



BRIAN
A PACK OF FANCIES
BOYDELL
*For a TRAVELLING HARPER
[A Tribute to Caroline (1670-1738)]*

MOSAICS
For Doreen Acton Harp.
& SKETCHES
For Brian Boydell

CHAMBER MUSIC FOR HARP **BOYDELL**

Cliona Doris *harp.*

Specially written for performance by Cliona Doris at the Dublin Festival of Contemporary Music January 1978.

Approximate Time



Cilona Doris, concert harp, *Irish harp* [All tracks] / Denise Kelly McDonnell, *Irish harp* [1-4] / Ciaran O'Connell, flute [15-17] / David O'Doherty, violin [5-9, 15-17] / Andreea Banciu, viola [15-17] / Margaret Doris, cello [15-17]

Further information on the music is available from the Contemporary Music Centre of Ireland (www.cmc.ie)

Four Sketches for Two Irish Harps, Op. 52 (1961 - 1962)

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|----|---------------------------------|------|
| 1. | I | 3.59 |
| 2. | II | 4.19 |
| 3. | III Dance for an Ancient Ritual | 2.29 |
| 4. | IV | 2.13 |

Five Mosaics for Violin and Harp, Op. 69 (1972)

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|----|-----------------|------|
| 5. | I Recitative | 3.00 |
| 6. | II Dichotomy | 4.01 |
| 7. | III Scherzo | 2.02 |
| 8. | IV Dream Fabric | 4.44 |
| 9. | V Rhapsody | 4.22 |

A Pack of Fancies for a Travelling Harper, Op. 66 (1970)

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|-----|---------------------------|------|
| 10. | I Prelude | 2.20 |
| 11. | II Caoin | 4.37 |
| 12. | III Impetuous Impromptu | 2.59 |
| 13. | IV A Dream of Ballyfarnon | 4.10 |
| 14. | V Toccata | 2.23 |

Quintet for Flute, Harp and String Trio, Op. 49 (1960, revised 1966 and 1980)

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|-----|---|------|
| 15. | I Moderato | 7.07 |
| 16. | II Scherzo: Allegro vivace e molto ritmico/Tranquillo | 6.09 |
| 17. | III Lento | 8.01 |

Mosaics and Sketches explores the Irish composer Brian Boydell's chamber music for harp written over two decades, 1960-1980. I have enjoyed performing *A Pack of Fancies for a Travelling Harper* (1970) for many years and when conducting research for a lecture-recital for the Brian Boydell Centenary Conference in June 2017, I came across a radio broadcast of the premiere of *Quintet for Flute, Harp and String Trio* (1960) in the Contemporary Music Centre. The work left a strong impression on me and I discovered that it had not been recorded, a fact lamented by the music critic, Charles Acton: 'In any other country official arrangements would have been made to support the recording, publishing and foreign dissemination of such a good work.' [*The Irish Times*, 4 March 1966]

I performed two of the *Four Sketches* (1961-62) from *The Irish Harp Book* as a student and I believe once in the hearing of the composer. The complete work is recorded with Denise Kelly McDonnell, who was a former student of Brian Boydell at Trinity College Dublin. *Five Mosaics* (1972), performed by David O'Doherty, nephew of the work's dedicatee, Geraldine O'Grady, completes the album. The four works provide a glimpse of the extensive compositional catalogue of Brian Boydell and indeed only a selection of his works for harp.

My appreciation is extended to RTÉ lyric fm, and in particular Eoin Brady, for their unwavering support of Irish music and musicians. I am grateful to the College of Arts and Tourism at Technological University Dublin for providing seed research funding towards this recording. I thank my TU Dublin Conservatoire colleagues, Ciaran O'Connell, David O'Doherty, Andreea Banciu, Margaret Doris and Denise Kelly McDonnell, for sharing my enthusiasm for this project. I am indebted to Fr. Patrick O'Donoghue and Paul McDunphy for the use of the Oratory in Holy Cross College Clonliffe and the Gleeson Theatre at Technological University Dublin. To Barra Boydell for starting me on this journey by inviting me to present at his father's Centenary Conference and for his encouragement with the recording. I acknowledge the valuable work and support of the Contemporary Music Centre and The Library of Trinity College Dublin. Finally, my deep appreciation and thanks to recording producer Laoise O'Brien and recording engineer Ben Rawlins.

Clíona Doris

THE COMPOSER AND THE MUSIC

Brian Boydell (1917-2000) was a prominent and enthusiastic figure in the musical life of Ireland through his multiple roles as a composer, performer, educator, musicologist, broadcaster and advocate. He was educated in England and won a choral scholarship to Clare College, Cambridge, where he spent much of his time involved in musical activities, while graduating with a degree in chemistry. His musical training continued at Royal College of Music, London, however, due to the outbreak of war, he returned to Ireland and later completed a music degree at Trinity College Dublin. He taught singing at the Royal Irish Academy of Music, conducted the Dublin Orchestral Players, and founded and directed the Dowland Consort, a small vocal ensemble specialising in early choral repertoire. For twenty years he held the position of Professor of Music at Trinity College Dublin and was extremely well known throughout Ireland through his public lectures, adjudications and broadcasts. As a founder member of the Music Association of Ireland and a member



of the Arts Council, he was also a strong advocate for music and cultural policy. His contribution to music research includes two major publications: *A Dublin Musical Calendar 1700-1760* (1988) and *Rotunda Music in Eighteenth-Century Dublin* (1992). He maintained an extensive archive of concert programmes, diaries, correspondence and manuscripts, which is now housed at The Library of Trinity College Dublin. This resource not only provides a far-reaching insight into Brian Boydell, but also provides an invaluable record of musical life in twentieth-century Ireland.

In an interview with Charles Acton in 1970, Boydell said that ‘I would like to be known as an Irish composer first’. [*Éire-Ireland*, Winter 1970] He started composing when very young and it was an enduring and important aspect of his life. His compositional output includes orchestral works, choral works, songs, works for piano and a varied range of chamber music, including four string quartets. He had an outward-looking appreciation of music and was also influenced by the

contemporary visual and literary movements. In the same interview with Charles Acton, Boydell addresses the subject of the composer writing within a national environment:

By living in a community and by living in a country with certain types of scenery, certain types of traditions, a certain type of atmosphere, he absorbs that atmosphere so that it affects his creative personality. The important thing is that if one is writing absolutely honestly, then the things that one has absorbed by being part of that community will come out in one’s writing. And surely it is better to use a reasonably international language, so that one can make a contribution from one’s own corner of the world to the international language of music, rather than taking a short cut. [*Éire-Ireland*, Winter 1970]

Boydell does not often overtly draw upon Irish traditional music, but when he does, it is the essence of the traditional air rather than quotation. However, perhaps given this recording’s focus on his works for harp, together with the instrument’s particular national resonance in an Irish context, this compositional aspect is more apparent.



This is the case in the *Four Sketches for Two Irish Harps* and *A Pack of Fancies for a Travelling Harper*, with both works possessing a distinctive Irish quality. However the recording also exemplifies his more universal language in *Five Mosaics* and *Quintet*.

Boydell wrote several works for the Irish harp or lever harp, including works for voice and harp for his friend and colleague, Gráinne Yeats. She was a soprano in his Dowland Consort, and often performed Irish airs with harp accompaniment in the ensemble's concerts. *Four Sketches for Two Irish Harps* (1961-62) was written for Gráinne and her long-term collaborator, Mercedes Bolger. They were both founding members of Cairde na Cruite (Friends of the Harp) established in 1960 to foster the Irish harp nationally and internationally. They premiered *Four Sketches* in a concert entitled 'My Gentle Harp' on 11 March 1962 in Eblana Theatre, Dublin. Charles Acton's review of the concert particularly praised the opening two movements as having 'a great beauty and a great depth of expression that not only show

the Irish harp as a serious instrument for the art music of our time but have also called forth from Dr. Boydell some of his very best work.' [*The Irish Times*, 12 March 1962] He was less complimentary of the last two movements, which he described respectively as 'relatively trivial' and 'parodistic'. While the last movements display a markedly different character, they are beautifully written and enjoy memorable melodic lines. 'Dance for an Ancient Ritual' is the only movement with a title, which is a reworking of a piano work of the same name, which in turn is extracted from his orchestral work *Megalithic Ritual Dances* (1956). Boydell subsequently gave permission for this movement together with the second movement to be published in *The Irish Harp Book* (1975) by Sheila Larchet Cuthbert.

Five Mosaics for Violin and Harp (1972) in its fragility and at times hypnotic qualities is a more introverted and contemplative work, with the exception of the middle Scherzo movement. These qualities are also referenced in the choice of movement titles, such as 'Rhapsody' and



'Dream Fabric'. The aptly entitled 'Dichotomy' places the two instruments at odds with each other. While it seems that *Five Mosaics* was conceived for piano or harp from the start, it was not until 1980 that four movements were given a first performance for violin and harp, in a concert presented by Concorde with Alan Smale (violin) and Denise Kelly (harp) at the Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art. In 1987, the same performers performed all five movements for harp at a Music Association of Ireland concert in the National Concert Hall, presented as a tribute to the composer for his seventieth birthday.

A Pack of Fancies for a Travelling Harper (1970) was written for Una O'Donovan for a performance at the Dublin Festival of Twentieth-Century Music on 13 January 1971. In five movements, it is written in tribute to the Irish harper and composer, Turlough O'Carolan (1670–1738) in the tercentenary year of his birth. There is also homage to Bach in the textures of the 'Prelude' and 'Toccatà'. Boydell was already conversant with composing for the harp; however,

this work exhibits a widening appreciation of the instrument, especially in terms of varying timbres and carefully judged use of extended techniques. His understanding of the instrument's capabilities came from an experimental approach, as demonstrated in a letter to Una O'Donovan: 'I have borrowed a harp, and have been living with it all the summer, trying things out'. [18 September 1970, Boydell Archive] Boydell selectively integrates extended techniques in the central movements, including the inventive exploitation of the fingernail buzz described by him as 'the harpist's nightmare' in 'Impetuous Impromptu' and the use of a rustling xylophone stick in 'A Dream of Ballyfarnon'.

While the *Quintet for Flute, Harp and String Trio* (1960, revised 1966 and 1980) was his first work to include such a prominent role for the harp, it underwent several revisions, which seem to be a result of his harp explorations in the intervening years. It was written for André Prieur and the Prieur Ensemble and premiered by them on 28 June 1960 at the Shelbourne Hotel, Dublin, as part of the International Festival of Music and the Arts with André Prieur, Jaroslav



Vanecek, Máire Larchet, Maurice Meulien and Sheila Larchet Cuthbert. Charles Acton states: 'This work pleased me a great deal straight away. . . . This may well be Dr Boydell's most complete and satisfying work to date.' [*The Irish Times*, 29 June 1960] However, after such a positive reception, it seems that the work was not performed again until 1966, now with material from the second movement of *Four Sketches for Two Irish Harps* incorporated into the revised first movement. The work underwent significant revisions between its premiere in 1960 and its final version in 1980. The harp has a more prominent role in the revised first movement, with extensive use of the glissandi effect and short solo passages that are absent in the original version. The second movement, with its constantly changing meters, is not as extensively revised and the coloristic final movement remains unchanged. Elizabeth Gaffney (flute), Caitríona Yeats (harp) with members of the Testore String Quartet performed the final version of the work at the National Gallery of Ireland on 6 May 1981 in a 'retrospective' concert of Boydell's chamber music works presented by RTÉ.

This album marks the premiere recording of *Five Mosaics for Violin and Harp* and *Quintet for Flute, Harp and String Trio*.

Clóna Doris

Recorded: Gleeson Theatre, Technological University Dublin City Campus, 24-25 June 2019 & The Oratory, Holy Cross College, Clonliffe, Dublin, 30 October 2019

Recording producer: Laoise O'Brien, www.jiggerypokeryproductions.com

Recording engineer & mastering: Ben Rawlins

Executive producers: Eoin Brady (RTÉ lyric fm), Clóna Doris (TU Dublin)

Images: By kind permission Barra Boydell

Design: Origin (www.origin.ie)

Liner Notes: Clóna Doris

Further information on the music is available from the Contemporary Music Centre, www.cmc.ie

ISRC Codes IE-WEZ-22-00001-00021



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