

Columbia Pro Cantare Program Notes

From Ireland, On Wings of Song Text, Translations and Program Notes

Seinn Aililú

The haunting strains of this ancient Irish melody and text trace the seven blessings bestowed on the Virgin Mary by her Son, Jesus. The simple chorus invites the faithful to "Sing Alleluia." There is a striking contrast throughout this piece between the moments of intense joy and the extreme sorrow which characterized her life. From the humble birth of her only Son Jesus, the listener journeys with them to the joyous discovery of a young Jesus in the Temple. The fourth and fifth blessings refer to the miracles performed by Jesus during His life, the Marriage Feast at Cana and the Raising of Lazarus from the Dead. The listener is reminded in the sixth blessing of the Son of Mary's ultimate sacrifice: He saved the world with His blood. The coronation of Mary is the subject of the final blessing. This hymn celebrates the deep faith of the Irish people and in particular, their devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Seachtain

This piece set by Micheál Ó Súilleabháin to words by Seán Ó Ríordán describes the evolution of a storm off the southwest Irish coast in County Kerry close to the Blasket Islands. The storm begins on Monday and as the days pass, the wind increases in strength. However, on Sunday, the Son of God calms the winds so that the Blasket Islanders can get to the mainland to hear Mass. Musically, the storm builds up from a cluster at the beginning, a sound painting of the approaching storm. As the days are mentioned, the melody sung by the sopranos becomes more frenzied. On Sunday the storm abates and Mass is announced in the strains of the "Kyrie" from the plainchant Mass Missa Orbis Factor. The piece ends with an extended series of chords, reminiscent of the beginning. Now though the chords fade away to a magical pianissimo.

Thugamar Féin An Samhradh Linn

Thugamar Féin An Samhradh Linn
The May dolls, the summer maiden,
Up every hill and down every dale,
Splendid girls dressed in bright dresses,
We brought the summer with us.

Refrain: Summer, summer, milk for the calves,
We brought the summer with us,
Golden summer of bright daisies,
We brought the summer with us.

We brought it with us from the branchy wood
We brought the summer with us,
Golden summer of setting suns,
We brought the summer with us.

The lark sings as she soars through the skies,
Bees and flies and blossoms on trees,
The cuckoo and all the birds sing out with pleasure,
We brought the summer with us.

John Field (1782-1837) was the leading Irish musician of his time and one of the greatest pianists of the first four decades of the nineteenth century. Born in Dublin and educated mostly there, he made his solo debut in Dublin at the age of nine in what a critic described as "an astonishing performance by such a child." A year later the family moved to London, where he entered into an apprenticeship with Muzio Clementi, the great pianist and instrument maker.

By the time he was seventeen, Field had already premiered his First Piano Concerto. It was one of the last acts of his apprenticeship. For the next several years he was lionized as a performer. He made more frequent appearances as a composer, beginning with this first set of piano sonatas, dedicated to Clementi upon publication in 1801. In July 1802, Field went with Clementi on a continental journey that was to prove fateful. After delighting listeners in Paris and Vienna with his playing, the young man followed his mentor to St. Petersburg, where he stayed on after Clementi left in June 1803. He became all the rage in Russian aristocratic society. A memorial tribute published in 1839 noted of those early days, "Not to have heard Field was regarded as a sin against art and good taste." Field remained in Russia most of the rest of his life, enjoying social, musical and romantic success, eventually marrying a student who had been his mistress, raising a family, and living alternatively in St. Petersburg and Moscow.

Every item in Field's compositional output includes a piano. In addition to the seven piano concertos, written between 1800 and 1832, there were several piano duets and many solo piano works--sonatas, romances, waltzes, variations, etudes, rondos, and so on. Within this latter category are the works that have kept Field's name alive, the set of short, poetic, lyric pieces that he called "nocturnes."

Until the publication of these works of Field's there was scarcely such a thing as a "piano piece" in this sense. The nocturne offered something new: a brief musical contemplation of a single mood, without development, lyrical in character, in which the left hand normally provided an accompaniment in broken chords--often triplets--to support a melody that is very much in the style of *bel canto* operatic singing, which was very popular in St. Petersburg when Field moved there. His decision to write in this style may well have come from a desire to show off the legato technique of the most modern pianos of his day as much as from a love of Italian opera. But despite any possible influence from the stage, this is truly piano music. Field consistently revealed a wonderful imagination for delicate and poetic effect. Almost all of his nocturnes fall into a simple three-part form, of which the final section is a repetition of the first, but elaborated with graceful decoration. Here, too, the flourishes and graces of *bel canto* technique show themselves. Field generally keeps his textures light, so as not to overpower the arch of the melody. But he makes frequent use of pedal point and his gentle melancholy is often marked by touches of dissonance, glints of chromatic shading, and imaginative variations in texture. Field's inventive keyboard techniques, his melodic grace, his ear for color, and his ability to grasp one of the fundamental elements of romantic music--the immediacy of a poetic mood, capture in music--make him a figure of some significance in nineteenth-century music. Perhaps is his destiny to be always regarded as a forerunner, but he nonetheless left some musical gems strewn in his path
~Steven Ledbetter

Return to Old Ireland Mary McAuliffe

"Return To Old Ireland" was commissioned by the 160 voice symphonic Michael O'Neal Singers of Atlanta, Georgia, and premiered to celebrate St. Patrick's Day 2000. The title of the composition is derived from the opening 20 line powerful and moving poem of Walt Whitman, "Old Ireland," (first published 1865). This text portrays the dying Ireland at the time of the great famine of 1845 - 1850 and its subsequent rebirth in the New World. The composition, which further deals with Irish emigration to the US, the power of the calling home, and finally, the invitation to a joyful reunion, reflects the long history and the bond between our two nations. It is a journey in time and in place, and so it is appropriate to begin with the text of one of America's greatest poets, Walt Whitman, and base the final movement on a line of Ireland's best loved poet, Nobel Laureate, William Butler Yeats.

Scored for SATB Chorus, 2 Flutes, Oboe, Cor Anglais, String Quartet, Piano, Organ, Bodhrán and Timpani, the work is a composite of 4 distinct movements, prefaced by a short introduction which later repeats as a link.

Return to Old Ireland brings us from the deepest sadness to the heights of great joy. It imbues in us one of the strongest draws of the human condition, the need to belong. We invite you to be part of this American/Irish celebration and to share our feelings, and wherever your roots, we hope you will experience with us these common bonds.

Since its 2000 world premiere by the Michael O'Neal Singers in Atlanta, *Return to Old Ireland* had its Irish premier in Dublin in July, 2000, and has received other performances in Indiana, Michigan, Georgia, Virginia and Ireland. *"Return to Old Ireland"* is featured on the Michael O'Neal Singers CD "The Music Of Ireland" and is available through the MOS website www.mosingers.com

LEAVING, a Famine Victim's Cry of Desolation, Mary McAuliffe

Leaving... was premiered at Emory University, Atlanta, in 1997 as part of a week of commemorative events marking the 150th Anniversary of the Irish Famine. The piece is written in memory of those million people who were forced to emigrate from Ireland on board what were known as Famine ships. I decided that I would approach the subject in a very personal way and attempt to place myself in the shoes of one such emigrant, imagining what I thought might be the feelings of someone about to board a ship to the New World.

The tremendous sense of grieving for loss of loved ones and of homeland, fear for the safety of those left behind, dread of the long and arduous journey ahead, and of a highly uncertain future in a strange land, and the knowledge that there was no going back were all extremely powerful and draining emotions in their own right, but these coupled with the already weakened condition of the emigrant must have embued this journey with nightmarish qualities. yet there must have been hope, and I believe it was this hope that carried the human spirit forward and empowered the emigrant with courage and vision of a better future.

Forty million people in the United States claim Irish heritage. Many can trace their ancestors to having crossed at the time of the Famine on ships such as the Jeanie Johnston, a replica of which will sail triumphantly into Baltimore in June 2003. The chorus joins the soloist in the *Song of Remembrance*, vowing to hold in cherished memory those who crossed the great Atlantic in those

terrible times.

What need I now for the brown earth
Scavenged to nothingness?
Leave I must for the new horizon,
My hope, my only hope,
For a better world, far away
At the ends of the earth.
To remain is to die.

My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?
Heard not my feeble cry in the barren fields?
Sought not to bring me comfort
Or a season of Plenty?
Provided not food from Thy bounty for Thy little ones,
Stooped, racked with pain and misery,
Older than their years?
Wiped not my tears with Thy gentle touch?
Why?

Frail, so frail, feeble and cold,
So Cold, despite the heat of the sun,
Broken of heart and mind
At the sight of my dear ones
Desolate and dying,
Weakened by hunger of body and soul,
Sorrowing at man's inhumanity.
Has no one cared?
Has no one cried for us?
Oh Ireland, my Ireland.

I cry on the open sea,
My voice lost in the sound of the gulls,
In the wind that carries us forth,
In the roaring of the waves,
In the sorrowing keening down below.
Oh Ireland, my Ireland.

In my dream only shall I see you,
lost to me forever.
Long time forth shall I hold your memory
Close to my heart; so long it may beat.
Oh memory, fade not with the burden of my trials.
Time hold thou nearer.
Be a fortitude in my loneliness.
I shall dream of you, oh Ireland,
Land of my heritage
Disappearing in the mist.

I am too weak for tears, still my heart still beats for you;
Too feeble to stretch my arms to you,
yet my soul reaches to you.
My strength ebbs further each moment
With each wave lapping at the edge of my stronghold.
Hold fast my ship, and carry me!
I long for life and the green earth,
For time and space to dream,
To see the stars.

Song of Remembrance

Hope is my salvation.
My Lord, take not my hope.
Give me strength to live,
To reach my destination
That I may live, may live -
So many others not forgotten.

Never, not forgotten.
Never.
You are held in my memory
You are close to my heart.
And never will I forget you.
Never.

12 August 1997 Mary McAullife ©

O'MALLEY'S MARCH - Performing from Baltimore to Washington, DC, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, O'Malley's March has been well known in the midAtlantic region for many years. They bring their own style of "Celtic Fury" to the stage with a number of original songs composed by songwriter and lead singer, Martin O'Malley. Harp, highland bagpipes flute and trombone by Jared; fiddling by Jimmy; Jamie on drums and percussion; Sean on the squeezebox; mandolin and tenor guitars by Ralph; and Pete, the baseman - a full spectrum of traditional and contemporary instruments rocked by these musicians' dynamic presentations. In addition to their many performances, they have warmed the stage for some of the group's favorites: Shane MacGowan, Los Lobos, The Chieftains, Bad Haggas, Chad Brock, Black-47, Tommy Makem, Liam Clancy & Robbie O'Connell, Mary McGonigle, Kips Bay and the Prodigals. Martin performed with the Neville Brothers and opened solo for The Saw Doctors and Carol King.

While attending Washington's Gonzaga High School, tenor/guitarist MARTIN O'MALLEY formed The Shannon Tide in 1979, with his football coach, Danny Costello. Later O'Malley traded his tin whistle for a guitar and went solo in 1985. He continued to play the circuit before joining forces with Paul Levin in 1988 to form O'Malley's March. Songs featured in tonight's concert include: *Farewell Clonbur, Wait For Me, South Baltimore Lullabye, and Streets of Baltimore.*