by a number of composers as a solution to the vexed issue of national opera in Britain. Works like Joseph Parry's *Blodwen* (1878), the first opera to be written in the Welsh language, and Hamish MacCunn's *Diarmid* (1897), based on two Celtic legends and 'underwritten' by the ambitious but ultimately short-lived National Celtic Opera Syndicate, are just two examples. The use of Celticism in opera would continue into the next century with Rutland Boughton's *The Immortal Hour* (1912), which blended Irish mythology and Wagnerism in a socialist vision at the Glastonbury Festivals.

While any discussion of Irish opera in this period needs to be considered in the context of both 'Britishness' and 'Irishness', a distinct shift can be detected. Although critics could evaluate opera's infrastructure at a British level, they unequivocally identified native operatic composition as Irish and not British. Furthermore, even the issue of infrastructure would take on a culturally nationalist bent in the ideas later espoused by Patterson. The weight of evidence suggests that Gaelic Revivalism galvanized a number of composers in their writing of self-consciously 'Irish' works. Furthermore, as has been demonstrated here, the revivalist culture of this period went hand in hand with an increasing exposure to Wagner's works, several of which had not been heard in Dublin before the turn of the century. Critics noted the fusion of 'modern' music (relatively speaking) with mythology and folklore; consequently, some of these works were identified as both Irish and Wagnerian. Perhaps then, it is worth considering that much of the revivalist culture of the period can be understood through the lens of Wagnerism. Beyond the captivating music, it seems that something of Wagner's revolutionary zeal resonated with composers, writers and audiences in the pre-independence years.

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Instruction Committee (CTIC), the Cork School of Music soon had in excess of 150 students, a varied curriculum and examinations arranged in conjunction with the Royal Academy of Music in London. From 1918, the headmaster and professor of Irish traditional music was Carl Hardebeck (1869–1945), one of the instigators in the revival of Irish music in the period before the Irish revolution. Born in London to a Welsh mother and German father, Hardebeck worked as a music teacher and organist in Belfast from 1893. He was best known in Ireland as a composer, with his compositions winning eleven first prizes at Feis Ceoil competitions in Dublin between 1897 and 1908. His works were influenced by the traditional music and local songs that he collected upon numerous visits to the Donegal Gaeltacht (Irish-speaking region) and transcribed into braille, for which he devised a particular alphabet later adopted by the Irish Institute for the Blind.

The depletion of Cork Corporation’s technical instruction fund by 1921 prompted CTIC’s application to the department of education for a £1,425 grant for the Cork School of Music: £300 to pay Hardebeck’s salary, the remainder the costs of publishing his arrangements of Irish music. Hardebeck’s chief concern was the composition of instrumental and vocal music in a traditional idiom for junior examinations and a substantial number of manuscripts were compiled, the printing of which proved to be costly, partly on account of the Gaelic script. Having investigated printing costs in Dublin and London, CTIC petitioned local and national politicians, impressing upon them the national significance of the scheme and of the endeavours of the eminent Hardebeck. Despite receiving the official and personal support of Collins—who died in August 1922—only a portion of the promised grant was paid; the rest to follow upon the inspection of the ministry of education. When the committee applied for the next installment of the grant in December, Prionsias Ó Dubhthagh, the secretary of the ministry of education wrote to the secretary of the finance ministry, Joseph Brennan, stating: “The minister of education is satisfied that this school is doing work for Irish traditional music which is of national importance, and which is not being done or attempted elsewhere.” Brennan informed the ministry of education in June 1923 that “no funds existed for the discharge of any grants previously promised”. It was

December 1923; Prionsias Ó Dubhthagh, education ministry, to finance ministry, 16 February 1923. Dublin, National Archives of Ireland, hereafter NAI (FIN/1/2795).

Bernard B. Curtis: Centenary of the Cork School of Music: progress of the school 1878-1978. Cork: Cork School of Music, 1978, p.15. There was an established and profitable practice by British musical bodies of conducting examinations for certification in urban centres around Ireland; the Royal Irish Academy of Music did not launch its local centre examination system until 1894.

Prionsias Ó Dubhthagh: memorandum to finance ministry, 16 February 1923. NAI (FIN/1/2795).

Curtis: Centenary of the Cork School of Music, pp. 71–73

Prionsias Ó Dubhthagh: letter to Dáil Éireann, 16 February 1923. NAI (FIN/1/2795).

Curtis: Centenary of the Cork School of Music, pp. 73–74.

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Ó Dubhthagh to finance ministry, 16 February 1923. NAI (FIN/1/2795).

the view of the new minister of finance, Ernest Blythe, that if a grant did ever become practicable in the future, the state could be expected to share a fraction of the total expenditure. In response, CTIC expressed astonishment “at the attitude of the ministry of finance in endeavouring to justify its action in breaking a distinct and unequivocal promise made”. Enclosing copies of previous correspondence, it requested recognition of “the honourable understanding” upon which the committee had made itself “liable for the expenditure involved in carrying out this work of national importance”, threatening to “organise public opinion on the matter ... with its consequent damage to public faith and the creation of an atmosphere so colourful of an old regime.” In the interim, an unpaid Hardebeck resigned from his post as professor of Irish traditional music at the Cork School of Music and returned to Belfast in July 1923. Despite continuing frustrations over the lack of funding for the publication of his works, and copyright issues concerning manuscripts that he produced, relations between himself and CTIC continued to be amicable. Those between the ministries of education and finance were not as the respective ministers from the governing Cumann na Gaedheal party and, more significantly, senior civil servants in their departments, wrangled over the issue for years. The matter was referenced only briefly by Teachtaí Dála (TDs, parliamentary members) in Dáil Éireann during this time.

NOTHING IRISH?

In May 1924, Brennan, the finance department secretary, informed Ó Dubhthagh, his counterpart in education, that another installment of the grant in question would be paid if the minister could give an assurance that “no further liability would be imposed on the state in this matter and that satisfactory work has been done for the total expenditure” involved. Details of the extent and cost of traditional music publication by the Cork School of Music were furnished in June 1924 by Giltinan, the CTIC secretary, who reminded Brennan that the only objective was “the furtherance of an appreciation of our national music”,

8 Joseph Brennan: letter to Ó Dubhthagh, 6 June 1923. NAI (FIN/1/2795).
9 F.B. Giltinan: letter to ministry of education, 10 July 1923. NAI (FIN/1/2795).
10 Curtis: Cork School of Music, pp. 73–76.
13 Brennan to Ó Dubhthagh, 5 May 1924; Brennan to Ó Dubhthagh, 7 May 1924. NAI (FIN/1/2795).
not "monetary profit". He enclosed specimen copies of the school's publications, *Nursery rhymes* and *Examination test music* (primary, junior, intermediate, senior and advanced grades), along with three draft publications, *Preludes and pieces*—primary grade, *Preludes and pieces*—junior grade and *Songs*, grade II. The education department evidently had confidence in the merits of these works and had no reservations in forwarding the booklets to the finance department. Conversely, Brennan was of the opinion that there was "nothing Irish in them except the top line of print on the cover". He added: "I do not know whether it was hoped that we would not look inside the covers!"

Brennan played a crucial role in creating guidelines for establishing proper financial procedures for the new Irish state and held significant control of the finance department until his resignation in 1928. For him, retrenchment and rigid economy took precedence over cultural development. In October 1924, he sought the opinion of Donal J. O'Sullivan, editor of the *Journal of the Irish Folk Song Society* and, what Brennan termed, "an authority on the subject of traditional Irish music," O'Sullivan responded in a balanced way. On the one hand, he regarded the content of the *Examination test music* series as the type of music easily obtainable in other publications and at a cheaper rate from Germany or England. He hoped that *Songs, grade II* would "never get as far as publication" for there were errors in the words of the Irish language songs contained within and the airs themselves were "practically all readily accessible in recently published books". On the other hand, he praised the draft *Preludes and pieces* for primary and junior grades, and the published *Nursery rhymes*, as "genuine Irish" music which had not been previously arranged. He recommended the nursery rhyme book for use in national schools and commended Carl Hardebeck on the excellent arrangements of airs which meant "very little except to the expert, and they have no chance of being popularized except when arranged in this way". "Work of this kind", O'Sullivan added, "when well done, deserves all the encouragement it can get."

Brennan evidently did not wish to encourage the Cork School of Music publication scheme and used O'Sullivan's criticisms as a pretext to renounce upon the promised grant. In his correspondence with Ó Dubhthagh, he highlighted only negative comments, attributing them to "a responsible and well informed quarter", and advocated disallowing the remainder of the grant in respect of publications which "could not have the slightest pretension to be regarded as Irish traditional music." In the absence of information as to the identity of the critic, the minister for education, Eoin MacNeill, refused to disallow the grant. There ensued for more than a year a heated written argument on the matter with Ó Dubhthagh warning that "the delay in settling it is calculated to do considerable injury to the government as it is being referred to as an instance of departments refusing to carry out undertakings of the Dáil ministers".20 In the meantime, CTIC had outstanding debts to printers which they could not pay without the promised grant. Giltinan, the committee secretary, made several enquiries regarding payment, intimating that they were "heartily sick of this whole transaction" and would be forced to publish "the history of this broken pledge".21

In September 1926, the education department was informed that money would not be discharged from public funds because some of the work of the Cork School of Music had "obviously very little merit in it".22 However, an ex-gratia grant of £300 was made by the finance minister from departmental savings to the school in 1927. The matter continued as an administrative anomaly for a further two years after a lengthy investigation by the committee of public accounts as to the legality of the original award. The entire issue dissipated when control of funding for the Cork School of Music was transferred from CTIC to Cork Corporation under the vocational education act in 1930. Within a few years "Irish music" by Carl Hardebeck was being published under the auspices of An Gúm (The Scheme), the publications section of the education ministry.

**"TOLLING THE DEATH KNELL OF IRISH CULTURE"**

Founded by the Cumann na nGaedheal government in 1926, the initial purpose of the state publication scheme, An Gúm, was the creation of school text-books in the Irish language.23 It gradually expanded to consider other types of publication in Irish, including "Irish music" which was published for the first time in 1935, by which time Fianna Fáil was the governing party. Shortly after coming to power two years previously, £10,000 was made available for the preparation and publication of "translations of original works in Irish and also for Irish music" but this discharge of public funds was not without controversy.

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14 Giltinan to dept. of ed., 9 June 1924. NAI (FIN/1/2795).
18 O'Sullivan to Brennan, 28 Oct. 1924 NAI (FIN/1/2795).
19 Brennan to Ó Dubhthagh, 4 Dec. 1924 NAI (FIN/1/2795).
20 Ó Dubhthagh to Brennan, 20 Jan. 1925 NAI (FIN/1/2795).
21 Giltinan to Ó Dubhthagh, 13 Nov. 1924 NAI (FIN/1/2795).
22 Memo, dept. of finance to dept. of ed., 30 Sept. 1926 NAI (FIN/1/2795).
In a lengthy speech in Dáil Éireann in April 1933, Thomas Kelly, Fianna Fail TD for Dublin South, questioned how this "grant for Irish music" was to be used "in terms of popular interpretation". He pointed out that he was speaking on behalf of musicians, "a large and very cultured number of our people", who had been unemployed not on account of the general economic depression, but rather "the change in manners of the people". According to Kelly, hundreds of people were now "idle" for some time owing to "changes, such as jazz music ... a remarkable sort of music even to my unmusical ear". He added that the "particular type of citizen" for whom he spoke – the musician – suffered an intense poverty because it was a secluded poverty. In Kelly's opinion, the money set aside for music publication would be better spent on the organization of "civic orchestras inside the five large cities in this country" to be subsidized in three ways: by a grant from the department of education, by a "small rate-in-aid" struck by the local authorities, and by "citizens who are blessed with wealth and have cultured minds".

Kelly felt that such orchestras would "bring about again the popularization of the national music of our country" and he asked that this matter be viewed seriously, not only because of the "unhappy position" of musicians but also "to advance national culture". He recalled "the enthusiasm of 25 years ago, amongst Sinn Féin, the Gaelic League and all the other associations existing then with strong national aspirations, for our native music. That is all gone, or nearly gone".

By the end of the academic year 1935/6, thirty-two pieces of Irish music were published by An Gúm, twenty-five (78%) of which were composed or arranged by Carl Hardebeck, the rest by Liam de Néartidhe and Ernest de Regge. This remained the position until the publication of new works by John Larchet in 1939 and by Éamon Ó Gallchobhair in 1940. Constraints on paper and publishing machinery brought about by the Second World War meant that only about five pieces of music were produced between 1941 and 1945. By July 1951, the total number of publications was 133. All had Irish language titles and consisted mostly of short choral compositions, instrumental orchestrations or arrangements of traditional melodies. A number of more 'lengthy' works, such as a symphony and an opera, were awaiting preparation and approval.

The list of names of those whose works were published reveals that it only contained works by composers who believed that the composition of art music in Ireland had to be related to the indigenous repertory and that a national expression of this type could only be achieved by basing compositions on 'folksong'.

This view was not shared by composers like Aloys Fleischmann, Brian Boydell and Frederick May, all of whom commented publicly on the predicaments of the composer in Ireland with regard to the traditional canon. Fleischmann wrote in 1935, for example: "One finds a great deal of complacency on the score of Gaelic traditional music. But that music is not an achievement of this generation but of the last; it is an ancient legacy." The following year he rebuked the compositional mode that adhered to the propagation of 'folk music' saying that it simply did not lead to the cultivation of 'art' music. That things had not changed by 1950 is evident from a revealing article written that year by Brian Boydell who stated that the conscientious attempts by the state to maintain insularity and self-sufficiency and to develop "our own pure little culture" meant "tolling the death-knell of Irish culture". He pointed out that the character of any individual or nation was formed by "the reaction of that individual to his surroundings" and that it was "not only arrant nonsense" but "an ignorance of historic fact to claim that we can build a great Irish culture by shutting out foreign influences".

Boydell suggested that it was time that Irish people "grew up and realized that the individuality of a nation is expressed by the natural activities and thoughts of its people, through the mouthpiece of its artists" and not through any prescriptive sense of Irishness, in music or otherwise:

Any artist who is Irish, and is sensitive to the strong and individual atmosphere of his country cannot help expressing the Irish spirit in his work; and it is his peculiar viewpoint which is a contribution to the art of the world.

If the artist should become aggressively self-conscious of his nationality, he deceives himself and becomes an impostor; he behaves like a small boy asserting his individuality, and adds nothing to the progress of culture".

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32 See Aloys Fleischmann: "Composition and the folk idiom", in: Ireland Today 1 (Nov. 1936), cited in Ryan, Nationalism and music, p. 419.

33 Brian Boydell: "Culture and chauvinism", in: Envoy 2 (May 1950), pp. 75-76.

34 Ibidem, pp. 76-77.
Boydell advised those who claimed that “Irish musicians should devote their time to the performance of Irish music, and not waste time on ‘foreign products’” should consider the fact that “great nationalist composers” like Greig, Sibelius and Bartók “could never have made such a contribution without their intensive study of the mainstream of European music”. He held that Ireland was “unfortunate” in “having an incomparable tradition of folksong” because this was a “spontaneous expression of national feeling” and therefore “totally different from the organised expression of art music”. Adding that it was “only too easy for unimaginative composers today to hide their lack of imagination by pasting this ready-made national expression all over their music”, he did not see how a musical culture could be built on folksong alone, particularly when “what the average person believes to be the genuine article is nothing more than a shadow, distorted by Victorian musical ideas”. Boydell concluded: “If Irish culture is worthy of survival… it will survive on its own merits as an integral part of the culture of the world. Insulate it from the invigorating influences of other countries, and it will surely rot in its own mildew of chauvinism”.

Frederick May expressed similar sentiments in Fleischmann’s seminal Music in Ireland survey, published in 1952, writing that “nationalistic considerations would have to be relegated to second place”, particularly in the education system, to ensure that “the talented youth of Ireland should not be denied the same facilities for development” in music as were afforded in countries like Sweden and Finland. May doubted whether any nation “with such a wonderful storehouse of traditional music” had “made such a negligible contribution to art music” as had Ireland. He proposed that “maudlin sentiment and barren theorising” be abandoned and musical criticism not be founded on the premise that “all good music must be demonstrably national in feeling”. The demonstration of ‘national’ feeling in music continued to be a concern for Irish politicians who articulated their views on music in Dáil Éireann.

COLLECTING CULTURE

In February 1937, James Dillon, Fine Gael party TD for Monaghan, asked the minister for education, Thomas Derrig, if his department was consulting with any body of artists or recognised authorities on Irish music with a view to selecting authoritative material and with a view to ensuring that whatever is printed, with the seal of the government’s approval will truly represent that type of Irish music which we might not expect a publisher, who is seeking nothing but profit, to produce.

Richard Anthony, the Independent Labour TD for Cork Borough, agreed that the department should take some authoritative advice because there was “a lot of ‘come-all-ye’s’ coming over the ether which is offered to us as Irish music, but which is not very creditable to the country”. Anthony enquired if anything had been done regarding the publication of the Bunting Collection which he personally regarded as ‘a standard work’. He added, though, that in the view of persons better qualified to judge than he was, the music collection was “beyond the reach of the ordinary school-child and is certainly beyond the reach of many-working class people” and he asked if the minister would ensure a more universally accessible publication.

Derrig responded that Bunting’s work was being edited and published by a private publisher, “a gentleman here in Dublin who is well known” but was quick to point out that this work was not being done under government auspices, its chief concerns lying with the publication of music prepared by Carl Hardebeck. Addressing Dillon’s query, Derrig responded that the department had a “small committee of experts to advise the department regarding the suitability for publication of pieces of Irish music” which would consider “any work” offered to it, whether this be original compositions or “the re-editing of Bunting or of the work of other early workers in that sphere”. He added that his department were satisfied with the work done by this committee to date. Dillon pressed the minister to state the names of the department’s music advisory committee members but he declined to answer.

In a lively debate a year later, Dillon pushed Derrig to explain how exactly the publication of “Irish music” was justified by the department given that the original intention of An Gúm had been to provide Irish texts so that pupils would have adequate learning resources. He asked:

What do we mean by Irish music? Surely we are branching out into a very much wider sphere now than the publishing of ordinary Irish texts? Is it proposed to collect traditional airs which have hitherto been unrecorded, and set them down, or is it suggested that we are to publish slip jigs in convenient form?

35 Ibidem, pp. 78–79.
38 Ibidem, col. 236–237.
40 Ibidem, col. 243.
41 Dáil Éireann parliamentary debates official report, lxx, 190 (3 Feb. 1938).
It was Dillon’s opinion that while the publication of “modern music such as is habitually played by dance bands or the like” would be money wasted, “everyone would be sympathetic with a proposal to collect traditional music on the lines on which Béaloideas is working at the present time”. Dillon was referring here to An Comisiún Béaloideasa Éireann, the Irish Folklore Commission, established in 1935, whose work was published in Béaloideas, the journal of The Folklore of Ireland Society. The aim of the commission was the collection, cataloguing and archiving of the “oral traditions and the oral literature of the country”. Collectors and archivists were sent abroad, to Sweden, for example, to learn the methodologies employed there for similar projects. Accounts of local ‘traditional’ musical activities and musicians featured in the material collected in the field as well as the accounts provided by school-children as part of the project.42 The commission also had one part-time collector of music, Liam de Noraidh, between 1940 and 1942, and one full-time collector of music, Séamus Mac Aonghusa, from 1941 to 1947, both of whom collected thousands of dance tunes and songs in the Irish language from all parts of Ireland, and parts of west Scotland.43

Timothy Linehan, a Fine Gael TD for Cork North, asked Derrig what exactly was meant by ‘the preparation and publication of Irish music’, and whether it included:

The publication of existing Irish music, publications put into cheap form, of old airs and old collections of Irish music that are not easily available to the public, or whether the phrase ‘Irish music’ would cover some such case as that of somebody here in Dublin composing a tune in the latest ‘swing’ style, called something like “The moon rising over pillar”? Would a composition of that kind come under the heading of Irish music?44

Derrig replied that while it was the government’s intention “to publish arrangements or settings of original Irish airs as far as possible”, they were so far confined to the work of a few composers. But he did not rule out ‘new’ music:

If a new composer swims into our ken, who is capable of doing for native Irish music what has been done in other countries by composers like the Hungarian composers of the present day or the Russian composers of some time back, it would be a question whether such a composer would be

44 Dáil Éireann debs., lxx, 193 (3 Feb. 1938).
where the government paid pensions to certain composers. It pointed to Finland, where the government had supported Sibelius and therefore "did more than anything else to establish Finland as one of the most civilised European nations of the present day". The association added that conditions had been propitious at the time of Sibelius' emergence with the existence of "a musical public, a good orchestra, a publisher, and a number of excellent musicians and teachers, including more than one contemporary first-class conductor [...] There was something for which to write music; music that would express the spirit of Finland as a force in Western civilization, and that was received with the enthusiasm of a nation". The fact that there was no composer of Sibelius' stature in Ireland, then, was not the fault or inability of composers but the result of unfavourable musical conditions and "the general lack of interest in music" which, the association claimed, was "a striking feature of Irish life".

The primary problem for the Irish composer, though, remained the lack of "a highly developed art music in Ireland". The association pointed out that it was "often supposed that Irish composers should base their work upon folk-music; or what is even more narrow-minded, that to qualify as 'Irish' composers they must merely arrange folk-songs, or at least introduce a conspicuous folk-song element into the matter or style of their compositions". There was, the association said, nothing more barren or sterile than these prejudices, which are the cause of some of the obstacles put in the way of our composers. Unfortunately a number of musicians have encouraged such ideas by incorporating Irish folk-tunes into larger works; but by so doing they have at the same time illustrated its fallacies, and failed completely to produce music of the slightest interest. A new idiom will have to be created that will express the Irish spirit and character in relation to the world today, and as a contribution to the future. Such an idiom will perhaps be inspired partly by the cultural traditions of the past, whose strength lies in poetry and language, not music; partly by the landscape; and perhaps to a very limited extent by a familiarity with the folk-music. But inevitably also it will be inseparable from the character and individuality of the composer and must be spontaneous, not a deliberate construction out of arbitrary ideological elements.

Referring to Finland, the association pointed out that Sibelius had succeeded in creating an entirely new musical idiom that was "at the same time so Finnish in character that many people imagine it to be based on Finnish folk-music". It claimed that Sibelius had "in fact never made use of a folk-tune, and his idiom is singularly unlike that of Finnish folk-music". However, it also warned that the composer, while requiring "some form of official recognition and encouragement", had to be left free to write as he chose. "We do not want the appointment of state composers, under compulsion to produce music according to the dogmas of the ruling régime, as in the U.S.S.R.".

The Music Association of Ireland pointed to the possibilities of composing music suitable for school or amateur choirs and orchestras, of which there was "exceedingly little available that is up to a competent standard". This type of composition, it assured readers of its memorandum, would not be "a handicap to the composer, but on the contrary a stimulus" to the imagination. It claimed that most of the "great works of music were produced to order in this way and would never have come into being if they had not been specially written for some particular player, purpose or occasion". "It is", it concluded, "not enough merely to enjoy the music of other people and ages; each society must produce its own. The composer is the end and justification of its musical life, its own realization in music".

The nascent Irish Free State's involvement with the Cork School of Music publication scheme in the early 1920s prompted important questions about the Irishness of 'Irish music' and the necessity of publication. The protracted controversy highlighted the reluctance of the central state department — finance — to support a potentially significant 'national' scheme, and the internal divisions within the Cumann na nGaedheal administration. The personalism of Irish politics however allowed individual government ministers and civil servants to develop or thwart aspects of musical activity pertinent to the development and propagation of national culture. It also demonstrated, as Harry White has long contended, that the cultivation and promotion of traditional music was prioritized to the impairment of musical advancement. This situation continued during the Fianna Fáil administrations of the 1930s and 1940s as state-sponsorship of 'Irish' music collection and publication aligned with the party's policies of self-sufficiency and safeguarding 'Irishness'. The emphasis on ethnic repertory as a raw musical source to be arranged for the concert hall, or for broadcast, promoted the compositions and enhanced the reputations of certain composers — to the chagrin of those who advocated a more outward looking approach. National self-consciousness insulated and polarized not only the art form but also its historiography, so that the question "What do we mean by Irish music?" is as problematic almost a century after independence as it was in the years after the foundation of the state.

52 Ibidem, p. 64.
54 Ibidem, p. 62.
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