

An Irish Rhapsody

The Ulster Orchestra
Bryden Thomson
Vernon Handley

An Irish Rhapsody

Sir Hamilton Harty (1879–1941)

- | | | |
|----------|--|--------------|
| 1 | The Londonderry Air* | 5:26 |
| | Pan Hon Lee violin solo | |
| | From 'An Irish Symphony'* | 10:28 |
| 2 | II The Fair Day. Vivace ma non troppo presto | 3:06 |
| 3 | III In the Antrim Hills. Lento ma non troppo | 7:18 |

Sir Charles Villiers Stanford (1852–1924)

- | | | |
|----------|--|--------------|
| 4 | Irish Rhapsody No. 4, Op. 141 'The Fisherman of Loch Neagh and What He Saw'[†] | 18:27 |
| | in A minor | |

Ernest J. Moeran (1894–1950)

- | | | |
|----------|--|-------------|
| 5 | In the Mountain Country[†] | 7:03 |
| | Symphonic Impression | |

Sir Arnold Bax (1883–1953)

6

In the Faery Hills*

15:15

Sir Charles Villiers Stanford

7

From Symphony No. 3 'Irish'†

7:24

in F minor

|| Allegro molto vivace

Sir Arnold Bax

8

Roscatha*

10:49

TT 75:26

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This programme illustrates the Irish presence in British music, two of the composers, Harty and Stanford, actually being Irish, the other two, Bax and Moeran, being partly of Irish descent. It begins, however, with Sir Hamilton Harty's arrangement of a piece whose composer is unknown but which Sir Hubert Parry described as 'the most beautiful tune in the world'. **The Londonderry Air** first appeared in print in the Petrie collection of 1855 and was given to Petrie by Jane Ross of Limavady, who made a practice of taking down melodies from peasants who visited that town on market day.

Harty began to establish himself in London as a fine pianist and promising composer in 1900 and his works include a sensitive setting of Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale*, the symphonic poem *With the Wild Geese* etc. His **An Irish Symphony** was pictorial in impulse also, especially the two movements included here, each reflecting a different aspect of Irish folk music. The highly skilled orchestration is what might be expected from a great conductor's understanding of instrumental textures, and in fact Harty's composing was latterly supplanted by his recognition as one of Britain's greatest conductors. This

reputation began with his work in London during World War I with the London Symphony Orchestra, and continued in Manchester with The Hallé Orchestra whose permanent conductor he became in 1920, introducing many unfamiliar works by Richard Strauss, Sibelius, Walton, Bax and Moeran.

Elgar aside, Sir Charles Stanford was, with Parry, the most distinguished British composer at the turn of the century. Like Bernard Shaw or George Moore, he was an excellent instance of the Irishman in exile, never happy in the land of his birth and preferring to live in London, where he criticised every aspect of the life there with the full resources of a sharp tongue and lively wit. He was very prominent in British musical life and wrote voluminously – seven symphonies, nine operas etc. – with a compositional craft that was immaculate at all levels.

It was Stanford's intense Irishness which in fact protected him from the Teutonic influences so prevalent in British music during his earlier years. This is clear from the two pieces which represent him here, their Brahms-based orchestral technique notwithstanding. From 1914, **Irish Rhapsody No. 4, Op. 141**, subtitled *The Fisherman of Lough Neagh and What He Saw*, is especially picturesque, in part

because of the Irish melodies woven into it. In its open-air vigour the *Allegro molto vivace* of Stanford's **Symphony No. 3 'Irish'** (1887) is just as Irish, however, just as remote from Victorian associations.

There are various links between these composers, E.J. Moeran, for example, being one of Stanford's numerous pupils and **In the Mountain Country**, his first orchestral work, carrying a dedication to Harty. Dating from 1921, this tone poem is typical of the acute response to nature that shaped much British music of the period, for instance Vaughan Williams's *Pastoral Symphony*. Moeran called *In the Mountain Country* a 'symphonic impression' and it perhaps evokes pastoral rather than mountainous scenery. A feature, as of so many of his pieces, are themes in folksong style that are in truth his own inventions. The middle section is the most personal, but the orchestral writing is assured throughout, especially in the independence of the parts for wind instruments.

Ireland was unquestionably the inspiration of Sir Arnold Bax's **In the Faery Hills**, a significant step in his overall development. Composed in 1909, it is Part 2 of his 'Eire' sequence and a considerable advance in terms of individuality of expression on Part 1, *Into the Twilight*, written the previous year. In the programme note for the first performance he wrote that

In the Faery Hills attempts to suggest the reveries of the 'Hidden People' in the inmost deeps of the hollow hills of Ireland.

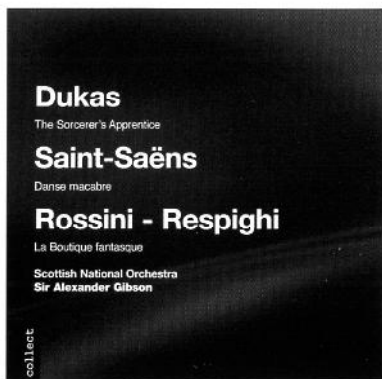
Roscatha came a year later, in 1910, and is in fact an orchestration of the short-score manuscript of 'The Gathering of the Chiefs', this having been intended as an interlude in Bax's unfinished opera *Deirdre*. Instead he decided that it would be Part 3 of the 'Eire' sequence, though it was not performed until 1974. Less poetic than *In the Faery Hills*, this is processional music, martial and energetically brilliant.

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The Londonderry Air and movements from *An Irish Symphony* recorded with financial assistance from The Ulster Orchestra Association; *In the Faery Hills* and *Roscatha* recorded in association with the Sir Arnold Bax Trust and Gallaher Ltd

Recording producer Brian Couzens

Sound engineer Ralph Couzens

Recording venue Ulster Hall, Belfast; June 1979 (*The Londonderry Air*), October 1980 (two movements from *An Irish Symphony*), February 1985 (*In the Faery Hills*, *Roscatha*), August 1986 (movement from *Symphony No. 3 Irish*), September 1987 (*Irish Rhapsody No. 4*), February 1989 (*In the Mountain Country*)

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'A no-holds-barred welcome for this highly desirable collection... the recordings are appropriately sumptuous.'

CD Review**Sir Charles Villiers Stanford**

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Sir Arnold Bax

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