

DOCUMENTS OF IRISH MUSIC HISTORY IN THE LONG NINETEENTH CENTURY. Edited by Kerry Houston, Maria McHale and Michael Murphy. Pp 288. Dublin: Four Courts Press. 2019. €55.

The historical study of Irish music is on a gentle upward curve. It is two decades since the publication of Harry White's *The keeper's recital* (Cork, 1998), which positioned the history of Irish politics and cultural identity as a central problem for scholarly understanding and musical composition. The argument that political history inhibited the creative output of musicians prevails to some extent, but more recent work has instead largely embraced the rich culture at the intersections of music, history, identity, politics, economics and ideology. This includes major studies such as Guy Beiner's *Remembering the year of the French* (Madison, 2007), which made extensive use of historical sources (most obviously the National Folklore Collection), but also an exciting range of new scholarship. Work by Maura Valenti, Timothy Love and Reg Hall stands out, as does Stephen Millar's *Sounding dissent* (Ann Arbor, 2019), which sets the standard for oral historians of Northern Irish political culture. If anthologies were at risk of dominating the scholarly landscape (e.g. Terry Moylan's *The indignant muse* (Dublin, 2016)), it now looks more likely that we will be able to understand as much as we collect.

The prospects for historical studies of Irish music are therefore promising, a situation enhanced by the increasing availability of relevant sources. Improvements in cataloguing and digitisation mean scholars can access more contextual material than ever. Examples include the National Folklore Collection, Bureau of Military History, Military Service Pensions Collection, Irish Newspaper Archive, census records, and the digital collections and archives made available by the National Library and National Archives of Ireland. Broadly, the more 1916-related a source is, the more available it is likely to be. A collection highlighting and promoting sources on nineteenth-century Irish music is therefore very welcome.

Such is the value of *Documents of Irish music history in the long nineteenth century*. Michael Murphy's introduction immediately draws attention to lesser known sources for musical study including the minute books and other archival materials of the Irish Musical Fund and official census returns. One would be forgiven at times for thinking that the contributors re-tread well-plundered ground. The comments that Thomas Moore's conception of 'Irish music' in his letter on music raises a 'vexed and contested term', or that the 'xenophobic view of European classical music' expressed by Thomas Davis dominated the 'history of ideas about music in Ireland', have a certain repetitive feel. However, overall this volume presents valuable material for the study of music and culture. Each of the seventeen chapters focuses on one source or collection, accompanied by critical commentary.

The result is a book presenting important insights into Ireland's nineteenth-century soundscape. Adrian Scahill, for example, traces the origins of the céilí back past its usual point of presumed origin in the London Gaelic League. Pat O'Connell, meanwhile, investigates the repertoire of military bands and shows, by noting the inclusion of waltzes, that bands must have provided music for social gatherings. In an invigorating contribution, Karol Mullaney-Dignam uses census records to illustrate the social conditions of professional musicians and how musicians were perceived by governments (via how their occupations were categorised).

The greatest value of this book for historians will not be its analysis, but the tantalising possibilities its sources suggest. Musical sources highlight much more than music itself, and sources need not be musical to inform us about musical culture. Thus, Catherine Ferris highlights the importance of newspaper reports for understanding music and politics. Historians will find interest in Una Hunt's contribution on the diaries of Ignaz Moscheles, German composer, not only because he brought 'Irish music to an international audience', but because he lived a consciously transnational life. Ita Beausang discusses the Irish Musical Fund Society, which supported professional musicians. Its papers, as Beausang illustrates, would be revealing for social and economic historians, with details of the society's support for the health and education of members, as well as insights into philanthropy, social

conditions and commemorative culture. In Jeremy Dibble's chapter on composer Michele Esposito, historians will recognise and benefit from the experience of working around sources that have disappeared altogether.

Documents of Irish music history in the long nineteenth century has much to commend it both to historians and music scholars. Those interested in specific musical subjects during the period will find at least one chapter of interest, while those concerned with non-musical topics in the history of culture, economics, politics, philanthropy and social conditions can also expect to find new and valuable lines of enquiry.

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IRISH READING SOCIETIES AND CIRCULATING LIBRARIES FOUNDED BEFORE 1825: USEFUL KNOWLEDGE AND AGREEABLE ENTERTAINMENT. By K. A. Manley. Pp 248. Dublin: Four Courts Press. 2018. €58.50.

In recent years a number of publications have appeared that have served to shed light, from a variety of angles, on the history of the book in Ireland. One thinks, of course, of volumes three, four and five of the *Oxford history of the Irish book* (2006–2011), though mention might also be made of Raymond Gillespie's *Reading Ireland* (Manchester, 2005) and, more recently, of Toby Barnard's *Brought to book: print in Ireland, 1680–1784* (Dublin, 2017) and Elizabethanne Boran's collection, *Book collecting in Ireland and Britain, 1650–1850* (Dublin, 2018). K. A. Manley's volume is a welcome addition to this corpus, though its focus is slightly more precise. As the title indicates, Manley is principally concerned not with books themselves, but with the institutions that provided readers with access to them – reading societies and circulating libraries. It should be noted at the outset, however, that the volume ranges more widely than its title might at first suggest, offering insights on the types of reading material that circulated in Ireland in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and of the wider significance – social, cultural and, invariably, political – of its circulation.

Reading societies do, to be sure, receive their due attention. The Belfast Society for Promoting Knowledge and the Dublin Library Society, prominent instances of this form of library, in which 'a group of people bought shares in a collection of books', are discussed (p. 12). So, too, are the smaller workers' book clubs and reading societies of late eighteenth-century Ulster (societies that are reasonably well-known to scholars of the 1790s, as a consequence of the authorities' suspicion and, in some instances, violent suppression of them), and Manley also sheds light on the somewhat lesser-known reading societies, catering for both the working and middle classes, that were established in the early nineteenth century. Likewise, two chapters are devoted to circulating libraries – commercial enterprises, often established by booksellers, that were generally confined to Ireland's larger urban centres. Libraries of this sort were present in Dublin and, to a lesser extent, Belfast by the second half of the eighteenth century, but became increasingly common in the early nineteenth century.

One of the particular strengths of *Irish reading societies and circulating libraries* is its author's careful utilisation of newspaper advertisements (little other evidence having survived) to chart this growth, though the volume is no dry-as-dust exercise in institutional or business history. Its account of the development of these differing types of libraries is enlivened by discussion of the controversies that exercised their members and, in the case of circulating libraries, by cameos of those who used and managed them. Thus, we encounter the remarkable Luke White, a Belfast pedlar, turned bookseller, who was said, when he died, to be Ireland's wealthiest man; the young William Carleton, who read scandalous books in the circulating library owned Mrs Richardson of Dublin's Francis Street; and Edward McGowran, also of Dublin, who appears in Patrick Kennedy's *Legends of Mount Leinster*