ireland). Classical harp was initially planned in this order. The place wasn't adapted to the imposing size of the classical instrument and, at the bend of winding stairs, the harp could not reach the hall designed for the concert. So, it was decided that it would be replaced by an Irish harp. The composer discovered the instrument by chance and the instrumental formation of the work has from then on remained in its new configuration.

### 1.3 – The search for a new sounding world

#### 1.3.1 – Irish traditional instruments in art music

For many reasons, the place of traditional instruments remains uncertain in art music. Melodic possibilities often limited on the diatonic scale, linked to a very connoted image, are as many obstacles that move a part of the composers back. For all that, some works give interesting angles, associating traditional musical elements to an art writing. Works like *The Brendan Voyage* (1980), intended for orchestra and instruments (among which the uilleann pipes and the bodhrán), *The Pilgrim* (1983) or *Granuaile* (1985), by the composer Shaun DAVEY, have developed the mix of genres by associating traditional instruments within classical instruments.

Instruments like the uilleann pipes play in various and sometimes important music groups. Whereas in his oratorio *Crécht Mór* (1996), for twelve vocal parts, uilleann pipes and narrator, Stephen GARDNER uses the traditional instrument only as a link or interlude

---

<sup>16</sup> He joined the group created by Paddy MOLONEY further to a common concert with the BBC Northern Ireland Orchestra, in 1972.

between the different musical sections of the chorus, Shaun DAVEY proposes it a soloist role within a full orchestra in his *Pipes Concerto* (1986). In *The Lost Land* (1996), by Micheal HOLOHAN, the instrument plays with other soloists (soprano and narrator), and that also within an orchestra.

The uilleann pipes also finds its place in the chamber music, for example next to the string quartet in *Cuimhnimis Siar* (1995), by Marian INGOLDSBY, a work commissioned by the University of Cork. It is also at the center of *Tradarr* (1999), for uilleann pipes, sean nós singer (or song in the ancient style), wind ensemble and electronic device, by Roger DOYLE, composer specialised in electroacoustic music. Already in his piece *Under the Green Time* (1995), the uilleann pipes was developing a speech associated to electroacoustic sounds. Because of its nature, the instrument keeps a melodic line with diatonic foundations, but the *slide*, particularly used in traditional music, permits it to go out of the strict structure of the diatonic scale. Motifs evolve in the different registers of the instruments and apply to harmonics, whereas traditional ornaments (*cut, pat* or *grace notes*) are developing them in an art music spirit to finish on a multiphonic effect.

So, the exchanges between traditional music and art music illustrate the creative vitality of contemporary composers. The name of the region of Sliabh Luachra, situated on the borders of the counties of Cork and Kerry, in the south-west of Ireland and particularly rich in musical tradition, was taken up for the title of a work, by the composer John GIBSON, for traditional flute, violin, cello and piano. This piece plays both on the integration of the traditional flute within classical instruments and on the appropriation of tunes coming from the Irish traditional music of this region, mixed with original motifs of art music.

The tin whistle or the bass whistle are also present in contemporary music's works. So we can find the tin whistle bass in *O Viridissima Virga* (1991), for four soloists soprano, flute, whistle bass and two classical harps, by Micheal McGLYNN, on a text by Hildegarde von BINGEN. It is also to be noticed that the parts of the harps of this work are absolutely playable with an Irish harp. We find the tin whistle in C in the arrangement of O'CAROLAN's tunes by Derek BELL (*Immortal Carolan Melodies*, 1985), for Irish harp, traditional music group (uilleann pipes, tin whistles, fiddles, traditional flutes, bodhrán) and string orchestra.

Irish percussions bring an original colour to classical ensembles. *Irish suite* (1998), by Mary McAULIFFE, for voices, two flutes, violin, dulcimer, bodhrán and piano, integrates these colours in an original music group. The duet Mícheál O SÚILLEABHAIN (piano) and Mel MERCIER (bodhrán, bones) sometimes completed with a more larger ensemble associating the string orchestra, group of traditional musicians and chorus is another good example of open-mindedness for Irish percussion instruments in a mix of traditional, classical music and jazz.

### 1.3.2 – Irish harp in the art repertoire

As it has been previously mentioned, among contemporary composers who wrote for the Irish harp, few of them have already written for a traditional instrument, thus reserving a particular status for the small harp in their music. Most of them are coming from European art music, they have few links with traditional music to which they are moreover referring little. Among harpists, they are also mainly classical musicians who compose contemporary

language works for the instrument. Most of the traditional musicians to whom I sent a questionnaire recognised not knowing this repertoire.

Is the search for new sounding materials favouring the emergence of contemporary works for Irish harp? In most cases, composers agree to enhance the sounding particularities of the Irish harp. Whereas the ton of the classical harp is considered as more « anonymous » by the composer Kevin O'CONNELL, it is the clear and unique ton of the Irish harp that he carefully considered for the creation of *Kolor*. The affection of some composers for the instrument is obvious and contributes to its technical development. For all that, as Derek BALL wrote, the small harp doesn't have an influential composer yet, like a Olivier MESSIAEN could be with the *Ondes Martenots* and that would know how to open him the ways to a recognition of the contemporary music's world.

When a composer of art music writes for Irish harp, it is generally the contemporary instrument, the gut-strung one or more recently the nylon-strung one he is referring to. This Neo-Irish harp, born in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, from the Dubliner instrument maker John EGAN, has as main characteristics a middle size between the big harp and the ancient Irish one; gut-strung, as the classical harp and a blades system which is thought to have been created in the 17<sup>th</sup>. Although it is easy to see in this model a predominance of elements coming from the classical harp on those coming from the Irish harp, this instrument is first a compromise between both. At a time when the tradition of the ancient Irish harp had nearly disappeared for the classical harp, its technique and its music, the attempt to create a hybrid instrument was also a way to keep direct links with the ancient Irish harp of the Middle Ages.

Among the works referring to the historical tradition of the harp in Ireland, the second movement of the *Concerto for two Harps and Orchestra* (1992) by Shaun DAVEY is a lament on the disappearance of the great time of harpists in Ireland and of the wire-strung harp. For the composer, this instrument is the authentic « Irish » harp, symbol of the ancient Gaelic society and whose brilliant and crystal-clear ton can't be replaced by the classical harp's one. As a solo instrument, the expressive capacity of the ancient harp is also greater. It is therefore even more surprising that this tradition disappeared during the 19<sup>th</sup>.

The renewal of the *cláirseach* is still too recent to see today the appearance of a consequent repertoire of contemporary music. The works composed for the small wire-strung harp generally remain the product of harpists who perform their own music. The image of the *cláirseach* is strongly associated to traditional harp, more than the Irish harp or the Neo-Celtic one is. Composers of art music are also maybe too rarely in contact with these musicians and so doesn't know the possibilities of the instrument enough to become attached to it.

However, some works are opening the way. Next to these pieces for classical instruments, Shaun DAVEY has developed an original repertoire for full orchestra and traditional instruments, like in *The Pilgrim* (1983), a large work commissioned by the inter-Celtic festival in Lorient to commemorate the links and musical traditions of Celtic nations or regions (Scotland, Ireland, Isle of Man, Wales, Cornwall, Brittany and Galicia). Rather than integrating the classical harp, less significant of the Irish music, or the small nylon-strung harp more modern, it is the wire-strung harp the composer choose to associate the whole. The instrument has a central place next to the other soloists and proves its appropriateness to the contemporary music with an original tone on top of a particularly strong symbolic image.

## II – The development of contemporary repertoire for Irish harp

### 2.1 – Irish harp or classical harp?

#### 2.1.1 – The instruments have a musical connection

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the influence of European art music was already well established in Ireland since the nobility of the country had definitely turned towards the European court societies. O'CAROLAN's work is strongly influenced by the Italian style and at a later stage in his life he may have met with the Italian composer GEMINIANI (1687-1762), who was living in Dublin. In the edition of John and William NEAL *A Collection of the most celebrated Irish Tunes* (Dublin, 1724), one of the tunes attributed to O'CAROLAN is arranged in the Italian style ("ye Italian manner"), by Lorenzo BOCCHI, a cellist with Italian origins well esteemed in Dublin. The musical life in the upper Irish society, similar to the main European courts one is then marked by the Italian baroque style and in Ireland, it is especially influenced by CORELLI (1653-1713) and VIVALDI (1678-1741). It was also in Dublin that HANDEL's (1685-1759) *Messiah* was first performed during a visit by the composer between 1741 and 1742<sup>17</sup>.

The Irish musicians who associated with the aristocracy of the country were influenced and as a result, their performances took on the modern sound of the time. It was possible for them to adopt this style to the ancient Irish harp, however, the evolution in art language along with the development of chromaticism surpassed the technical possibilities of the instrument. Since the medieval times, the Irish harp had experienced several important mutations including the increase of its size and the number of strings. Yet, the instrument remained similar to the old harp of the medieval times and it is only from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and with the EGAN type that the classical harp became important in the evolution towards the modern Irish harp. The development of the pedals system by Sébastien ERARD, in 1811, suits the change in the music of the time. Those amongst the Irish harpists who used this system are connected with the European art music. As for the others, their number gradually declined and vanished. In both cases, the harpists experienced a common transition phase, when the musical tradition of their instrument was influenced by the Italian style.

What type of musicians did the contemporary composers of art music have in mind when they composed for the small harp? If the piece *John de Courcy's Travels*, by Elaine AGNEW, was at first meant for the classical harp, the reason why the Irish instrument was used instead were simply practical; the classical instrument was too big for the size of the concert venues. A big part of the repertoire can be transposed from one harp to another without encountering major adaptation problems. Most performers of contemporary music on the Irish harp or those who commission the works are familiar with both types of harps. Also, some composers sometimes seem to have composed for a classical harpist playing a small harp, rather than for a musician only familiar with the Irish harp.

---

<sup>17</sup> Two performances of the *Messiah* took place on the 13<sup>th</sup> of April and the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 1742, at the Fishamble Street Music Hall, in Dublin.

### 2.1.2 – The classical harp in Irish contemporary music

The contemporary repertoire for the classical harp is experiencing an important development in Ireland. From solo pieces, to chamber music, from orchestral works, to vocal or electroacoustic works, most genres are being represented. The harpist Derek BELL composed a great number of works for his instrument as, for example, the second symphony subtitled *The Violet Flame of the Compte de St. Germain* (1990), for two classical harps, choir and orchestra. The two harps render a great technical variety as well as sound effects. Similar development of the possibilities of the instrument can be found – using a very different musical language – in the concerto for harps and orchestra (1993), by the composer and pianist Philip MARTIN.

In the arrangement of the *Six Pieces for Harp* (1962), for the solo instrument, or in duet with voice or melodic instrument, Joseph GROOCK (1913-1997) used O'CAROLAN's repertoire. The voice (soprano or tenor) with the accompaniment of the harp is also the formation in the arrangement of his *Three Pieces* (or CAROLAN's lamentation, 1962), a work commissioned and performed by the harpist and singer Gráinne YEATS. The composer's use of accidental changes is moderate and in this context, this repertoire can be adapted to the Irish harp.

*A Pack of Fancies for a Travelling Harper*<sup>18</sup>, Op.66 (1970), by Brian BOYDELL (1917-2000), for solo classical harp, is made of five short pieces (*Prelude, Caoin, Impetuous Impromptu, A Dream of Ballyfarnon, Toccata*). The central pieces are a tribute to O'CAROLAN. When the composer presents the work, he points out the difficulties involved in writing for such an instrument as the harp:

« Although the harp, in one form or another, is one of the most ancient instrument still in use, its characteristic possibilities have only quite recently been explored (apart from what little we know of the special technique of the old Irish school of harpers), and it remains one of the most awkward instruments to write for in any medium beyond a simple diatonic idiom ».

Several types of writing have influenced the composer, from « *in the manner of the first prelude of BACH* » for the first piece, to a technique that represents more the old tradition of playing with the nails, in the second piece (*Caoin* or *lamentation*, in Gaelic)<sup>19</sup>. The

<sup>18</sup> First performed by Una O'DONOVAN, during the festival of contemporary music, in Dublin, in January 1971.

<sup>19</sup> The technique of playing with the nails is especially used in contemporary works for the harp. With gut-strings, this technique produces a more muffled and drier sound than the normal sound when the string is played with the tip of the finger. We can find this sound effect in *Soundings* (1983), for cello and harp, by Denise KELLY.

third piece relies on the sound effect produced by the nails on the vibrating strings or when the musician plucks a string and then presses on the pedal. Other sound effects are produced in the fourth part, including a muffled rumble from using a stick with a cork tip on the low strings and a tinkle produced by a xylophone stick hammered or in glissandi on the strings. The use of various elements doesn't alter the unity of the work that is organised around a recurrent pattern with a second minor interval followed by an interval changing depending on the pieces (third, fourth or fifth).

The organisation of musical elements around intervals is important in the evolution of certain types of contemporary music languages. The development of minimalist patterns within a metric system without barlines is also at the centre of *Earthshine* (1992), a work for classical harp, by Eibhlis FARRELL. Many works by the composer Fergus JOHNSTON are built around specific intervals, as in *Kaleidophone* (1992, revised in 1996), for string quartet, harp and percussion instruments. This system also rules the pitches in his work *Je goûte le jeu...* (1997), for string orchestra, in which a theme based on a sequence of eight notes is presented in one way, in reverse, in a mirror effect or in a mirror effect of the reverse, in a suite of variations. It is also minimalist elements of music similar to American repetitive music, that Donnacha DENNEHY uses in *Curves* (1997), for amplified harp with magnetic tape.

## 2.2 – The contributors to these developments

### 2.2.1 – Commissioned works

Commissioned works of contemporary music play an important role in the evolution of the Irish harp. Commissions are crucial for some composers whose compositions for this instrument are limited to one or two pieces that are not central to their work. *The Arts Council of Ireland*<sup>20</sup> funds several contemporary arts projects and arts in general. The following graph shows the changes in its budget since 1976<sup>21</sup>:

---

<sup>20</sup> The equivalent for Northern Ireland is the *Arts Council of Northern Ireland*.

<sup>21</sup> Source: John McLACHLAN, *The composer in Society*, in: *The Journal of Music in Ireland*, Bray Co. Wicklow, vol.1, n°5, July/August 2001, p.7.

---

### Arts Council Budgets

---

|  |
|--|
| Arts Council Budgets :<br>(£1 = € 1.27)<br>1976 : £ 990 000<br>1980 : £ 3 000 000<br>1984 : £ 5 193 000<br>1988 : £ 6 599 000<br>1992 : £ 10 161 000<br>1996 : £ 18 409 000<br>2000 : £ 34 000 000 |
|--|

---

|  |
|--|
|  |
|  |
|  |
|  |
|  |
|  |
|  |
|  |
|  |

---

The *Arts Council* is not usually the instigator of commissioned works for the Irish harp in contemporary music, which more often come from individuals or collectivities; however, it brings financial help for projects to be performed. Commissions come from private organisations, like *Cáirde na Cruite*<sup>22</sup>, rather than from public ones. Although RTÉ (Radio Telefís Éireann, the Irish National Radio and Television) plays an important part in the promotion of first performances of contemporary works especially in the repertoire for orchestra, its commissions for the instrument that symbolises the country remain few and discrete.

The development of the repertoire for the Irish harp is linked to the commissions; yet, the compositions for the instrument seem to be fairly dynamic nowadays to allow the development of a repertoire that is not funded or not commissioned. It is also comforting to see that most of the works are personally initiated by the composers.

---

<sup>22</sup> Founded in the 1960's, *Cáirde Na Cruite* (« Friends of the Harp ») organises Irish harp workshops. This association also published tutorial books for the instrument.

### 2.2.2 – The role of performers

The contact between harpist and composers plays an important part in the development of the contemporary repertoire. If the musicians, having learned both the classical and the Irish harp, are often the instigators of commissions, they are also the performers during their first public performance. Thus, harpist Helen DAVIES (nylon-strung or wire-strung harp) is composer Shaun DAVEY's favourite performer (*The Pilgrim*, 1983). The Duo Gráinne YEATS and Mercedes BOLGER is associated with the first performance of part of the contemporary repertoire for two Irish harps (*Introduction and Air for two Harps*, J. TRIMBLE, or again *Spanish Arch*, by J. WILSON).

Besides her performance of contemporary works for solo Irish harp (*Kolor*, by K. O'CONNELL), the harpist and composer Anne-Marie O'FARRELL, in her duet with the mezzo-soprano Aylish KERRIGAN, is the instigator of the creation of part of the repertoire for voice and harp. Although in these works, the vocal and the instrumental parts have their own separate performers, in the works by Brian BOYDELL, or in *A Woman Young and Old*, by James WILSON, they are assigned to the same person; in this case, on the day of their first performance by G. YEATS. I will come back to this division, especially to be found in the ancient tradition of the Irish harp, in the third part of this report.

### 2.2.3 – The role of musical publications

Unlike the repertoire of traditional music, which is passed on orally, the art music repertoire is essentially written. Music publications are therefore important in its development and its diffusion. The publication of the Contemporary Music Centre in Dublin allow us to have access to this repertoire, but its diffusion is yet limited. Then, a lot of works remain in manuscript form and of a graphic quality sometimes difficult to read. If private musical publishers remain timid as for the publication of the repertoire – the potential of musicians likely to plat this music being not today sufficient from the commercial point of view – it is also their role to raise an interest in the harpists by the availability of these works. One thing leading to the other, it is also by presenting a material of quality that one can develop a market.

Tutorial books have a greater distribution, like the collections by Nancy CALTHORPE (*Begin the Harp*, CALTHORPE Collection, *A Tribute to O'CAROLAN*, *A Tribute to MOORE*, *A Celtic Bouquet*, all Walton's Publications, Dublin). The development of a contemporary repertoire for the instrument is also linked to the apprenticeship of young musicians. The *Irish Harp Book*<sup>23</sup>, by Sheila LARCHET CUTHBERT, commissioned by *Cáirde na Cruite*, allows us to examine very different musical styles. One part is composed of exercises allowing musicians to develop their technique before moving on to the second part, which contains works from the repertoire (among others: *Three Pieces for the Irish Harp*, by G. VICTORY; *Spanish Arch*, for two Irish harps, by J. WILSON; or, for the same ensemble, the difficult *Scintillae*, by S. BODLEY). The whole work offers a fairly complete picture intended for beginners as well as advanced players.

---

<sup>23</sup> LARCHET CUTHBERT, Sheila, *The Irish Harp Book, a tutor and companion*, Cork and Dublin, The Mercier Press, 1993 (first ed. 1975).

## 2.2.4 – The development of harp making

If the making of the Irish harp is nowadays relatively reliable and of good quality, the difficulty to find such an instrument fifty years ago could discourage more than one harpist. At that time, the importance of its development was ignored and only the beginning of its revival could be felt. The rare musicians to persevere in the search for a reliable instrument often met with craft requirements that were not necessarily in accordance with their desire to recreate the historical instrument.

Nowadays, the demand is bigger and the increase in the number of harpists was followed by an increase in quality and the numbers of instruments. In the whole of Ireland (Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland), thirteen harp makers are now registered: Paddy CAFFERKY (Co. Galway), Paul DOOLEY (Co. Clare), Paul DOYLE (Co. Westmeath), Laurence EGAR (Cork), Nial IMBUSCH (Limerick), Malachy KEARNS (Co. Galway), Peter KILROY (Co. KERRY), Martin MURPHY (Co. Mayo), Jan MUYLLAERT (Co. Meath), Colm O'MEACHAIR (Dublin), Patrick et John QUINN (Dublin), James RUSSELL (Co. Down, Irlande du Nord), Wolf SEIBERT (Co. KERRY)<sup>24</sup>.

## 2.3 – Is there an audience for the contemporary repertoire of Irish harp?

If the image of the Irish harp is that of an instrument derived from traditional music, its musical reality is quite different. It is the role of the classical harpists, as well as the traditional harpists, to develop the contemporary repertoire and to bring it to an audience often eager for new sounds. By ignoring this music, they contribute, on the one hand, in building virtual barriers between art music and popular music and, on the other hand, they restrain a musical expression just as creative. The musician's interest in the contemporary repertoire should arouse the curiosity of the audience and not the opposite.

When the musician wants to approach a music, whatever music it may be, he must have a certain amount of elements, learnt during his years of apprenticeship. He must know certain rules of interpretation specific to contemporary music, just as he must learn the different styles of the traditional repertoire. If the harpist's repertoire evolves more and more towards a mix of musical genres, possibly combining successively jazz, art music, to traditional tunes, the composers also followed this way, displaying very different languages. Contemporary music thus offers a world of sounds, with an important expressive potential. This world of sounds, if given as a whole, can be fully judged by the audience for its own value.

---

<sup>24</sup> Most of them are listed in: PYE, Joyce, *Ireland's Musical Instrument Makers*, Galway, Salmon Publishing, 1990, p.23-25.

### III – The contemporary music for Irish harp

#### 3.1 – The different repertoires of the Irish harp nowadays

Nowadays, the musician playing Irish harp has three main repertoires. The older one, the one that could be qualified as historical or of the ancient tradition, groups together compositions that have been passed down to us on a manuscript form or that have been published since the first publications in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was also from that time that the first harpists' names reached us, like Ruairí Dall Ó CATHÁIN (around 1550-1650, Co. Derry), Myles O'REILLY (c. 1635-?, Co. Cavan), the brothers Thomas and William CONNELLAN (respectively 1640-*ante* 1700, c. 1645-?, Co. Sligo), Thady KEENAN (*fl. c.* 1700) and the most famous of them: Toirdhealbhach O Cearbhallain (1670-1738, Co. Meath), more known under the name Turlough O'Carolan or simply Carolan. His work is to be considered as being at the junction of several influences : at the same time heir of the Irish harp tradition, it was also imbued with the Italian baroque style, then very in fashion in the Irish upper class. The traditional music is the third repertoire which influenced his style. O'CAROLAN's work was born of this junction of very different styles. For all that, he is still considered as the first composer of music in Ireland.

The whole of this repertoire was completed by the collections, particularly those of Edward BUNTING, further to the 1792 harp festival in Belfast. Concerned with preserving harpists' repertoire, then in danger of disappearing, BUNTING was ordered to transcribe the tunes played during this festival. This work would be the subject of three publications: *A General Collection of the Ancient Irish Music* (1796), *A General Collection of the Ancient Music of Ireland* (1809) and his most famous collection: *The Ancient Music of Ireland* (1840). A part of the ancient harp tradition in Ireland reached us through those collections and so constitutes the first source of this repertoire.

The second repertoire, commonly called « traditional », was born from the contact with popular musicians. It groups together the tunes and dances' arrangements coming from the tradition or recent compositions having a traditional spirit. Directly influenced by the other popular instruments, it corresponds to a new tradition of the Irish harp and that is associated to its renewal in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Neglected by the musicians who turned to the classical instrument, the instrument was appropriated by the traditional musicians to develop it this new repertoire. In a way, Irish harp in traditional music was born from an exchange between musical genres. Other instruments have known this phenomenon, like the bouzouki, coming from Greece and whose integration is going to be achieved.

However, whereas the bouzouki is present within the musical sessions in the *pubs*, in the same way as uilleann pipes, the fiddle or the banjo, or associated to concert groups of traditional music, the harp, as for it, remains nearly absent from the Irish musical scene. Less sounding than the other instruments, it is also of a relatively imposing size and has a playing technique considered as being particularly difficult. Finally, the instrument appears more as a solo one able to satisfy itself on a harmonic ground. Despite these reasons, nowadays the traditional instrument knows an important development and some success with the audience.

The oral transmission is also a characteristic of the traditional instrument, though this one is more a learning principle. Indeed, more and more traditional musicians, particularly

harpists, read and learn on scores. The development of writing is also associated to a more developed musical education and we would acknowledge important functions to this transmission. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, few musicians could really sight-read tunes' collections gathered by Francis O'NEILL<sup>25</sup>. Today they all agree to recognize the essential character of his books. No other society than ours would have put such forward the importance of writing. Without the collections of the previous century, the ancient tradition of the harp would have simply disappeared and would be unknown to us. The keeping spirit is now well integrated and since 1987, traditional Irish music has its sanctuary in the *Irish Traditional Music Archives*<sup>26</sup> in Dublin.

Although writing is seen as a means of ensuring the transmission of history and so of identity<sup>27</sup>, the traditional musician would never have put so much forward the oral learning principle. For the popular musician, the score only remains a mnemotechnical means. Besides, many of them use tablatures instead of classical staves<sup>28</sup>. The oral learning makes the listening, observation, and then imitation intervenes. On one side, it develops the technique of the musician and on the other side, it brings it the context without which the style could not exist. It is also about the transmission of culture through the exchange from a musician to another or from the master to the pupil. When he sight-read a contemporary score, he moves on to another musical tradition with its conventions, a different spirit and audience.

The third musical category of the small harp is made up of art music's works, that is to say, the repertoire specially composed for the instrument at our time. It is precisely it the subject of our study. Whereas the musician of the first two repertoires is an arranger, a composer and a performer of his own music, the one of the third category is first a performer. The transmission of the repertoire is also different: essentially oral for the first two<sup>29</sup>, it is written for this last one.

More recently, other styles of music have found repercussions on some musicians. However, these genres are not representative enough yet, next to the other repertoires of the Irish harp; I will only allude briefly to one of them. The influence of jazz is important within traditional musicians, maybe because of a very easy writing and a spirit of perpetual variations close to their own music. The harpist Máire NÍ CHATHASAIGH, playing in duet with the guitarist Chris NEWMAN, has developed an original jazz music for his instrument and distinct from his traditional repertoire. On the contrary and more generally, other harpists are making their language evolve when they integrate specific elements of jazz style, like harmonic, rhythmic and in a more moderate way, melodic elements. The mix of traditional tunes with jazz colours corresponds more to the evolution of the second repertoire, whose one representative is the pianist and composer Micheál Ó SÚILLEABHÁIN. This last category illustrates again the vivacity of the genres' mixes in Irish music nowadays and the adaptation to new styles by its musicians.

---

<sup>25</sup> Francis O'NEILL, himself, didn't read music. The transcription of his tunes in his works was realized by James O'NEILL.

<sup>26</sup> Nicholas CAROLAN (director), *Irish Traditional Music Archives*, 63, Merrion Square, Dublin 2.

<sup>27</sup> Breandán BREATHNACH thus considered the collectors (BUNTING, PETRIE, JOYCE) as « *nation builders* ». BREATHNACH, Breandán, *The Use of Notation in the transmission of Irish Folk Music*, O RIADA Memorial Lecture 1, Cork, The Irish Traditional Music Society, UCC, 1986, p.2.

<sup>28</sup> Particularly the accordionists and more recently some fiddle players.

<sup>29</sup> The ancient tradition of the Middle Ages harp was passed down orally and it is to be thought that this tradition would have endured if it had not been subjected to the consequences of persecutions harpists had to face.

### 3.2 – Realization of the catalogue of contemporary music

The catalogue of contemporary music's works was realized from four main sources. The first two are preestablished catalogues whose publications date from 1968 and 1982. The third one is the database realized by the *Contemporary Music Centre* in Dublin. A selection of this catalogue is the subject of an annual edition and we can also have access to it thanks to their website<sup>30</sup>. However, the huge creation of Irish composer is not totally registered and I joined it a fourth personal source but which is far from being exhaustive. The table added in the last part of the questionnaire sent to composers shows up to which point the inventory of musical works remains a long work, some of them having escaped, for varied reasons, to previous catalogues. Of course, I would not claim to have realized the complete catalogue of the contemporary music works for Irish harp, but at least a contribution to its realization.

The first catalogue: *A Catalogue of Contemporary Irish Composers*<sup>31</sup>, by Edgard DEALE was published in 1968, at a time when Irish harp was not already very present, including among the traditional musicians. Twenty-three contemporary composers are registered in it, among whom only five have one or several works to their credit for the Irish harp:

- BODLEY, Seóirse : *Scintillae* (1968), 2 Irish hp.
- BOYDELL, Brian : *Three Yeats Songs* (1965), sop. and Irish hp.  
*Caoine Phiarais Feiritéara* (arrangement), Irish hp.  
*Lord Mayo* (arrangement), voice and Irish hp.
- DEALE, Edgar M. : *The Castle of Dromore* (1949 – arrangement),  
Choir (SSA) and Irish hp. or pno.
- POTTER, A.J. : *A Full House of Harpers* (1963), 2 classical hp and 12 Irish hp.
- WILSON, James : *A Woman Young an Old* (1966), Op.20, sop. and Irish hp.

In total, four compositions and three arrangements: the more ancient work is the arrangement of the traditional melody *The Castle of Dromore* (1949), by Edgard DEALE (1902-1999), the author of the catalogue ; the most ancient composition is *A Full House of Harpers*, by A.J. POTTER (1918-1980) and dates from 1963.

\*  
\* \*

---

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.cmc.ie>

<sup>31</sup> DEALE, Edgard M., *A Catalogue of Contemporary Irish Composers*, Dublin, The Music Association of Ireland, 1968.

The second catalogue is the *Catalogue of Contemporary Irish Music*<sup>32</sup>, by Bernard HARRISON, published in 1982. Fourteen years after DEALE's catalogue, the number of composers had more than doubled, reaching the number of fifty-four, among whom thirteen have composed for the Irish harp. The number of pieces for the instrument went to eighteen. Some are dated before 1968, that is to say before the publication of DEALE's catalogue. Most of them (eleven on the eighteen) were the subject of the edition of *The Irish Harp Book*<sup>33</sup>, published in 1975. The titles of these works are preceded by an asterisk.

Not all the pieces registered have the indication « Irish harp », but sometimes simply « harp », which so could lead to confusion. When these works can be played only with the levers harp or when the indication of the edition specifies it, I have transferred them with the other pieces for Irish harp, specifying it with « Irish » between brackets.

- BODLEY, Seóirse : *Scintillae*\* (1968), 2 hp (Irish).
- BOYDELL, Brian : *Four Sketches for two Irish Harps* (1962), Op52, (N°2 & 3)\*, 2 Irish hp.  
*Three Yeats Songs* (1965), Op 56a, sop. and Irish hp.  
*Musician's Song* (1965), Op56b, sop. and Irish hp.
- DEALE, Edgar M : *For the Children* (1971), (N°1 & 2)\*, voice and hp (Irish)
- DOYLE, Roger : *Ceol Sidhe* (1973), uilleann pipes, tin whistle and Irish hp.
- FLEISCHMANN, Aloys : *An Coitin Dearg*\* (1970), hp. (Irish) version.
- FRIEL, James Redmond : *Inishowen* (1972), Irish hp., strings orch.
- KELLY, Thomas C. : *Interlude*\* (1966), Irish hp.
- KINSELLA, John : *Allegro Giocoso*\* (1966), hp (Irish).
- O GALLCHOBHAIR, Eamonn : *Tostal Music* (1953), voice and Irish hp.  
*Déirín Dé*\* (1966), hp (Irish).
- POTTER, A J : *A Full House of Harpers* (1963), 2 classical hp and 12 Irish hp.  
*Etude bitonal*\* (1968), hp (Irish).
- TRIMBLE, Joan : *Air for two Irish Harps*\* (1969), 2 Irish hp.
- VICTORY, Gerard : *Three Pieces*\* (1966), hp (Irish).
- WILSON, James : *A Woman Young and Old* (1966), Op.20, sop. and Irish hp.  
*Spanish Arch*\* (1968), 2 Irish hp.

Only the compositions have been registered. The arrangements have disappeared from this catalogue. It must be noticed that the more ancient work, *Tostal Music* (1963), by Eamonn O GALLCHOBHAIR (1910-1982), was absent from DEALE's catalogue.

\*

<sup>32</sup> HARRISON, Bernard : *Catalogue of Contemporary Irish Music*, Dublin, Irish Composer's Centre, 1982.

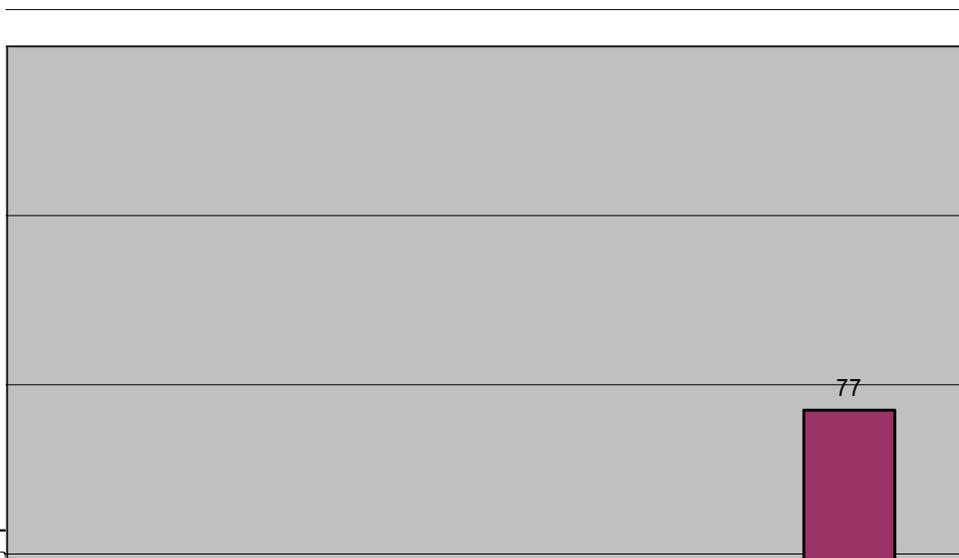
<sup>33</sup> LARCHET CUTHBERT, Sheila, *The Irish Harp Book*, Dublin, The Mercier Press, 1993 (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1975).

\* \*

The database of the Contemporary Music Centre in Dublin (CMC) is a very useful tool and the number of pieces of information recorded in it is considerable. However the entire repertoire is not totally registered. At the beginning of the year 2002, this catalogue listed one hundred and thirty-seven composers in total, that is to say more than the double of HARRISON's catalogue. Among them, twenty-five have composed one or several works for Irish harp, for a total of seventy-seven pieces. Some works of the first two catalogues don't appear in the CMC file. It is generally not indicated if the works are original or arranged, in most cases they are compositions.

\*  
\* \*

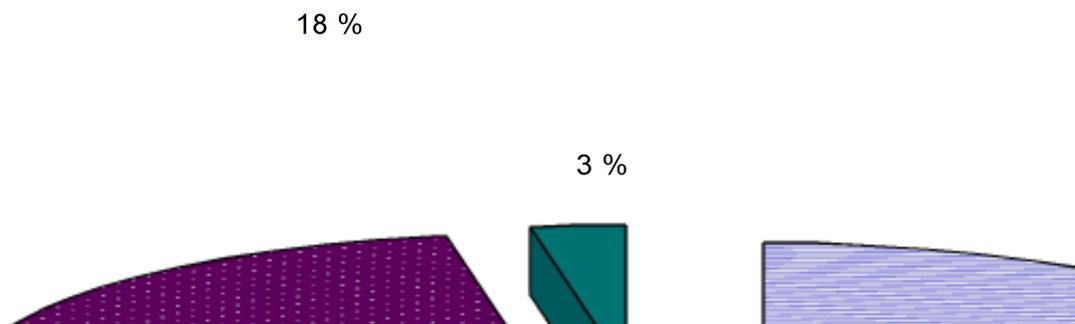
The last source of pieces of information is personal. On one side, it comes from an inventory directly with the composers and, on the other side, it has been completed by a research in musical libraries and bookshops. Only the composers who have a significant work in the contemporary repertoire are present in this list. There are a lot of isolated works, of a relative importance, which have not or a little diffusion and so are not part of the common musical background. These pieces, generally appropriate, are not representative of the contemporary repertoire of the Irish harp, and so I have dismissed them from our inventory. So the catalogue I propose includes thirty-two composers, for a total of one hundred and eleven works<sup>34</sup>. Most of them are original compositions, a part is arrangements. If I can claim that it is representative of the contemporary repertoire of the Irish harp, I can difficulty judge the quantity of unlisted works. First, because of isolated pieces for the previously mentioned reasons and second, because some composers obviously keep out of any kind of census. The above graphic represents the progression of the number of composers and contemporary works registered by the catalogues:



<sup>34</sup> This catalo

### 3.3 – Different musical genres

The whole constituent works of the contemporary repertoire for Irish harp can be grouped under five different musical genres: 1- The solo pieces; 2- The chamber music works; 3- The works with orchestra; 4- The vocal works, among which I will make a distinction between those for solo voice and for harp – works that constitutes an important part of the repertoire – of other music groups (for choir, several voices or with other associated instruments); 5- Finally, the electroacoustic works which have appeared in the repertoire. The graphic below represents the whole one hundred and eleven works listed, divided according to their category:



The works for solo harp constitute the main represented genre, that is to say around the third of the repertoire (35%), nearly equal to the category grouping together all the voices works (18% + 15%, that is to say 33% in total, also a third of the repertoire). A little less than the third left groups together the works for Irish harp among instrumental groups of every size (chamber music: 23% and orchestra: 6%, that is to say 29% in total). With only 3%, the electroacoustic works are few represented.

The repertoire for solo Irish harp is also made up of short pieces, going from one to five minutes. Some works last more, going up to ten minutes (*Kolor*, K. O'CONNELL), and twelve minutes for the longest (*Scénario*, G. VICTORY). *An Album of Pieces for the Irish Harp*, by Brian BOYDELL, reaches the twenty minutes, but in several pieces whose longest, *Lament for a Legendary Queen*, doesn't last more than six minutes.

Half of the chamber music concerns Irish harp groups, most of the time in duet. One third associates the harp in duet to another instrument (flute, violin, cello or the percussion). The rest of the repertoire is made up of varied classical formations (with violin and bassoon or string quartet), groups associating classical and traditional instruments (D. BALL, *Mary's Piece*, 1991, for pipes, violin, viola, concertina and Irish harp), groups with traditional instruments (R. DOYLE, *Ceol Sídhe*, 1973, for uilleann pipes, tin whistle and Irish harp).

With 6% of the repertoire, the works for orchestra and Irish harp are few represented. Most of them associate the instrument as soloist, within a string orchestra (D. BALL,

*Miniature concerto*, 1997; J.R. FRIEL, *Inishowen*, 1972) or within a more important orchestra (P. CASSIDY, *Three Carolan Pieces*). For sounding volume reasons, orchestral works are mainly aimed at the big harp, but not only. The intimacy of a smaller music group is also more favourable to the Irish harp. Within an orchestra, when the subject takes up the « Celtic » thematic, it is common to see the appearance of the small harp. It is then amplified to compensate for its low sounding volume and finds its place next to other traditional instruments like the Scottish bagpipes, the Irish uilleann pipes, the bodhrán or the traditional flute. *The Pilgrim* (S. DAVEY, 1983), I have already mentioned, is one of the first far-reaching works associating the full orchestra, the Irish harp and traditional instruments.

The vocal works with the small harp are as much represented as the solo repertoire. Very early in the history of music, string instruments were already associated to the song or to the recited text<sup>35</sup>. The practice of the song accompanied on harp was also important in the Middle Ages Ireland. The remained famous scene, by John DERRICKE, *Image of Ireland* (1581), gives us a representation of the ancient tradition of the *reacaire* (or bard) who recites a poem made up by the *file* (the poet living in the court) and accompanied on the harp by the *cruitire*. Then, the three functions would be filled by one and the same person and this tradition would live on through O'CAROLAN's works during the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup>.



John DERRICKE, *Image of Ireland*, 1581<sup>36</sup>.

The harp is represented in a symbolic way; we would notice the improbabilities in its form, the strings being both fixed to the forepillar and the neck.

The works for voices accompanied on Irish harp represent 15% of the contemporary repertoire of the instrument. 18% are made up of works with chord, or several voices and sometimes associated to other instruments (E. FARRELL, *Windfalls*, 1990, for soprano, flute, clarinet, violin, Irish harp and percussion among which the bodhrán and bones).

<sup>35</sup> This practice would have been established since the third millennium B.C. By Joan RIMMER, *op. cit.*, p.5.

<sup>36</sup> In : Y DELYN , Christine, *Clàirseach, la harpe irlandaise : aux origines de la harpe celtique*, Plounéour-Menez, Hent Telenn Breizh, 1998, p.34.

The last category concerns the electroacoustic works whose number is however not yet representative of an established musical expression. In *Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf* and *the Writer's Farewell*, both composed in 1990 by Paul HAYES<sup>37</sup>, the voice is associated with the Irish harp and with the magnetic tape. Originally for string quartet and computerized tones, *Critique*, by the composer Derek BALL, was recently transcribed in a version for violin, clarinet, cello, Irish harp and still associated to computerized tones. The electroacoustic works are new in the Irish harp repertoire. In a way, they constitute an avant-garde and reflect a similar development to the Celtic harp's one in Brittany.

### 3.4 – The languages used in the contemporary music for Irish harp

#### 3.4.1 – The difficulties of writing for the instrument

The difficulties relative to the writing for the Irish harp don't seem to be more problematic than for any other instrument, «each instrument brings particular considerations» (R. CLARKE). The harpists are naturally more objective as for the technical capacities of the instrument and «what is in the heart will out!» (K. LOUGHNANE). However the levers system and the sounding particularities impose inherent restrictions to the small harp and often different from those of the pedals harp. «The harp, like the piano, is not an easy instrument to write for; too many notes, too many possibilities only available to those who are properly equipped to exploit them» (S. DAVEY). Then the classical harp has a more important ambitus than the Irish harp. This technical point can become important from the moment that the composer creates a music which exploits the different registers of the instrument (like for *Kolor*, by K. O'CONNELL).

The Irish harp is an instrument limited in its harmonic possibilities and less fluid in its accidentals' changes than the classical pedals harp. Some of the musical languages of the contemporary music have a very important potential of notes' accidentals, particularly the serial or dodecaphonic system and more commonly atonal for the Irish harp. To watch carefully at the levers' position during the work is fundamental and it is common to notice oversights and mistakes in the changes of accidentals.

If, for some composers, this system lays on a simplicity nearly «archaic» (compared to the pedals system of the classical harp), for the others and on the opposite, it gives possibilities of complex and different tunings on the whole compass of the instrument, which makes possible the development of non-diatonic scales. The pedals of the big harp are absolutely adapted to changes of tonalities or modes. On the other hand, when the musical language goes out of the tonal or modal context, the composer faces similar problems to the levers harp. Some tunings or melodic lines associating a note and an altered octave are just impossible with a classical harp. In *Scintillae*, Seóirse BODLEY exploits these possibilities, for example, in a tuning of the second harp (first system of the page 217 of *The Irish Harp Book*, Cork and Dublin, Mercier Press, 1993) :

---

<sup>37</sup> The first work was composed in collaboration with Donal HURLEY and Fergus JOHNSTON.



In this example, whereas the first chord is possible with the pedals harp by replacing the low *A flat* by its enharmony *G sharp*, because of the presence in the same chord of a *A natural*, on the other hand, the second chord is exclusively written for the levers harp; the simultaneously disposition of the notes *B flat – B natural – C – C sharp – D* can not be played on the big harp.

The change of accidentals during a piece remains a technical point the composer must completely consider in the languages he uses. For the traditional harpists, the numerous changes of levers during a piece go against the music assigned to the instrument, like to the technique of the musician. For the harpist Kathleen LOUGHNANE, the abundance of these changes « remains a non musical experience, more a gymnastic encounter and the squeaks from the levers completely interrupt the music mode or melody ». On account of the disposition of levers on the left side of the neck<sup>38</sup>, the changes of accidentals are assigned to the left hand of the musician. The harpist can quickly change the tuning of his instrument and an enough well-considered writing allow him to make it with as much flexibility and rapidity than the pedal system.

Next to her traditional repertoire, the harpist Máire NÍ CHATHASAIGH has developed a jazz repertoire in which the left hand is nearly exclusively reserved to the changes of accidentals: so the line above the right hand can evolve in a chromatic way, but to the detriment of the purely musical playing of the left hand, which thus restricts the bass line. So, the harp becomes a monodic instrument.

Because the levers system is restrictive in some harmonies or some melodic lines, composers have to develop an adapted language. For Derek BALL, the system of the classical pedals harp has as much advantages in certain respects than others have weaknesses, it particularly limits the vertical structure. The difficulty of tuning the harp (the levers or the pedals one), beforehand or in the changes during the work, remains an abiding feature in the contrapuntal lines. When it is possible, the common use of the homophones with classical harp to overcome some harmonic constraints remains as efficient to the Irish harp. The contemporary music is so not inevitably more adapted to the pedals of the big harp than to the levers of the small one. The great variety of musical languages at our time favours sometimes one and sometimes the other.

Each instruments family has sounding qualities which are peculiar to it and develops a musical material consequently. The small wire-strung harp has a different repertoire than the gut-strung or nylon-strung one. The characteristic of the levers system, which permits to play a note at the same time as its altered octave, also offers possibilities of dissonances with a sounding result very different according to the strings which are used. The harmonics which come from the plucking of these dissonances on nylon strings have nothing in common with

<sup>38</sup> The neck is the upper part of the instrument, where are fixed the pegs and sillets aimed at hitching the strings. On the other extremity, the strings are hitched to the soundbox.

those of the classical gut-strung harp or those of the piano. This tone is often qualified as crystal-clear, sometimes of sharp flavour.

To illustrate this sounding singularity and the particularities of the levers system, Derek BALL composed a short piece entitled *Sans embellissement* (2001), dedicated to the author of the present report, further to the stimulation provoked by the questionnaire I sent him. On the front page of the work, the composer gives us his intention in the search for the « naturel fondamental de la harpe celtique »<sup>39</sup>: « Est-ce qu'on peut faire un bruit déplaisant en la jouant ? Dans cette pièce je m'affaire à le découvrir ! »<sup>40</sup>. The tuning is different on all the range of the instrument and stays fixed during the piece. Among the musical material used, the most peculiar is a series of rising notes in octaves most of the time altered (generally in seventh major, but also in augmented octaves), in the image of the first bar's motif:

Tempo Giusto ♩ = 100



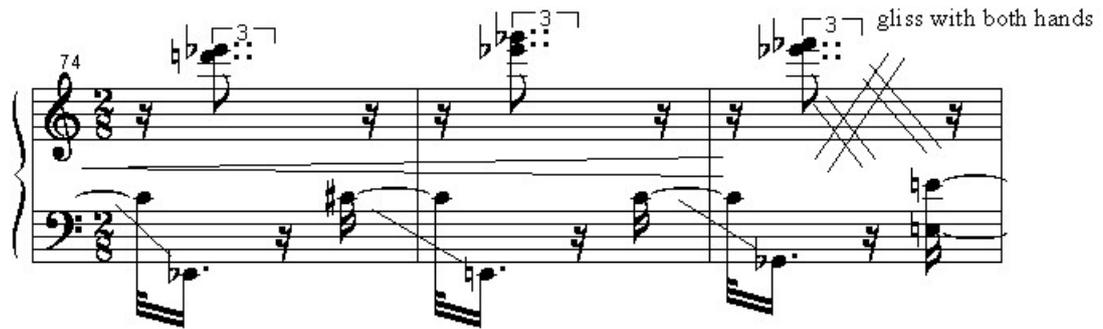
The musical score is written on a single staff with a treble clef. It is in 7/8 time and marked 'Tempo Giusto' with a quarter note equal to 100. The first measure is marked 'pesant' and 'ff'. The motif consists of a series of rising notes in octaves, with some alterations.

Derek BALL, *Sans Embellissement* (2001),  
for Celtic harp. Initial motif.

The levers system of the Irish harp is admittedly less flexible than the double movement of the pedals harp. Each lever changes the chord of a semitone, but all the accidentals are not available. Sometimes the composer is forced to think in enharmony or homophone, more common habit of the big harp. However, some of the scales used ask for a change or another tuning of the instrument. In *Kolor* (1999), for solo Irish harp, Kevin O'CONNELL ask for a specific tuning of the instrument: the starting scale is *D flat major*, so the musician has to tune his instrument (on top of other specific tunings to some strings, like for example: the lowering of *F* and *G* high in the *flat-natural* position of the following illustration). This solution consisting in modifying the harp's tuning, generally doesn't fill the harpists with enthusiasm. Too common changes alter the particularly sensitive accuracy of their instrument.

<sup>39</sup> In French in the score: « the fundamental natural of the Celtic harp ».

<sup>40</sup> In French in the score: « Can we make a disagreeable noise when playing it? In this piece I busy myself discovering it ! ».



Kevin O'CONNELL, *Kolor* (1999),  
Contemporary Music Centre.

The tuning of the harp changes according to the models. Whereas the classical harp is tuned, with the strings free (that is to say the pedals are released), in *C flat major*; the Celtic harp is generally in *E flat major* (levers on the low position, that is to say which don't pluck the strings). As for the Irish harp in the traditional music, it is generally tuned in *C major*. The tuning of these instruments is linked to their repertoire: the double movement pedals of the classical harp give it the access to all the scales of the tonal system, from seven flats to seven sharps in the key signature. The Celtic harp is more associated to the traditional Breton music, whose main tonalities are more on the flats' side, particularly *B flat major*, common tonality on the bombard. The most important part of the Irish traditional music is played on the tonality of *G major* or *D major*. The tuning of the Irish harp is also more centred to these tonalities.

### 3.4.2- Different languages

The Irish or Celtic harp is abusively classified among the traditional instruments and we have previously seen mainly why. Traditional music, tonal or modal for the Irish music and mainly modal for the Breton music, is certainly absolutely adapted to the levers instrument. In his great orchestral works, with traditional instruments among which the Irish harp, the composer Shaun DAVEY gladly uses this modality (*The Pilgrim*, 1983, *Granuaile*, 1985): « it makes melody pure and harmony strong and simple ». For it is also the respect of a technique and a music characteristic of the traditional instruments, which justify his language choice. The innovation or creation of a new way of thinking creates some excess « musically unproductive with lack of fulfilment for the player ».

The tonal or more generally modal language, without a change of accidentals, can become a principle preceding the work's composition, like in *Leaves Lie* (1991), for mezzo-soprano and Irish harp, by Martin O'LEARY, and in which the harp's part keeps its initial tuning during the whole piece. Other works are close to a more classical language and writing, close to the big harp's repertoire (J. KINSELLA, *Allegro Giocoso*, 1966; G. VICTORY, *Three Pieces for the Irish Harp*, 1966; D. McNULTY, *Fantasia, Berceuse, Rondo*), sometimes in study form (A.-M. O'FARRELL, *Etude for three Irish harps*, 1998; T.C. KELLY, *Interlude*, 1966; A.J. POTTER, *Etude Bitonal*, 1968).

The links between the different classical and traditional music are important and particularly in the Irish harp's repertoire. Among the numerous references to the ancient tradition of the harp and to O'CAROLAN, let's mention Derek BELL's arrangements

(*Carolan's receipt*, 1971-1972, for one, two, or three Irish harps) or Anne-Marie O'FARRELL's (*A Carolan Suite; Carolan's Concerto*, for solo Irish harp). Within a formation associating Irish harp to the string orchestra, his tunes know an important development of the number of the arrangements (P. CASSIDY, *Three Carolan Pieces*; S. LARCHET CUTHBERT, *Carolan Suite*, 1990; H. NELSON, *Quintet A Carolan Tune*). Some traditional instruments are sometimes associated to this formation (D. BELL, *Immortal Carolan melodies*, 1985, for Irish harp, Neo-Irish harp, traditional group and string orchestra).

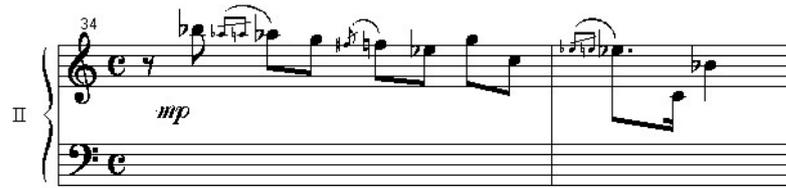
Contemporary composers are more and more developing different styles or kinds of writings. In his traditional music's pieces, Derek BALL gladly uses the pentatonic modes, on the opposite his work *The Mary's Piece* (1991), for pipes, violin, alto, concertina and Irish harp, keeps a style linked to O'CAROLAN's music; in other works (*Céadalchoire*, 1995, for two Irish harps or in the recent version of *Critique*, 2001, for violin, clarinet, cello, Celtic harp and computer), a more modern, often atonal, language is used.

This atonal language, particularly adapted to the levers system of the Irish or Celtic harp, for the reasons we have already seen, is also used in Rhona CLARKE's works, with some references to the tonality however. Some of his works, particularly the vocal works, thus juxtapose atonal with other microtonal sections. If *Sympathy* (2000), for mezzo-soprano, baritone, flute, percussion and Irish harp is a tonal piece, *Liadáin* (1988), for mezzo-soprano and Irish harp, uses an atonal language, on an initial tuning of the harp developed consequently:



Initial tuning of the harp in *Liadáin* (1988), for mezzo-soprano and Irish harp, by Rhona CLARKE. we would notice the enharmonies (*G sharp – A flat*) and (*F sharp – G flat*), that would need a beforehand tuning of the harp.

In his pieces dedicated to the small harp, James WILSON uses different types of musical languages and the possibilities of the instrument affect its musical expression a lot. In *Spanich Arch* (1966), for two Irish harps, he uses an effect linked to the changes of levers whereas the string is still vibrating. In the following example, the material of the second harp develops a melodic line (because of the changes of levers assigned to the left hand) under the form of an upside down chromaticism (*B flat – A flat – A natural*) and then of a linear one (*A natural – A flat – G – F sharp – F natural*):



James WILSON, *Spanish Arch*, 1966.  
*The Irish Harp Book*, Mercier Press, 1993.

It must be noticed that the one movement levers system offers two possibilities of chromaticism, without changes. For a Celtic harp tuned in *E flat major*: *C sharp – D – E flat* and *F sharp – G – A flat*. For an Irish harp tuned in *C major*: *A sharp – B – C* and *D sharp – E – F*. In *Spanish Arch*, the two harps are also not tuned the same, which permits the composer to obtain a scale with a potential of more important pitches; then the changes of accidentals during the work will increase these possibilities. The complementarity of the tunings of the two instruments gives the illusion of chromaticism, like in the following example in which *F* and *F sharp* are altered in a close way:



The works which exploit many musical parameters often have a more complex degree of writing. *Kolor* (K. O'CONNELL, 1999), I already talked about, explore the whole registers of the instrument, either in a moderate progression through small intervals, or in a quick one, through big intervals (sometimes more than two octaves). So some counterpoints can remain confined in intervals going from a fourth to a fifth to suddenly leaving escape an imposing series of perfect or altered octaves, or even more. The colour evoked by the title can refer to the specific scale on the whole range of the harp which is offered to us in small touches at the beginning of the work. We would regret the many mistakes in the work's edition, particularly during the changes of accidentals, which make the reading particularly difficult.



Kevin O'CONNELL, *Kolor* (1999).  
Contemporary Music Centre.

If the author of *Kolor* stays more gladly in a traditional way of writing, in his piece *Scintillae* (1968) for two Irish harps, Seóirse BODLEY adopts a resolutely more modern style. His language associates traditional writing to sounding effects characteristic of the instruments and aleatoric parameters. The tuning of the two harps is also complementary, so that some chromaticisms appear between the two, like it was previously presented in *Spanish Arch*. Thanks to brief but regular pauses during the work, the performers can modify his tuning. The aleatoric writing is also controlled in the sense that possibilities are limited to some choices in the material proposed and in its interpretation. Performers have to be informed and experienced to use this type of writing whatever presented traditionally on a staff, in a cell form or in a reservoir of notes.

The composer exploits a lot of technical and musical possibilities: besides the aleatoric sections, the work makes a range of important nuances intervene, that is to say every kind of intervals, dissonant and complementary harmonies between the two harps, the playing with the nails – which is reminding us of the ancient tradition of the wire-strung harp<sup>41</sup> – clusters on the different registers of the instruments, the playing « près de la table »<sup>42</sup> which develops a mat ton, harmonies, glissandi, rising or lowering arpeggios, or as well percussions with the palm of the hand on the strings. The capacity of resonance of the instruments is exploited through chords that are left vibrating or that are associated to pauses. On the opposite, a great number of mufflings makes clearer some motifs.

If the two harps start by similar and simultaneous rhythms, at the image of a unique instrument, sprinkled with appoggiaturas and small furtive notes, their playing quickly becomes independent and follows a way that seems to them intrinsic and with no connection with the other. Whereas one develops a writing within barlines, the other one evolves in an aleatoric way, with however some meeting points. Complex rhythms have become interlinked between the two performers. At this stage of their independence, the development of their playing reappears in a complementary way, but different than the starting one: the two harps intervene in a very close way and are now juxtaposed, in such a way that when listening we could hear only one instrument with many possibilities. The central chaotic episode finishes when the two harps find their initial situation again to rhythmically finish in one voice.

<sup>41</sup> This effect seems particularly used in the contemporary music for Irish harp. It is also to be found in *Ceol Sidhe* (1973), for uilleann pipes, tin whistle and Irish harp, by the composer Roger DOYLE.

<sup>42</sup> In French in the score : « near the soundbox ».

Seóirse BODLEY, *Scintillae*, 1968, p.212, *The Irish Harp Book*, Mercier Press, 1993.

The aleatoric contemporary music for Irish harp makes different systems intervene for the choice of possibilities. I evoked the use of cells and reservoirs in *Scintillae*; in *Windfalls* (1990), for soprano, flute, clarinet, violin, Celtic harp and percussion, Eibhlís FARRELL asks the performers to intervene by basing themselves on the voice and not a precise barline. However possibilities given to musicians remain limited. In *Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf* (1990), for mezzo-soprano, Irish harp and magnetic tape, work by Paul HAYES, these possibilities are extended to cells of some notes, whereas for the same formation in *The Writer's Farewell* (1990), Paul HAYES alters entirely improvised parts for the harp in *Ad Libitum* sections.

These contemporary music works have no precise reference to the traditional music and, for all that, the improvisation or the improvised style is a common element to both. Would the composer be more tempted to write his pieces more freely when he is writing for the Irish harp? Influenced by this less written style, peculiar to traditional musicians, Derek BALL admits to use more free or aleatoric materials in his works for Irish harp than in his other pieces. It has also brought him other musical possibilities whereas an instrument like the piano could not have done it. More generally, it is a traditional musical spirit which influenced Martin O'LEARY in the composition of slower tunes (*Slow airs*) for piano or Irish harp, without however containing traditional melodies.

The technique of the traditional ornaments for Irish harp offers new sounding possibilities in the contemporary music but they are still few used. Contrary to the traditional music in which ornaments have an important role in the arrangements, art music composers use them sporadically. Among the classical instruments, only some, including the harpsichord, have developed a very embellished style. Most of the traditional ornaments (*pat*, *cut*, *roll*, *triplet*, *grace note*<sup>43</sup>) are not part of the education of the classical harpist. As for the repertoire of contemporary music for Irish harp, it reflects this dissociation. For all that, in the search for new musical expressions, the integration of these embellishments could offer the art music composer an original material and bring a complementary to the classical harpists.

<sup>43</sup> The *pat* is a small appoggiatura added below the note, whereas the *cut* is above; the *roll* is the association of the *pat* and the *cut* in a triplet; the *triplet* is the quick triplet on a same note; the *grace note* is the upper appoggiatura which accents more the note than the *cut*.

## Conclusion

Traditional instrument for some musicians, of art music for others, the Irish harp is difficult to classify. Both a symbol and a musical reality, it is firstly a modern instrument, in its repertoire as in its making. In old representations, the forepillar was a symbol of the link between heaven and earth, real and supernatural worlds, like a bridge connecting the two banks of a river. Musically more present today since its revival, it stands somewhere in the midst of distant worlds, this time with a more human face, and connects their music together.

The history of the harp is rich of these symbols, of these technical developments and its music is all the more complex since it is connected to a thousand-year old tradition. How does the contemporary repertoire fit into this history? At the crossroads of musical genres, art music on the small harp offers a new way and an authentic expression not yet much explored. It is the role of harpists to travel these paths and to go beyond the main obstacle: the image of their instrument. If the recent evolution of the Irish harp seems to turn more its repertoire towards traditional music, the ancient music of harpists from medieval times is practically unknown to us. Contemporary music, like traditional music belongs to new traditions of this instrument and their occurrence is still too recent to have an established musical significance.

The composers who created works for the Irish harp have opened unknown paths and developed an original sound. Through different points discussed in this report, I hope to have encouraged this creation. As Derek BALL remarked one day: « Quand on pense aux questions comme ça, [on] suscite des pensées et des sentiments ; les pensées et les sentiments souvent suscitent la musique »<sup>44</sup>. Some time later, the composer was sending to us the music score of his new work *Sans Embellissement*, composed after answering the questionnaire, that I sent him. In this work, he exploits the possibilities of the Irish harp, as much on the technical level (blades), as the sounds (style of playing, free style). The development of the contemporary repertoire for the instrument is thus current.

In the search for a new world of sounds, the Irish harp brings a freshness linked to an important expressive potential. Works for the solo instrument, for small ensembles, as well as orchestral, vocal or electroacoustic works, the contemporary repertoire of the instrument undergoes today a development in the main musical genres of art music. If the Irish harp carries a historical and cultural image strongly linked to the past, the composers have shown that it is also an instrument of contemporary musical *avant garde*.

---

<sup>44</sup> In French: « Thinking about questions like these, brings up thoughts and feelings. The thoughts and feelings often prompt the music ».

## Bibliography

### Irish Harp :

- ARMSTRONG, Robert Bruce, *The Irish and the Highland Harps*, Dublin, Irish University Press, 1969 (1<sup>st</sup> ed. Edinburgh, 1904).
- BIRCH, Albert, *The Modern development of the harp*, in : Anthony BAINES, *Musical Instruments through the ages*, Penguin Books, 1974 (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1961).
- BUCKLEY, Ann, *Musical instruments in Ireland from the ninth to the fourteenth centuries*, in : Gerard GILLEN and Harry WHITE, *Irish Musical Studies, I : Musicology in Ireland*, Blackrock, Co. Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 1990 p.13-57.
- – *Harpes et lyres des monuments du Haut Moyen Age en Grande-Bretagne et en Irlande*, in : *Harpa*, Journal International de la Harpe, n°7, Dornach (Switzerland), Centre International de la Harpe, 1992.
- – *La Musique dans la société irlandaise médiévale*, in : *Harpa*, Journal International de la Harpe, n°11, Dornach (Switzerland), Centre International de la Harpe, 1993.
- – *Music as symbolic sound in medieval Irish Society*, in : Gerard GILLEN and Harry WHITE, *Irish Musical Studies, III : Music and Irish Cultural History*, Blackrock, Co. Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 1995, p.13-76.
- CHARNASSE, Héléne and France VERNILLAT, *Les instruments à cordes pincées harpe, luth et guitare*, Paris, P.U.F., collection Que sais-je ? N° 1390, 1970.
- C.R.I.H.C. (ed), *Identité de la Harpe Celtique*, Dinan, Association départementale pour le développement de la musique et de la danse, 1994.
- FLOOD, W.H. Grattan, *Story of the Harp*, London, The Walter Scott Publishing, 1905.
- FOX, Charlotte Milligan, *Annals of the Irish Harpers*, London, Smith-Elder, 1911.
- FRICK, Rudolf, *Origine des petites harpes modernes*, in : *Harpa*, Journal International de la Harpe, n°16, Dornach (Switzerland), Centre International de la Harpe, 1994.
- HARRISON, Franck and Joan RIMMER, *European musical instruments*, London, StudioVista, 1964.

- JOYCE, Sandra, *An Introduction to O'Carolan's Music in Eighteenth-Century Printed Collections*, in : Patrick F. DEVINE and Harry WHITE, *Irish Musical Studies*, IV, Blackrock, Co. Dublin, Four Courts Press, 1996.
- LE DENTU, Odette, *A propos de la harpe*, Paris, Billaudot, 1984.
- MAHER, Tom, *The Harp's a Wonder*, Mullingar, Uisneach Press, 1991.
- MOLONEY, Colette, *Style and Repertoire in the Gaelic Harp Tradition : Evidence from the Bunting Manuscripts and Print*, in : Patrick F. DEVINE and Harry WHITE, *Irish Musical Studies*, IV, Blackrock, Co. Dublin, Four Courts Press, 1996.
- ———— *The Irish Music Manuscripts of Edward Bunting (1773-1843)*, Dublin, Irish Traditional Music Archive, 2000.
- MUNROW, David, *Instruments of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, London, Oxford University Press, 1976.
- O BROGAIN, Seamus, *The Irish Harp Emblem*, Dublin, Wolfhound Press, 1998.
- O'SULLIVAN, Donal, *The Life, Times and Music of an Irish Harpers*, Cork, Ossian, 2001, (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1958).
- REMNANT, Mary, *Musical Instruments of the West*, London, B.T. Batsford, 1978.
- RENSCH, Roslyn, *The Harp, its History, Technique and Repertoire*, London, Duckworth, 1969.
- ———— *Harps and Harpists*, London, Duckworth, 1989.
- RIMMER, Joan, *The Irish Harp*, Dublin, The Mercier Press, 1984 (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1969).
- TOURNIER, Marcel, *La Harpe*, Paris, Henry Lemoine, 1959.
- Y DELYN, Christine, *Cláirseach, la harpe irlandaise : aux origines de la harpe celtique*, Hent Telem Breizh, Plouñéour-Menez, 1998.
- YEATS, Gráinne, *Irish Harp Music*, in : *Four centuries of Music in Ireland*, ed. by Brian BOYDELL, London, British Broadcasting Corporation, 1979.
- ———— *The Harp of Ireland, the Belfast Harpers' Festival, 1792 and the saving of Ireland's Harp Music by Edward Bunting*, Belfast, Belfast Harper's Bicentenary, 1992.

## Irish Music :

- BENSON, Ciaran, *A Psychological perspective on art and Irish national identity*, in : Ken BROWN and Carol McGUINNESS, *The Irish Journal of Psychology*, vol 15, n°2 et 3, Dublin, p.316-330.
- BREATHNACH, Breandan, *Folk Music and Dances of Ireland*, Cork and Dublin, Mercier Press, 1986 (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1971).
- DEANE, Raymond, *The Honour of Non-Existence ; Classical composers in Irish Society*, in : Gerard GILLEN and Harry WHITE, *Irish Musical Studies, III : Music and Irish Cultural History*, Blackrock, Co. Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 1995, p. 199-211.
- FLEISHMANN, Aloys, *Music in Ireland*, Cork, Cork University Press, 1952.
- FLOOD, W.H. Grattan, *A History of Irish music*, Shannon, Irish University Press, 1970.
- HAMMOND, David, *The Popular Tradition in Ireland Today*, in : *Four centuries of Music in Ireland*, ed. by Brian BOYDELL, London, British Broadcasting Corporation, 1979.
- HUGHES, Anthony, *Music in Ireland - the Future*, in : *Four centuries of Music in Ireland*, ed. by Brian BOYDELL, London, British Broadcasting Corporation, 1979.
- MC CARTHY, Marie, *Passing it on, The transmission in Irish culture*, Cork, Cork University Press, 1999.
- O'CANAINN, Tomas, *Traditional Music in Ireland*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978.
- O'CONNOR, Nuala, *Bringing it all Back Home, The Influence of Irish Music*, London, BBC Books, 1991.
- O'LEARY, Jane, *Contemporary Music in Ireland : Developments in the past twenty years*, in : Patrick F. DEVINE and Harry WHITE, *Irish Musical Studies, IV*, Blackrock, Co. Dublin, Four Courts Press, 1996.
- O'MURCHU, Labhras, *An Rod Seo Romhainn, A Future for Irish Traditional Music*, O Riada Memorial Lecture 2, Cork, UCC Publications & The Irish Traditional Music Society, 1987.
- O'RIADA, Sean, *Our Musical Heritage*, Portlaoise, The Dolmen Press, 1982.
- O'SUILLEABHAIN, Micheal, *Irish Music Defined*, in : *The Crane Bag Book of Irish Studies (1977-1981)*, Mark Patrick HEDERMAN & Richard KEARNY, Dublin, Blackwater Press, 1982.



# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1

### Catalogue of contemporary music for the Irish harp

---

#### Abbreviations

|              |                                  |                |  |
|--------------|----------------------------------|----------------|--|
| <b>A</b>     | alto [solo voice]                | <b>kbd</b>     | keyboard   |
| <b>a</b>     | alto [chorus]                    | <b>Mez-sop</b> | mezzo-soprano [solo voice]                         |
| <b>ACI</b>   | Arts Council of Ireland          | <b>MS</b>      | manuscript (unpublished facsimile)                 |
| <b>ACNI</b>  | Arts Council of Northern Ireland | <b>ob</b>      | oboe   |
| <b>anon.</b> | anonymous(ly)                    | <b>Op.</b>     | opus   |
| <b>arr.</b>  | arrangement                      | <b>opt.</b>    | Optional   |
| <b>B</b>     | bass [solo voice]                | <b>orch</b>    | orchestra, orchestral                              |
| <b>b</b>     | bass [chorus]                    | <b>perc</b>    | percussion   |
| <b>Bar</b>   | baritone [solo voice]            | <b>pno</b>     | piano  |
| <b>bn</b>    | bassoon                          | <b>rev.</b>    | revised  |
| <b>CD</b>    | compact disc                     | <b>RTÉ</b>     | Radio Telefís Éireann (Irish Radio and Television) |
| <b>cl</b>    | clarinet                         | <b>S</b>       | Soprano [solo voice]                               |
| <b>CMC</b>   | Contemporary Music Centre        | <b>s</b>       | soprano [chorus]                                   |
| <b>div.</b>  | divisi                           | <b>str</b>     | string(s)  |
| <b>elec</b>  | electric, electronic             | <b>T</b>       | tenor [solo voice]                                 |
| <b>fl</b>    | flute                            | <b>t</b>       | tenor [chorus]                                     |
| <b>glock</b> | glockenspiel                     | <b>trans.</b>  | translation, translated by                         |
| <b>gui</b>   | guitar                           | <b>va</b>      | viola  |
| <b>hp</b>    | harp                             | <b>vc</b>      | cello  |
| <b>hpd</b>   | harpsichord                      | <b>vln</b>     | violin   |

---

**ELAINE AGNEW (b. 1967)**

---

***John de Courcy's Travels (1992)***

Vln, bn, Irish hp

MS 7', 11p.

Commissioned by the ACNI, Education Boards, Arts Centres and the Department of the Environment, Northern Ireland, to mark the restoration of Carrickfergus Castle.

Premiere: 29 September 1992, Carrickfergus Castle, Northern Ireland. Linda Irwin (vln), Stephen Deazley (bn), Marie-Claire Doris (hp).

Recording: CMC Sound Archive.

**DEREK BALL (b.1949)**

---

***Dad's Piece (1993)***

Irish hp

3'.

***An Fharraige: Dul Faoi na Greine (1995)***

Irish hp

2'.

***Ceithre Ráithe na Cláirsí (1995)***

Irish hp

5'

Dedicated to Myrdhin.

***Mary's Piece (1995)***

Irish hp

7'.

***Taoile agus trá (1995)***

Irish hp

1'30.

***Pagodas in the Mist, Pagodas in the Rain (1996)***

Irish hp

3'.

***Pagoda Party (1996)***

Irish hp

5'.

***Never the same twice (1997)***

Irish hp

5'.

***Tríd an Fraoch (1997)***

Irish hp

3'.

***Sans Embellissement (2001)***

Irish hp

Dedicated to Tristan Le Govic

MS 2', 2p.

***Flower of Scotland (arr.)***

Irish hp

***Mary's Piece (1991)***

Lowland pipes, vln, va, concertina, Irish hp version

10'.

***Pastorale (and other pieces) (1994)***

Vc, Irish hp

5'.

***Céadalchoire (1995)***

2 Irish hp

8'.

***Mary's Piece (1995)***

Vln, Irish hp

7'.

***Critique (2001)***

Vln, cl, vc, Irish hp and computer version

MS 4'.

***7 Carolan Arrangements (arr.)***

Vln, Irish hp.

***Miniature Concerto 1-4 (1997)***

Irish hp, str

10'.

***Cláirseoireacht (1999)***

Voice, Irish hp

Text : Gabriel Rosenstock (Irish)

MS 5', 4p.

Dedicated to Judith Peacock.

***Draperies et Broderies (1998-99)***

Irish hp solo and 6 or 12 Irish hp

MS 10', 20p.

## **DEREK BELL (b. 1923)**

---

### ***An Buacaill Caol Dubh (The Dark Slender Boy)***

Irish hp

Moxon Press, *The Small Harp* 1'30, 1p.

### ***Carolan's Receipt (1971-72) (arr.)***

Irish hp / 2 Irish hp / 3 Irish hp

Lyra Music Company, 23p.

### ***Immortal Carolan Melodies (arr.)***

Irish hp, str / Irish hp solo / Irish hp, traditional instr.

Lyra Music Company, 51p.

## **SEÓIRSE BODLEY (b. 1933)**

---

### ***Scintillae (1968)***

2 Irish hp

Mercier Press, *The Irish Harp Book* 6', 13p.

Commissioned by Cáirde na Cruite.

Premiere : 24 July 1989 / Termonfeckin, Co. Louth [Cáirde na Cruite course]. Anne-Marie O'Farrell (hp), Helen Davies (hp).

## **BRIAN BOYDELL (1917 – 2000)**

---

### ***An Album of Pieces for the Irish Harp, Op. 88 (1989)***

Irish hp

MS 20', 10p.

Dedicated to Teresa Lawlor

Commissioned by Teresa Lawlor 1989, with funds provided by ACI.

Premiere : 23 April 1990 / John Field Room, National Concert Hall, Dublin Teresa Lawlor (hp).

### ***Caoine Phiarais Feiritéara (arr.)***

Irish hp.

### ***Four Sketches for two Irish Harps, Op. 52 (1961-62)***

2 Irish hp

MS / Mercier Press, *The Irish Harp Book* [N°2, 3] 10', 12p.

Commissioned by Gráinne Yeats and Mercedes Bolger.

Premiere : 11 May 1962 / Eblana Theatre, Dublin.

Gráinne Yeats (hp), Mercedes Bolger (hp).

Recording: CMC Sound Archive.

### ***Three Yeats Songs, Op. 56a (1965)***

S, Irish hp

Text by W.B. Yeats (english).

MS 11', 17p.

Dedicated to Gráinne Yeats.

Premiere : 24 March 1966 / Abbey Lecture Hall, Dublin. Gráinne Yeats (S, hp).

Recording: CMC Sound Archive

***Musician's Song, Op. 56b (1965)***

S, Irish hp

Text by W.B. Yeats (english).

MS 2', 3p.

Commissioned by RTÉ.

Premiere : Gráinne Yeats (S, hp).

Recording: CMC Sound Archive.

***Love is an immoderate thing***

S, Irish hp

MS 3'

Premiere : 28 May 1965 / Dublin.

Gráinne Yeats (S, hp).

Recording: CMC Sound Archive.

***Lord Mayo (arr.)***

Voice, Irish hp.

---

**PATRICK CASSIDY (b. 1956)**

***Three Carolan Pieces (arr.)***

Irish hp, orch.

10'

Recording : CMC Sound Archive.

***The Children of Lir***

SATB, satb, Irish hp, uilleann pipes, orch.

43'

Recording : CMC Sound Archive.

---

**RHONA CLARKE (b. 1958)**

***Liadáin (1988)***

Mezzo-sop, Irish hp

Poem : anonymous translated by Frank O Connor (english).

MS 8'20", 8p.

Commissioned by Aylish Kerrigan and Anne-Marie O'Farrell.

Premiere : 8 April 1990 / Accents Festival, Royal Hibernian Academy Gallagher Gallery, Dublin.

Aylish Kerrigan (Mez), Anne-Marie O'Farrell (hp).

Recording : CMC Sound Archive.

***Sympathy (2000)***

Mez/Bar, fl, perc (woodblock, tambourine & glock.) Irish hp

Text: Emily Brontë (1846).

MS 9'20", 10p.

Commissioned by the Tyrolean Ensemble for the Begegnungen 2000 Festival of Contemporary Music, Austria.

Premiere: 23 November 2000, Begegnungen 2000, Austria. Tyrolean Ensemble für Musik, conductor Günther Zechberger.

Recording: CMC Sound Archive.

## **SHAUN DAVEY (b. 1948)**

---

### ***The Pilgrim* (1983)**

A suite for orchestra, soloists, pipe band and choir.  
Soloists : voices, sean nós singer, gáita, uilleann pipes, bombardes, Irish hp (metal-strung), narrator.  
Commissioned by the Lorient Interceltique Festival.  
Premiere : Lorient, 1983. Lorient Festival  
Orchestra, Helen Davies (hp), Noel Eccles (perc), Garvan Gallagher (bass guitar), Paul MacAteer (drums).  
Tara CD 3032, 1994. Conductor Noel Kelehan.

### ***Granuaile (Grace O'Malley)* (1985)**

Chamber orch, uilleann pipes, fiddle, whistle, sax, hpd, guitar, bouzouki, concert and Irish hp (nylon-strung), bodhrán, perc.  
Tara CD 3017, 1985. Conductor : Gareth Hudson.

## **EDGAR DEALE (1902 – 1999)**

---

### ***The Castle of Dromore* (1949) (arr.)**

ssa, Irish hp (or pno)  
Cramer 3'.

### ***For the Children, No 1 & 2* (1971)**

Voice (or instrument), Irish hp  
Mercier Press, *The Irish Harp Book* 4'.

### ***Follow me up to Carlow* (1972) (arr.)**

satb, Irish hp (or pno)  
Waterloo (*the Art of Arranging*).

## **ROGER DOYLE (b. 1949)**

---

### ***Ceol Sidhe* (1973)**

Uilleann pipes, tin whistle, Irish hp  
MS 5', 13p.  
Premiere : 6 January 1974 / Dublin Festival of Twentieth Century Music. Peter Brown (uilleann pipes), Gráinne Yeats (hp), Jolyon Jackson (tin whistle)  
Recording: CMC Sound Archive.

## **MAURA EATON (b. ?)**

---

### ***The Coming of Winter and Spring* (1988)**

Mez, Irish harp  
MS 5'  
Dedicated to Aylish Kerrigan  
Recording : CMC Sound Archive.

## **EIBHLIS FARRELL (b. 1953)**

### ***Windfalls (1990)***

S, fl, cl, vln, Irish hp, perc [bodhrán, bones or woodblock]

Text: Seamus Heaney (english).

MS 5', 6p.

Premiere: 27 March 1994, Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, Dublin. Concorde, director Jane O'Leary.

Recording: September 1994, *Donne in Musica*, RAI TV.

### ***Fáinne Geal an Lae (1995) (arr.)***

2 S, Irish hp

Text : anonymous (english).

MS 3', 4p.

### ***The Queen of Connemara (1995) (arr.)***

Bar, ss, vln, Irish hp

Text : anonymous (english).

MS 4p.

### ***The Star of the County Down (1995) (arr.)***

Bar, ss, vln, Irish hp

MS 4p.

### ***Thugamar Féin (1995) (arr.)***

S, ss, vln, Irish hp, perc [opt]

Text : Traditional (Irish).

MS 5', 3p.

## **ALOYS FLEISCHMANN (1910 – 1992)**

### ***An Cóitín Dearg (The Red Petticoat) (1950)***

Irish hp version

Mercier Press, *The Irish Harp Book* 3', 4p.

Recording : CMC Sound Archive.

### ***Ballinderry***

Irish hp

MS 3', 7p.

Premiere : 21 May 1991 / John Field Room, National Concert Hall, Dublin Teresa Lawlor (hp).

## **JAMES REDMOND FRIEL (1907 – 1979)**

### ***Inishowen (1972)***

Irish hp, str orch

9'

Premiere : RTÉ, 1973.

### ***Tis Pretty to be in Ballinderny (arr.)***

(Bunting Collection Arranged)

Voice, Irish hp

Mercier Press, *The Irish Harp Book* 1'.

## **PAUL HAYES (b. 1951)**

---

### ***Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf (1990)***

Collaboration with Donal Hurley and Fergus

Johnston

Mez, Irish hp, tape

Text: Roald Dahl (english)

MS 8', 9p.

Premiere: 8 April 1990, Accents Festival, Royal

Hibernian Academy Gallery, Dublin. Aylish

Kerrigan (Mez), Anne-Marie O'Farrell (hp), Donal

Hurley (sound projection).

Recording : CMC Sound Archive.

### ***The Writer's Farewell (1990)***

Mez, Irish hp, tape

Text by Francis Stuart

MS 7', 9p.

Premiere : 8 April 1990 / Accents Festival, Dublin.

Aylish Kerrigan (Mez), Anne-Marie O'Farrell

(hp)

Recording : CMC Sound Archive.

## **FERGUS JOHNSTON (b. 1959)**

---

### ***The Wisdom of the World (1990)***

Mezzo-sop, Irish hp

Text: Various authors (english)

MS 5', 6p.

Premiere: 8 April 1990, Accents Festival, Royal

Hibernian Academy Gallagher Gallery, Dublin.

Aylish Kerrigan (Mez), Anne-Marie O'Farrell (hp).

Recording: CMC Sound Archive.

## **MARY KELLY (b. 1957)**

---

### ***Poems from Connemara (1988)***

Mez, Irish hp

4 poems by Patrick Kelly (english).

MS 14', 18p.

Recording: CMC Sound Archive.

### ***Two Songs on Words of Love (1988)***

T, Irish hp

Poems by P. Healy.

MS 3', 6p.

Premiere : January 1988 / Hugh Lane Municipal

Gallery of Modern Art, Dublin. Michael McGlynn

(T), Cliona Molloy (hp).

Recording: CMC Sound Archive.

## **THOMAS C. KELLY (1917 – 1985)**

---

### ***Interlude (1966)***

Irish hp

Mercier Press, *The Irish Harp Book* 6', 3p.

Commissioned by Cáirde na Cruite.

## **JOHN KINSELLA (b. 1932)**

---

### ***Allegro Giocoso (1966)***

Irish hp

Mercier Press, *The Irish Harp Book* 5', 3p.

Commissioned by Cáirde na Cruite.

## **JOHN F. LARCHET (1884-1967)**

---

### ***The small Black Rose (1955)***

Voice, Irish hp (or hp)

Txt : Donal O'Sullivan

5'.

## **MARY McAULIFFE (b. 1947)**

---

### ***Mass of the Irish Martyrs (1992, rev. 1997)***

satb, fl, ob, pno / kbd, gui [opt], Irish hp [opt]

version

Text sacred (english)

Mary McAuliffe Publications 13', 90p.

Commissioned by Dublin Diocesan Commission for Sacred Music.

Premiere : 3 October 1992 / St Mary's Pro-Cathedral, Dublin.

Dublin Diocesan Music Group, St Kevin's Music Group and students from four Dublin schools, Mary McAuliffe (kbd), conductor Fr Pat O'Donoghue.

## **MICHAEL McGLYNN (b. 1964)**

---

### ***Blackthorn (1996)***

S, satb [div], Irish hp

3'

Recording: CMC Sound Archive.

### ***Island (1996)***

S, satb [div], Irish hp

4'

Recording: CMC Sound Archive.

### ***Nobilis Humilis (1996)***

satb [div. with soli], Irish hp

4'

Recording: CMC Sound Archive.

### ***There is no Ros (1996)***

ST, satb [div], Irish hp

3'

Recording: CMC Sound Archive.

### ***Codail a Linbh***

2 S, satb, Irish hp

3'

Recording: CMC Sound Archive.

### ***Silent, O Moyle***

S, satb, Irish hp

4'

Recording: CMC Sound Archive.

***Sleepsong***

SSST, satb, Irish hp

5'

Recording: CMC Sound Archive.

***The Last Rose***

S, satb, Irish hp

3'

Recording: CMC Sound Archive.

***The Mermaid***

2 S, satb, Irish hp

3'

Recording: CMC Sound Archive.

**JOHN McLACHLAN (b. 1964)**

***Double Portrait (1994)***

2 Irish hp

MS 5', 16p.

Premiere: 28 April 1995, National Concert Hall,

Dublin. Cormac de Barra (hp), Anne-Marie

O'Farrell (hp).

**DANIEL McNULTY (1920-1996)**

**I – Fantasia, II – Berceuse, III – Rondo**

Irish hp

Mercier Press, *The Irish Harp Book*, 8' 9p.

**HAVELOCK NELSON (1917-1996)**

***Quintet A Carolan Tune (arr.)***

Irish hp, str quartet

Mercier Press, *The Irish Harp Book*, 5' 10p.

**KEVIN O'CONNELL (b. 1958)**

***Kolor (1999)***

Irish hp

MS 10', 12p.

Commissioned by Anne-Marie O'Farrell with funds provided by the Arts Council.

Premiere : 26 April 2001 / Rathfarnham Parish Church.

Anne-Marie O'Farrell (hp).

## ANNE-MARIE O'FARRELL (b. 1966)

### ***Chorale Variations on 'Deus Meus Adiuva Me'* (1989)**

Irish hp

Hymn tune by Seán Óg Ó Tuama.

Anne-Marie O'Farrell Publications 4', 6p.

Premiere: December 1990, Officers' Mess, Collin's Barracks, Mullingar. Anne-Marie O'Farrell (hp).

### ***The Knappogue Medley (1990)***

Irish hp

Anne-Marie O'Farrell Publications 4', 6p.

Premiere : 14 March 1990 / St Patrick's Cathedral, New York, USA. Anne-Marie O'Farrell (hp)

Recording: CMC Sound Archive & by A.-M. O'F.

*Number twenty nine presents harping Bach to Carolan,*

CD 2901 / CC2901.

### ***Prelude (1996)***

Irish hp

Anne-Marie O'Farrell Publications 3', 2p.

Dedicated to Etaoin Ní Ghabhainn.

Premiere : March 1996 / Feis Ceoil, Dublin Étaoin Ní Ghabhainn (hp).

### ***A Carolan Suite (arr.)***

Irish hp

9'

Recording : CMC Sound Archive.

### ***Carolan Draught (arr.)***

Irish hp

2'

Recording : CMC Sound Archive.

### ***Carolan's Concerto (arr.)***

Irish hp

1'

Recording : CMC Sound Archive.

### ***For Ireland I'll not tell her Name***

Irish hp

3'

Recording : CMC Sound Archive.

### ***Limerick's Lamentation***

Irish hp

4'

Recording : CMC Sound Archive.

### ***She moved Through the Fair***

Irish hp

4'

Recording : CMC Sound Archive.

### ***Silent O Moyle***

Irish hp

4'

Recording : CMC Sound Archive.

### ***The Coulin (arr.)***

Irish hp

4'

Recording : CMC Sound Archive.

***The Night in Bethlehem***

Irish hp

3'

Recording : CMC Sound Archive.

***The Tailor's Twist and the Spey in Spate***

Irish hp

3'

Recording : CMC Sound Archive.

***Passacaglia for Two Irish Harps (1989, rev. 1994)***

on a Ground Bass by Raison

2 Irish hp

Anne-Marie O'Farrell Publications 5', 8p.

Premiere : Anne-Marie O'Farrell (hp), Cormac de Barra (hp).

***Étude for Three Irish Harps (1998)***

3 Irish hp

Dedicated to Maev Uí Chiagáin

Anne-Marie O'Farrell Publications 3', 12p.

Premiere: 14 May 1999, Newpark Music Centre, Dublin.

***Fanny Power***

Fl, Irish hp

4'

Recording : CMC Sound Archive.

***Heir Conditioning & Miss Monaghan's Reel***

(arr.)

Irish hp, drums

4'

Recording : CMC Sound Archive.

***Miss McDermott & Lady Geithin (arr.)***

2 Irish hp

4'

Recording : CMC Sound Archive.

***Song of the Chanter & Allistrum's March***

2 Irish hp

3'

Recording : CMC Sound Archive.

***The Jig's Up***

Irish hp, perc [slitwood / tongue drum]

4'

Recording : CMC Sound Archive.

***The Queen and Gander***

Irish hp, bodhrán

3'

Recording : CMC Sound Archive.

***The Rights of Man & The King of the Fairies***

(arr.)

Fl, Irish hp

4'

Recording : CMC Sound Archive.

***The Laughter of Women***

Voice, Irish hp

1'

Recording : CMC Sound Archive.

***The Salley Gardens***

Voice, Irish hp

3'

Recording : CMC Sound Archive.

Pno or Irish hp

MS 8'.

## **EAMONN O GALLCHOBHAIR**

**(1910 – 1982)**

---

### ***Ceol Sinsearach don Chruit (1966)***

Irish hp.

### ***Ceol Sóisearach (1966)***

Irish hp.

### ***Déirin Dé (1966)***

Irish hp

Mercier Press, *The Irish Harp Book* 3', 2p.

### ***Tostal Music (1953)***

Voices, Irish hp

20'

Premiere : Dundalk, 1953.

## **CIAN O hEIGEARTAIGH (b. 1944)**

### ***Do Chuala Scéal***

S, Irish hp

Mercier Press, *The Irish Harp Book* 2'.

## **MARTIN O'LEARY (b. 1963)**

### ***Slow Air + Aisling (Gock of Gold Suite) (1990)***

### ***Suantraí Maeve (1996)***

2110 0110 hp (or Irish hp) str

MS 4', 15p.

Premiere: 26 March 1996, St Mary's Church,  
Maynooth,

Co. Kildare. Maynooth Orchestral Players,  
conductor Tríní Armstrong.

### ***Three Lyrics (1986)***

Mez , Irish hp (or gui)

Text : James Joyce (english)

MS 10', 10p.

Premiere : 8 April 1990 / Royal Hibernian  
Academy Gallagher Gallery, Dublin. Aylish  
Kerrigan (Mez), Anne-Marie O'Farrell (hp).

### ***Leaves Lie (1991)***

Mezzo-sop, Irish hp

Text: James Joyce (english)

MS 8', 14p.

Commissioned by Aylish Kerrigan & Anne-Marie  
O'Farrell.

Premiere: 20 November 1991, Project Arts Centre,  
Dublin. Aylish Kerrigan (Mez), Anne-Marie  
O'Farrell (hp).

Recording: CMC Sound Archive.

### ***By Tears of Sorrow Shaded (1995)***

satb [div. with soli], fl, Irish hp, vln, vc

Text: de Vere, Lady Wilde, Mulchinock, Varian

MS 14'

Commissioned by Cois Cladaigh with funds provided by the George Moore Society.  
Premiere: 19 August 1995, Claremorris Town Hall, Co. Clare. Cois Cladaigh, conductor Brendan O'Connor.  
Recording: CMC Sound Archive.

## **ARCHIBALD JAMES (ARCHIE)**

### **POTTER**

**(1918 – 1980)**

---

#### *Etude Bitonal (1968)*

Irish hp  
Mercier Press, *The Irish Harp Book* 4', 2p.  
Commissioned by Cáirde na Cruite.

#### *Teach Lán le Cruiteoirí (A Full House of Harpers) (1963)*

2 Concert hp, 12 Irish hp  
MS 15', 32p.  
Premiere : Dublin, 1963.

## **JOAN TRIMBLE (1915 - 2000)**

---

#### *Introduction and Air for Two Harps (1969)*

2 Irish hp  
MS / Mercier Press, *The Irish Harp Book* [Air] 4', 6p.  
Commissioned by Cáirde na Cruite.

Premiere: 1970, Grainne Yeats (hp), Mercedes Bolger (hp).

## **GERARD VICTORY (1921 – 1995)**

---

#### *Three Pieces for the Irish Harp (1966)*

Irish hp  
Mercier Press, *The Irish Harp Book* 8', 10p.  
Commissioned by Cáirde na Cruite.

#### *Scenario (1983)*

Irish hp  
MS 12', 27p.  
Dedicated to Denise Megevand.

## **JAMES WILSON (b. 1922)**

---

#### *Spanish Arch (1966)*

2 Irish hp  
Mercier Press, *The Irish Harp Book* 8', 15p.  
Commissioned by Cáirde na Cruite.  
Premiere : First broadcast: 17 May 1975, RTÉ.  
Gráinne Yeats (hp), Mercedes Bolger (hp).

#### *A Woman Young and Old, Op. 20 (1966)*

S, Irish hp  
Poem by W.B. Yeats (english)  
MS 25', 35p.

Premiere : 3 November 1968 / Belfast Festival  
Gráinne Yeats (S, hp).

***Three poems by Susan Connolly (1991)***

Mez-sop, Irish hp

Poems by Susan Connolly

MS 8'.

## Appendix 2

### Questionnaire

|   |
|---|
| <b>The Irish Harp in the contemporary music</b> |
|---|

1. The Irish Harp is first a « Harp » or first « Irish » ?
2. In your opinion, what are the most important differences between the Irish Harp and the Classical Harp's technique ?
3. Is contemporary music more open to the Classical Harp than the Irish Harp ? Why ?
4. Are the specificities of the Irish Harp's technique (like the ornamentations) an advantage in the development of the contemporary repertoire ?
5. Do you think that Irish Harp will have a future in the orchestra, or will this instrument remain infrequently used ?
6. Could the Irish Harp be as important as the Classical Harp in contemporary music ? If Yes / No, could you explain why ?
7. Is the traditional musician favoured with aleatoric pieces, because he's used to arranging his own tunes, or not ?
8. Do you think that the public interest in contemporary music on the Irish Harp is great enough to see the repertoire develop ?

\*  
\* \*

## Your compositions for the Irish Harp

Could you introduce yourself in a few words, your experience in music, talk about some of your significant compositions (for harp or not) :

Do you play harp ?  
No.....⌘  
Yes.....⌘, which harp(s) do you play :

9. Did you compose for the Irish Harp solo in the orchestra ? Or in the chamber music ?

10. Does your works with the Irish Harp constitute an important part in all your compositions ?

11. Why did you compose for this Harp ?

12. Did you receive commissions for the Irish Harp ? If so, from whom did you receive these commissions ?

13. Did you compose for other traditional instruments ? Could you explain briefly the circumstances of this compositions ?

14. In your music for the traditional instruments, have you tried to conserve a certain form of traditional writing suitable to this instruments or have you tried to get away from this tradition and develop a new line of thought ?

15. Does your music essentially use one musical language ? If yes : Which one : classical's harmony, tonal, modal, atonal, serial, others languages... If no : in keeping with the last question, did your choice to compose for a particular instrument influence your musical language ?
  
16. The Irish Harp has a lot of possible effects, did you use them ? How did you write them ?
  
17. Did the pieces for the Irish Harp play a particular role in the development of your language ? Please, could you explain ?
  
18. Was it difficult to convey your inspiration on the Irish Harp because of the instrument's technique?
  
19. In all of your music with the Irish Harp, which one is the composition you are the most satisfied with and why ?
  
20. As I would like to comment on some particular things in contemporary music for the Irish Harp, could you possibly analyse all or part of one composition of yours ?
  
21. Do you think that I have left out any important questions I should have asked you ?
  
22. Are you thinking about new composition for the Irish Harp ?

\*  
\* \*

## Appendix 3