

A Note on the Story and the Five Traditional Ballads

The story told by the *The Antient Concert*, a “Dramatic Recital for Four Singers,” concerns itself with the 1904 *Feis Ceoil* competition recital on 27 August 1904 in the Antient Concert Rooms in Dublin, Ireland. Legend has it that John McCormack and James Joyce competed that night in the Tenor Competition. There is no documentary evidence of this; however, Joyce did win the Bronz Medal that year (it is said that he did not agree with the stipulation that competitors demonstrate their musicianship by doing some sight-reading, and left the stage). Many believe that it was McCormack’s 1903 win of the Gold Medal that launched his career.

For the purpose of telling a story about the collision of words, music, performance, sex, death, and nationalism, we chose five traditional Irish ballads that Joyce and McCormack may have performed that evening, and used them as the musical and textual foundation upon which the piece is built. Consequently, throughout the recital, the characters shift between “performance mode” and the expression of their internal thoughts. Since a little background about each air might be useful to performers, I have offered some below.

1. Salley Gardens (p. 8)

William Butler Yeats’ poem was published in *Crossways* in 1889, and was probably inspired by an eighteenth-century song called *The Rambling Boys of Pleasure*. The air is the traditional Irish ballad *The Maids of Mourné Shore*. A salley is a willow tree. It was once common to have gardens of willows for osiers (willow rods), which were used for basket-making and thatching cottage roofs. The Gaelic for willow is saileach; the English useage of sally, or salley, for willow tree may be derived from the Gaelic.



2. The Harp That Once (p. 23)

Irish poet and barrister Thomas Moore’s ballad has long been associated with the traditional air *Gramachree*, which may be found in M’Gibbon’s *Scots Tunes Bk. II* (1716) as *Will You Go to Flanders*. Tara is the hilltop site in County Meath that was once home to the Irish high kings.



3. You’re as Welcome as the Flowers in May (p. 32)

The original song *You’re as Welcome as the Flow’rs in May* was written (words and music) by Daniel J. Sullivan in the early twentieth century.



4. Tho’ the Last Glimpse of Erin (p. 40)

In 1543, Henry VIII passed laws regarding the dress of the Irish. Thomas Moore set his words to the traditional air *Coulin*, which concerned an Irish virgin who preferred her “Coulin” (an Irish youth with long hair) to strangers. The song is about preferring exile to the oppression of English law.



5. The Croppy Boy (p. 53)

Although there is a resemblance to an Elizabethan lute tune called *Callino Custurame*, it is more likely that this air is an adaptation of an Irish song of the 1700s called *Cailin O’Chois ’t Siure Mé*. New Geneva, in County Waterford, was used as a prison and torture house by the British in 1798.



—Daron Hagen

5-15)

G A B C# D E b F# G

(Vare TR) Pizz *hosszo* d=72

Authent
"Croppy Boy"

D.H.
P.M.

975.

JOHN
1006
2nd X →
Jim

The youth has knelt — to — tell his sins; — 'No-mi-ne De-i' the youth be-gins.
I bear no grudge — against living things; — but I love to — tend a bird the King.

989
1010

JOHN
2nd X →
Jim

At-me-gul-pa — he beats his breast, — And an bro-ken mur-murs — he speaks, rest.
Now, father, bless — me, — and let me go — To — die, if, God has — ordered it so.

NORA & MAY move towards each other in a reprise of the scene which earlier featured JIM & JOHN.
MAY takes the role of Father Green, NORA that of the supplicant.

2nd time omit
4 bar bridge

982

espr

At the
2nd John = The

(C)

987
1014 1014 → 1018 do a counter-melody

JIM

JOHN
2nd X →

seige of Ross did my fa-ther fall, — And at Go-rey my — lov-ing bro-thers all, — I — a —
priest saw hangt, — but a rustling noise — made the youth look up — in — wild sur-pris; — The robes were

1st Vn. & cal. voices;
2nd Vn. & clarinet

Facsimile of the composer's sketch for measures 975-1018. This manuscript corresponds to pages 71-74 of the score.