

Irish Musical Studies

9: MUSIC IN NINETEENTH- CENTURY IRELAND

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The musical press in nineteenth-century Ireland

MICHAEL MURPHY

Criticism is out of the question. The audience had merely to record by their applause a succession of triumphs, as they recognized each favourite air, and heard the wonderful productions of Bellini derive a new charm from the artiste.

*Cork Examiner*¹

This epigraph is taken from a notice of Catherine Hayes' performance in *La Sonnambula* in Cork's Theatre Royal in the middle of the nineteenth century. As a typical encomium it represents most readers' worst impressions of musical criticism in the daily and weekly newspapers of the nineteenth century, which is to say there is no attempt at criticism in any sense of that term, a problem that was repeatedly lamented in the same era.² Moreover, it reminds us that the majority of the notices were preoccupied with Anglo-Italian opera, the genre that dominated classical musical life in Ireland for the majority of the century. The operas by Balfe, Wallace, Verdi, Bellini and Rossini *inter alia* were funded by the lessees of the theatres, and were performed by visiting companies from England under the management of an impresario who sometimes may have been one of the singers or conductors. The majority of musical criticism was an adjunct to that model of music making. It was only in the final three decades of the century that this model of musical criticism was eroded notwithstanding the continued popularity of Anglo-Italian opera. Indeed, notices were remarkably similar over the decades. Also, they typically reflected the style of the British press, a pervasive presence in Irish newspapers until the advent of national ideals. It is important to see such notices as a reflection of the 'corporate' vision of the editors and patrons of the newspaper. Consequently we must engage with a range of issues that are at once extra-musical but nevertheless seminal to the production

I gratefully acknowledge the funding provided by the College Research Directorate at Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick for enabling me to engage a research assistant, Ruth Stanley, who undertook much archival work for this chapter. ¹ 'Miss Catherine Hayes in Cork', *CE*, 15 March 1850. ² For discussion on this point see Leanne Langley, 'Music', *Victorian periodicals and Victorian society*, ed. J. Don Vann and Rosemary T. VanArsdel (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1994), p. 103. Langley's work is a seminal source for work on the musical press in Britain in the nineteenth century. See op. cit. for a bibliographical essay on the topic. See also, Simon McVeigh, 'London newspapers, 1750 to 1800: a checklist and guide for musicologists', *A handbook for studies in 18th-century English music*, 6, ed. M. Burden and I. Choltj (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); see also <www.concertlifeproject.com> (accessed 20 October 2006) the website for the *Concert Life in 19th-Century London Database and Research Project* which has been reported on in Rachel Cowgill, Christina Bashford and Simon McVeigh, 'The concert life in nineteenth-century London database project', in *Nineteenth-century British music studies* 2, ed. Jeremy Dibble and Bennett Zon (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pp 1–12.

and consumption of music. Only in the final three decades of the century, with the advent of the Cecilian movement and the Feis, do we find articles on musical subjects *per se*: church music and musical nationalism respectively.

The sources for the musical press in nineteenth-century Ireland are overwhelming and no systematic bibliographic work has been done in relation to this material. This chapter does not attempt to remedy this lacuna, nor does it present a systematic guide to sources.³ Rather, I have focused on a number of topics and particular historical moments, a strategy which allows us to see the press conducting its business in a variety of contexts. This thematic approach provides useful points of comparison and contrast both synchronically and diachronically. The topics selected are as follows: the hegemony of Anglo-Italian opera, problems in the standards of musical criticism, inter-press rivalry, Wagner reception, and nationalism. These will be dealt with in a number of case studies such as the 1831 Festival, Catherine Hayes' tour of Ireland, Bayreuth and Carl Rosa's productions of Wagner in Dublin.

THE CRITICS

... the living, breathing, erring, human, nameable and addressable individual who writes criticism.

GBS⁴

Irish newspapers did not employ full-time music critics until the final three decades of the century, relying instead on the occasional use of critics when a major event necessitated it, and frequently using generalist reporters who were cheaper to employ. Because of the pervasive practice of anonymity, which was current in all British periodicals and newspapers until the mid century, we cannot identify the majority of these critics.⁵ It was only towards the later part of the century that certain individuals can be identified either by name, initials or pseudonym. On occasion critics are identified in other sources: Stanford famously identified Robert Prescott Stewart and Hercules MacDonnell as critics of the first Bayreuth Festival of which I treat in detail below. A less well-known critic such as Frank Sullivan was identified by *Ireland's Eye* as the critic for the *Freeman's Journal* in 1874 (see illustration 13.1).

³ However, Ite O'Donovan is completing a PhD entitled 'Music in Irish periodical literature, 1770–1970' at UCD, and I am grateful to her for sharing her resources with me in preparation for this chapter. Some readily available resources include: <www.irishnewspaperarchives.com> (accessed 10 October 2006) which contains a searchable database of the *Freeman's Journal inter alia*; the website of the National Library of Ireland contains information on the 'Newsplan' project; the *Waterloo directory of Irish newspapers and periodicals, 1800–1900* ed. John S. North (Waterloo, Ontario: North Waterloo Academic Press, 1989) is an important source; the *Irish Times* (29 June 2006) announced plans to digitize and make available its entire microfilm archive by late 2007. ⁴ George Bernard Shaw, 'On musical criticism', *The World*, 13 June 1894. ⁵ See Ruth Solie's chapter, 'Macmillan's Magazine in the Grove years', in her book *Music in other words: Victorian conversations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) where she examines the issue of anonymity and music criticism with respect to Grove's editorship of *Macmillan's*

For much of the century, the question whether the writer did or did not have the skills to critique musical performance was secondary to the fact that the newspaper had an editorial policy that dictated the style and rhetoric of the review. An analysis of this style over a period of time can demonstrate editorial intervention when the prospect of 'diminished receipts' threatened the manager.⁶

It is important to distinguish two types of writer on musical affairs: the 'critic', an expert who was musically knowledgeable and capable of articulating musical terminology; and the 'penny-a-liner' who would have been assigned to report on circuses, court proceedings as well as opera. The difference between the two is registered in the language and use of musical terminology, and in some cases the critic would announce his credentials by referring to his familiarity with opera houses in Italy and London. When a 'star' came to town, newspapers usually opted for a critic who would typically write an article in advance of their appearance and then follow up with the notices.

Critics had free access to all performances of Italian opera even when ticket prices were inflated for special occasions and when all other patrons had their entitlements suspended. In other words, music criticism was sponsored by the theatre managers and the paying public. Its function was to mediate audience participation in musical life, and therefore musical considerations typically took second place to economic necessity. As tax on advertising revenue was high in the first half of the century, the critic, as an employee of the paper, was under pressure to provide a return on the theatre manager's speculation by way of positive notices. Audiences were frequently reminded of their debt to the theatre managers whose name was kept before the public eye along with that of the state representative, usually the lord lieutenant and his entourage.

THE POLITICS OF THE 'PLAUDITS'

Praise is lavishly dispensed because the system pays.

*Irish Builder*⁷

It is rare to find any overt negative criticism of operatic performers, and the use of superlatives was customary. Applause and encores were always recorded to the benefit of the artists and the audience alike: it praised the former for their artistry and the latter for demonstrating their ability to appreciate it. As a mode of social

Magazine, a publication which pioneered the abolition of anonymity. *The Wellesley index to Victorian periodicals, 1824-1900*, v, ed. Jean Harris Slingerland (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1989) enables scholars to identify certain anonymous authors: but one should also consult Eileen M. Curran. 'The Curran index: additions to and corrections of the *Wellesley index to Victorian periodicals*' which is published at <<http://victorianresearch.org/curranindex.html>> (accessed 7 November 2006) and which is part of the *Victorian Research Web* <<http://victorianresearch.org>> which is itself a very useful resource for nineteenth-century periodical research. ⁶ See *CE*, May to November 1855 for a controversy over the boisterous behaviour of the gallery occupants. See also below. ⁷ 'Our "musical festivals" and "musical" critics', *Irish Builder* [hereafter *IB*], 15 January 1873.



Illustration 13.1: Cartoon of Frank Sullivan, music critic with the *Freeman's Journal*, in *Ireland's Eye*, December 1874, with a short article (p.116) given here below.

'The gentleman who is the subject of our Cartoon this week is well known to many who have never seen him. He has long been connected with *The Freeman's Journal*, and his writings have formed a notable feature in the columns of that newspaper. The position of dramatic, musical, and art critic, which he now occupies, is one which his experience, knowledge, and artistic tastes eminently qualify him to fill. Mr. Sullivan's humorous and satirical reports of Police Court proceedings used to attract much attention. Ridicule is a powerful weapon, when directed against the minor failings of humanity, and Mr. Sullivan always wielded it with good effect.'

flattery, reporting on applause was an important part of the currency of the musical economy because the notices reassured the middle and upper classes of their status in society, a condition that both necessitated their presence at such social luxuries as opera and on which the entire enterprise depended.

Throughout the century one finds more thoughtful and critical commentaries in contemporary journals whose writers were not under pressure to meet frequent deadlines, and, perhaps more significantly, whose editors did not rely on advertising from the impresarios who staged Italian opera. Early nineteenth-century journals typically avoided the criticism of opera, opting instead for analysis of instrumental works by Irish composers. The *Monthly Museum* consistently reviewed new music by Irish composers such as Stevenson, Blewitt, Cooke and Bishop who were often subjected to 'a sedulous examination'.⁸ While that journal occasionally commented on performances or events, it concerned itself primarily with giving advice to composers on their most recent works. The critic was knowledgeable and commented on such detail as modulations, enharmonic changes, dissonances, and typically deplored such solecisms as consecutive parallel fifths. Clearly, this magazine set a high standard and established such a demand for criticism that omission from its purview was a fate worse than the dreaded 'sedulous examination' itself.⁹ The tradition of analytical scrutiny was continued by the *Dublin Magazine* as evidenced in its review of two symphonies by Paul Alday. While the critic was happy to acknowledge the beauties and ideas in the work, the predominant criterion was academic correctness, and praise was reserved for those passages that evinced 'a deep knowledge of science' and 'a thorough knowledge of theory'.¹⁰ Typically, musical composition was treated as a craft rather than an art.

As the newspaper industry gathered pace in Ireland in the late nineteenth century, the quality of material was often sacrificed to the exigencies of providing copy, and it is not surprising, therefore, that problems multiplied in the standard of music criticism. However, these sins did not go unnoticed or unpunished by professional journalists. One of the most important trade journals, the *Irish Builder: Architectural, Archaeological, Engineering, Sanitary, Arts and Handicrafts*, took a tough stance on problems in contemporary music criticism in the 1870s. In the first of two substantial articles on musical criticism it asked if there was 'such a thing as independent dramatic or theatrical criticism, or aught else in this line, by the Press of Dublin?'¹¹ The answer was in the negative as the majority of 'fulsome notices' were written 'to order' and 'consequently bad, good, and middling singing and acting come in for systematic praise.' In condemning these 'slap-dash' notices as 'dishonest, shameful, utterly unworthy, and a scandal to

⁸ See the review of Cooke's 'Sonata Fugata' in *Monthly Museum*, November 1813, 164, quoted in Ita Hogan, *Anglo-Irish music, 1780–1830* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1966), p. 118. ⁹ See for example *Monthly Museum*, January 1814, 230. I am grateful to Ite O'Donovan for drawing this to my attention. ¹⁰ *Dublin Magazine*, February 1820, quoted in Hogan, *Anglo-Irish music*, p. 119. ¹¹ 'Our "musical festivals" and "musical" critics', *IB*, 15 January 1873, and continued in 15 February 1873.

journalism and Ireland' it identified the economic imperative that motivated these 'unscrupulous' penny-a-liners who knew that an impresario was more likely to pay for advertising space on Monday if his investment received fulsome praise on Saturday. The practice of critics hobnobbing with 'stars' was also exposed, as were the double standards of those critics who damned performers privately while extolling them publicly. In the second article under that title, the *Irish Builder* exposed some of the other immoral tricks of the trade: the 'sub silentio move' was explained whereby some performers were ignored by the press because they had offended the critical fraternity.¹² Also, the practice of critics reviewing performances that they had not attended seemed to be widespread, and the *Irish Builder* cited four recent examples. It claimed that only one Dublin newspaper had a *bona fide* music critic, and that other critiques were supplied by penny-a-liners or 'clippers' i.e. a sub-editor who clipped extracts from other sources so as to 'enliven and diversify the contents of their own papers.'¹³ The *Irish Builder* hoped that by exposing such shameful practices the dailies would adhere to higher standards. (I shall return to this issue below.)

INTER-PRESS RIVALRY DURING THE 'GRAND MUSICAL FESTIVAL'

The Triumph of Faith is a splendid composition.

*Freeman's Journal*¹⁴

The Triumph of Faith may be fairly esteemed a failure.

*Dublin Evening Mail*¹⁵

While political polemics between newspapers is a *sine qua non* of nineteenth-century Irish history,¹⁶ antagonism between newspapers could manifest itself in any quarter, and the musical columns were not innocent of such inter-press rivalry. The 'Dublin First Grand Musical Festival for the Benefit of the Mendicity Association and Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers' Society' generated much controversy in the Dublin press.¹⁷ Although the Festival (held between 29 August and 5 September 1831) is chiefly remembered today for the presence of Paganini and Dragonetti, the inter-press rivalry it generated is worthy of the attention of music historians.

¹² *IB*, 15 February 1873, 58. For a specific instance of the 'sub silentio move' exposed see 'Madame Daviez – music and criticism', *IB*, 1 March 1873, 61. ¹³ 'A Nut for Figaro', *IB*, 1 February 1873, 43: this article demonstrated how its own material had been recently plagiarized by *Figaro*. ¹⁴ 'The Dublin Musical Festival', *FJ*, 1 September 1831. ¹⁵ 'Musical festival', *DEM*, 2 September 1831. ¹⁶ See Maire-Louise Legg, *Newspapers and nationalism: the provincial press, 1850–1892* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998). ¹⁷ For details of its organisation see Derek Collins, 'Music in Dublin, 1800–1848', in *To talent alone: the Royal Irish Academy of Music, 1848–1998*, ed. Richard Pine and Charles Acton (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1998), pp 15–16. I am grateful to Ita Beausang for drawing my attention to the following two sources: *Dublin musical festival: programme, books of the words etc the first Dublin musical festival with ms. notes by Sir George T. Smart* (Dublin: W. Underwood, 1831) which is in the British

The *Freeman's Journal* offered its full support to the festival and affected to take the high moral ground in the attendant 'politico-religious controversy' by vilifying 'certain journals' who bickered over 'whether this lord or that earl is on the committee' or whether it was appropriate to have sacred works performed in a secular venue.¹⁸ Its main target, the *Dublin Evening Mail*, which it styled 'the *soi-disant* organ of the *beau monde*', continued to rant against the festival even after it had ended and was declared a success by all other sources.¹⁹ Notwithstanding the impressive forces mustered for the occasion – an orchestra of 300, the Dublin Festival Choral Society, the Liverpool Choral Society, and the choirs of the principal Cathedrals in Ireland, conducted by such notables as George Smart and Ferdinand Ries – the *Freeman's Journal* nevertheless chided the organising committee for not having engaged expert international singers: its main argument was that no expense should have been spared to ensure the quality of the performances. While reminding readers of its patriotism through its encouragement of 'native talent', the *Freeman's Journal* regretted that none of the great vocalists of the day were engaged (e.g. Pasta, Malibran, La Blache), and consequently that justice would not be done to the 'sublime productions of genius' in the programme by Handel, Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven and Ries.²⁰ It was for this reason that the *Freeman's Journal* claimed that it was 'lunacy' to engage Paganini, the 'lion of the cat-gut scrapers', at a cost of 1000l.²¹ However, as with the English press which had initially vilified Paganini, the *Freeman's Journal* executed a sudden U-turn and lauded the Italian virtuoso immediately after his first concert. Subsequently, the reception of the core sacred works was eclipsed by the mania for Paganini.

In the early stages of the festival the initial commitment of the *Freeman's Journal* to musical standards was reflected in the detail and quality of the notices of the performances. The style of these notices was singularly poetic, and might be said to be mimetic of the sublime nature and 'mighty grandeur' of the music itself. In one particular notice of Ries' *The Triumph of Faith* the critic detailed how the 'spirit of the listener becomes almost celestialised [*sic*] beneath its influence ... it is a moment before you recover from the trance of ecstasy'.²² All doubts about the success of the festival were dispelled in this review. But the success was not only musical; it had political implications also. The notice

Library (C.61.g.8.); and a volume of newspaper cuttings about the festival in the National Library of Ireland. It was not the 'first' such festival, as the lord mayor and Dublin Corporation had organized a 'Dublin Grand Musical Festival' in 1814. 18 'The Musical Festival', *FJ*, 10 August 1831, 2. See also the 'Musical Festival: to the Editor of the *Freeman's Journal*', *FJ*, 29 August 1831, 3. 19 'The Musical Festival', *FJ*, 8 September 1831. 20 These included Mozart's arrangement of *Messiah*, extracts from *Jephtha*, *The Mount of Olives* and *The Creation*, and the first performance in the United Kingdom of *The Triumph of Faith* by Ferdinand Ries which was composed for the Lower Rhine musical festivals. It seems that the exhortations by the *Freeman's Journal* were taken seriously by the committee as on the next day the usual front-page advertisement contained an extra line: 'The Committee are in treaty with several other principal Vocalists, whose names will speedily appear.', 'Dublin First Grand Musical Festival' [advertisement], *FJ*, 11 August 1831, 1. 21 'Theatrical Mems [*sic*]', *FJ*, 25 August 1831, 3. 22 'The Dublin Musical Festival', *FJ*, 1 September 1831.

concludes with a patriotic evocation of 'the days of her [Ireland's] ancient glory' when she was proverbially 'the home of the minstrel, and nurse of song'. This is of course a veiled reference to detriment caused by the Union, a frequent theme in the reviews of the festival, a topic to which I will return subsequently.

As the days passed, more and more newsprint was devoted to Paganini in inverse proportion to the space allotted to the sacred works. The notice of his first concert dispelled the antipathy that had hitherto preceded his actual appearance: his valetudinarian 'physical configuration' was described in detail, and it was intimated that his wizardry was related to his otherworldly configuration. (Even though the *Freeman's Journal* was quick to criticize other papers that plagiarized its own political reports, that particular pen portrait was itself reprinted verbatim and unacknowledged from a contemporary English newspaper.²³) Moreover, initial concerns about the appropriateness of mixing the sacred and the secular evaporated when Paganini expressed his desire to support the Festival by performing at one of the oratorio concerts – up to that point sacred and secular concerts were held on separate days, but Paganini interspersed his solos between movements of *The Creation*. Instead of taking offence at this daring departure from protocol, the critic employed imagery from Greek myth and quotations from Byron in an attempt to capture the magic of his 'spell-fraught bow'.²⁴ By the end of the festival not only had the *Freeman's Journal* defended Paganini from vitriolic attacks in the English press,²⁵ it even attempted to draw parallels between Paganini's art and Irish folk music: 'There is in some of his productions that plaintive sweetness and that luxurious strain of melancholy so peculiar to Irish melody'.²⁶ The *Freeman's Journal* finally admitted to sacrificing 'minute notice' of the oratorios to make room for eulogizing the 'modern Orpheus'. The standard of criticism had declined in direct proportion to the Paganini mania.

If the *Freeman's Journal* supported the Festival for political reasons, i.e. that the Hudson brothers, who were staunch supporters of O'Connell, were on the organizing committee, the *Dublin Evening Mail*, which was virulently anti-Catholic, initially attacked the enterprise on religious grounds. After quoting at length from a sermon by 'that most faithful servant of God, the Rev. John Newton', in which the author condemned the decline in 'the tastes and desires of men', referring to Ries' *The Triumph of Faith* in particular, the *Dublin Evening Mail* added its voice to the moralizing and declared that Ries' work was 'profane' and 'derogatory to God's glory'.²⁷ Warming to his subject, the critic then intimated that the day of judgment was at hand, and that any citizen of Dublin who would attend such a base entertainment when they should instead be preparing their souls to meet God was guilty of 'insanity'. In a subsequent article the

23 Compare 'The Dublin Musical Festival', *FJ*, 31 August 1831, 3, with the extract from an unidentified Liverpool newspaper quoted in John Sugden, *Paganini: The illustrated lives of the great composers* (London: Omnibus Press, 1980), p. 103. 24 'The Dublin Musical Festival', *FJ*, 3 September 1831. 25 'Birmingham morality on Paganini's prices', *FJ*, 31 August 1831, 4. 26 'The Dublin Musical Festival', *FJ*, 5 September 1831. 27 'The First Grand Musical Festival', *DEM*, 24 August 1831, 4.

Dublin Evening Mail defended itself against the charge of being a 'foe' of both music and public charity, and vilified the 'nameless and disreputable' persons on the organising committee, their unaccountability, their poor decision making, their squandering of money, etc.²⁸ While a derogatory tone pervaded any mention of the organizational logistics (from the 'conduct of the ruffians who were placed as door-keepers' to the lack of ventilation), high praise was reserved for individual performers, notably Dragonetti. Remarkably, however, the *Dublin Evening Mail* declared itself lost for words when it came to praising Paganini, and instead reproduced a eulogy from one of the morning papers, citing it as an example of 'fine' writing worthy of Lady Morgan. Having condescended to worship the 'Devil riding upon a fiddle-stick', it further criticized the oratorio by the 'obscure' Ries, which it had nick-named the '*Triumph of Dullness*'. This time its fault was that it was a failure as a work of art and could not compare with the 'inexhaustible beauties of the established writers, the *Classics*', namely Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, in particular the latter's *The Mount of Olives* which should have been the centrepiece of the festival in its opinion.²⁹ Despite the various *ad hominem* attacks and repeated condemnation of the festival, the writer was an able music critic and wrote engagingly on the purely musical features of the various works, especially *The Creation*.³⁰

Perhaps the *Dublin Evening Mail* was correct in its assertion that Paganini was the reason for the festival's popular success. Ultimately, it was the work of another Italian, Bellini, whose *Norma* and *La Sonnambula*, both composed in that year, which had a greater impact on Irish musical life for the next fifty years when 'absolute' music took a distant second place to opera in the public mind.

THE 'TWIN CULTURES' OF MUSIC AND MUSICAL CRITICISM

It may be, perhaps, that Beethoven sometimes did not understand his own thoughts; or it may be that sometimes there was really nothing in them to understand ...

*Dublin Evening Mail*³¹

Dahlhaus' notion of the 'twin cultures of music', Franco-Italian opera on the one hand and German instrumental music on the other, specifies 'a dichotomy [which] extended to the very roots of the nineteenth-century concept of music, far transcending differences of genre or national style.'³² Time and again that dichotomy was reinforced in the Irish musical press.

In 1841 the *Dublin University Magazine* published an extensive theoretical essay on 'modern scientific music' by which the author meant the works of

28 'The Musical Festival', *DEM*, 31 August 1831, 3. 29 'Musical festival', *DEM*, 2 September 1831, 3. 30 'The Musical Festival', *DEM*, 5 September 1831. 31 'Philharmonic Society', *DEM*, 21 January 1856. 32 Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-century music*, trans J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 13.

Mozart, Spohr and Weber.³³ The article was an appeal for greater representation of classical music in contemporary concert programmes. The Antient Concert Societies of Dublin and Cork were the main vehicles for this genre, the reviews of which tended to be laudatory of their efforts to improve musical taste.³⁴ Good intentions, however, were no match for social entertainment, and implicit in nearly all music criticism was the popularity of the secular (opera and ballads) over the sacred. In a notice of Haydn's *The Seasons* performed by Cork's Antient Concert Society in 1850, the *Cork Examiner* argued that 'grandeur and majesty become tiresome in a short time' and 'ordinary mortals' long for 'the feelings of the heart'.³⁵ Ironically, *The Seasons* was the exception that proved the rule because 'the music was light, agreeable, and much diversified'. Five years later the *Freeman's Journal* disapproved of Lindpaintner's oratorio *The Widow of Nain* which was performed by the Dublin Antient Concert Society while nevertheless praising 'the concert [which] was one calculated to do much to increase the growing taste for the works of the great composers which we are happy to find is rising amongst us.'³⁶ The Viennese masters and Mendelssohn were again elevated as the artistic *ne plus ultra* of musical taste.

The first Irish performance of Beethoven's 'Grand Choral Sinfonia' on 18 January 1856 by the Dublin Philharmonic Society under the direction of Henry Bussell brought the issue of instrumental music into sharp focus.³⁷ The critics employed a variety of techniques to variously cajole and chastise the audience into appreciating high-quality instrumental music. The *Freeman's Journal*, while praising the performance, all but apologized for the singularity of the work. While the well-worn excuse of the composer's deafness was proffered as the chief cause for its defects, the reader was assured that the 'wayward, eccentric, and curiously beautiful burden' of the music exhibited 'all the science' of modern instrumentation.³⁸ The critic in the *Saunders' Newsletter* brought some historical perspective to his notice by recounting the London Philharmonic's rejection of the work on account of its 'unintelligibility', a strategy employed to praise Bussell and the 'capabilities' of the Dublin orchestra. He then marshalled a passage from Moscheles' translation of Anton Schindler's biography of Beethoven in explicating the meaning of the work.³⁹ By contrast, the critic for the *Dublin Evening Mail* scorned the 'upper classes' of Dublin for their ignorance and intolerance of instrumental music, and confronted them with the fact that, while a tuneful ballad or chorus would elicit an *encore*, instrumental music was

33 'An apology for harmony', *Dublin University Magazine* [hereafter *DUM*], 17 (May 1841), 570-84. The *DUM* devoted relatively little attention to musical matters apart from sporadic reviews of recent compositions, and no notices of Italian opera. 34 See Paul Rodmell's chapter in this volume. 35 'Antient Concert', *CE*, 5 April 1850. 36 'Antient Concert Society', *FJ*, 15 December 1855. 37 This was the Second Grand Concert of the season and was held in the Concert Rooms in Great Brunswick Street (see Paul Rodmell's chapter in this volume for that venue). It is worth noting that with regard to the necessary choral and orchestra forces, Ireland could have had a performance of Beethoven's Ninth as early as 1831 when Ries, Beethoven's champion in London, came to Dublin for the Grand Musical Festival. On that occasion, of course, all the choral works were sacred. 38 'Dublin Philharmonic Society', *FJ*, 19 January 1856. 39 'Philharmonic Society', *SN*, 19 January 1856, 2.

habitually received with 'weariness and inattention'.⁴⁰ However, he noted that in this instance the 'instrumental dulness [*sic*]' commonly associated with symphonies was relieved by the unique nature of the Ninth, a fact which accounted for the sustained attention of the audience on this occasion. Dispensing with the rhetoric of persuasion, the critic took for granted the greatness of this 'very powerful work' and asserted the need for careful study and multiple opportunities of hearing it if one were to understand it. That particular notice could only have been written by an independent and authoritative critic who did not balk at annoying his readers and editor alike. As we shall see presently, he overstepped the mark with the claim that the "'rank, beauty and fashion" would rather hear the noisiest and most commonplace polka by Jullien than the best symphony which has ever been conceived by genius.' This was a particularly pointed reference to Jullien because over the next five days that charismatic maestro presented a series of 'Grand Vocal and Orchestral Concerts' in the Rotunda.⁴¹

The light 'classical' concert, modelled with aplomb by Jullien, had become a firm favourite in the Dublin musical and social calendar by this time.⁴² Jullien's programmes contained solo vocal items, in addition to arrangements of *bel canto* favourites, alongside his own dance suites such as the programmatic quadrille, *The Fall of Sebastopol*. It was in this context that 'classical' works, usually the slow movements from symphonies by Beethoven, Haydn and Mendelssohn, were presented, but as the *Cork Examiner* had commented in the previous year, they were 'selected with a view to popularity rather than to the comprehension of classic music.'⁴³ A 'Grand Concert' of Jullien's was first and foremost a social event that had more in common with the opera business than with well-intentioned attempts at promulgating the Austro-German canon of instrumental music.

Just how important Jullien's presence was in Dublin can be estimated from the eulogistic tone, detailed content and increased length of the press notices whenever he appeared. The *Freeman's Journal*, for example, extended effusive welcome to the 'talismanic' Jullien while offering fawning gratitude to the gentry for coming out of their comfortable homes in the inclement winter weather.⁴⁴ On the same day, 23 January, the *Saunders' Newsletter* proffered a detailed account of Jullien's celebrated quadrille, and lavished abundant praise on the musicians and audience alike.⁴⁵ Most remarkable of all was the review in the *Dublin Evening Mail* which reproduced verbatim extracts from the notices in both the *Freeman's Journal* and the *Saunders' Newsletter* of the same date.⁴⁶ Clearly, editorial intervention replaced the critic (see above) with a 'clipper' probably due

⁴⁰ 'Philharmonic Society', *DEM*, 21 January 1856, 3. ⁴¹ The Round Room, Rotunda, Dublin, 22–26 January 1856. The advertisements highlighted the difference between his considerable orchestral resources and the more usual substitution of a piano for the orchestral part. See, for example, *FJ*, 18 January 1856, 1. ⁴² For details of Jullien's previous visits to Ireland see Derek Collins, 'Music in Dublin', pp 19–20. ⁴³ 'M. Jullien's Concert', *CE*, 2 March 1855, 2. ⁴⁴ 'Music &c.', *FJ*, 21–28 January 1856. ⁴⁵ 'M. Jullien's Grand Concerts', *SN*, 23 January 1856, 2. ⁴⁶ 'Mons. Jullien's Concerts', *DEM*, 23 January 1856, 3.

to the pressure from Jullien, not to mention complaints from some of Dublin's 'rank, beauty and fashion'. It seems most likely that the *Dublin Evening Mail* waited to see what its contemporaries had to say and then followed suit. It was into this climate that the *Irish Times* launched its first salvo at its rivals three years later.

HIGH STANDARDS

... we shall not indulge in the vague and stereotyped panegyrics at present so much in vogue; panegyrics that neither deceive the reader nor benefit the artist, but have only the effect of retarding the public appreciation of works of real merit.

*Irish Times*⁴⁷

The editorial in the first edition of the *Irish Times* (just quoted), committed the paper to providing quality notices on the creative arts. A reader familiar with the writings of Leigh Hunt or another reformer might have hoped for criticism in the best sense of that word.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, the first review in the first edition confined itself to stating the obvious: 'Italian Opera and its leading artistes continue to exercise an increasing powerful influence upon all classes of the citizens'.⁴⁹ While subsequent articles maintained the high moral tone of the first editorial, little intellectual effort was expended over the rest of that very busy musical year.⁵⁰ A comparative study of the *Irish Times* and the *Freeman's Journal* shows they both said the same thing but with a different accent.⁵¹ With reference to Verdi's *Macbeth*, the *Irish Times* complained about the 'noisy instrumentation', the 'superabundance of chorussing [*sic*], some of which is indifferent' and the absence of 'sweet melody', while the *Freeman's Journal* engaged with the dramatic nature of the music itself, and indicated that the audience acknowledged 'that the intense dramatic interest of Shakespeare's tragedy was now conveyed through a medium which more powerfully than words portrayed [*sic*] the workings of human passions.' By contrast the *Irish Times'* review of the final performance of *Macbeth* merely complimented the singers who 'sustained' their parts with their 'usual talent', with most attention given to the presence of the lord lieutenant and the Countess of Eglinton, and the embarrassing uproar in the

⁴⁷ 'Editorial', *IT*, 29 March 1859, 2. ⁴⁸ See Theodore Fenner, *Leigh Hunt and opera criticism: the 'Examiner' years, 1808–1821* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1972). ⁴⁹ 'Italian opera', *IT*, 29 March 1859, 4. ⁵⁰ There were at least 32 operatic nights between March, April, August, and October in the Theatre Royal. In addition, all the 'stars' *inter alia* Lind, Garcia, Mario, Grisi and Titiens sang with the Philharmonic Society in the Antient Concert rooms. Moreover, the season boasted a number of Irish premieres including Verdi's *Macbeth* on 30 March and Flotow's *Martha* on 9 April. And on 27 October Lind performed for the benefit of Mercer's Hospital and the Irish Musical Fund Society. See R. M. Levey and J. O'Rorke, *Annals of the Theatre Royal, Dublin* (Dublin: Joseph Dollard, 1880), 201. ⁵¹ Compare for example the notice of Verdi's *Macbeth* in 'Italian opera', *IT*, 31 March 1859, and 'The Italian opera', *FJ*, 31 March 1859.

gallery.⁵² Equally disappointing was the cursory coverage given to a performance in May of that year of the 'Kreutzer' sonata which was described as 'Beethoven's lovely sonata for piano-forte and violin ... a work so replete with melody ... as to be the delight of all lovers of classical music.'⁵³ The performance itself drew a mere mention of the 'celebrated violinist Herr Joachim, and the equally famous Mons. Halle'.⁵⁴ The lack of interest in instrumental music is indicated in the same article which announced a London piano recital containing works by Bach, Beethoven, Hummel, Mendelssohn, and 'the gifted but eccentric Chopin.' As in other papers, sub-editors in the *Irish Times* were happy to cut and paste from the English newspapers, and consequently sustained some of Davison's worst blunders.⁵⁵

The quality of the musical coverage in the *Irish Times* varied over the years. For example, the initial years of the *Irish Times* featured an article every other day entitled 'The Drama, Music &c' (later expanded to 'Dramatic, Musical, and Literary' on 21 April 1859). In addition to announcing local musical events, often repeating the advertisements on the front page, a lot of space was devoted to musical news from London. One was also likely to find news and gossip about the private lives of popular singers and composers. Mention was also made of recent musical publications on the continent, and concerts and festivals in European centres. It occasionally included reviews of performances, often quoting from foreign newspapers (e.g. *Gazette Musicale*). After an absence of some years it was revived and greatly extended by 1875 when it appeared under the heading 'Gossip' and was penned by someone styling himself 'Faust'. In addition to that informal and intriguing column, the *Irish Times* also engaged an anonymous expert music critic who reviewed performances. His reviews of sacred music, no less than opera or symphonies, were scholarly, technically detailed, and contained quotations from historical texts, for example biographical information on Bach and Beethoven.⁵⁶

A number of factors converged to elevate standards of criticism at this time: the vigilance of the *Irish Builder*, the Royal Irish Academy of Music in its contribution to the increase in musical literacy and theoretical and historical knowledge; and we should also note Hugh Oram's claim that theatrical criticism in Dublin was revolutionized by Bram Stoker's notice in the *Dublin Morning Mail* of *She Stoops to Conquer* which was staged on the opening night of the Gaiety Theatre on 27 November 1871.⁵⁷ However, despite these developments, one of the most seminal influences on critical standards was the advent of Wagner's music in Ireland.

52 'Italian opera', *IT*, 7 April 1859, 2. 53 'Dramatic, Musical, and Literary', *IT*, 24 May 1859, 4. 54 *Ibid.* 55 J.W. Davison was music critic for *The Times* and *Musical World*. See Charles Reid, *The music monster: a biography of James William Davison, music critic of 'The Times' of London, 1846-78, with excerpts from his critical writings* (London: Quartet Books, 1984). 56 See, for example, 'Music in Dublin churches', *IT*, 7 August 1877. 57 See Hugh Oram, *The newspaper book: a history of newspapers in Ireland, 1649-1983* (Dublin: MO Books, 1983), p. 75.

CRITICISM OF THE MUSIC OF THE FUTURE

Ireland has not reached the Wagnerian stage yet: I have been there and I know.

GBS⁵⁸

When *Lohengrin* was performed in Dublin in October 1875 the dailies recorded the failure of the reception despite the quality of the performance.⁵⁹ The *Irish Times* began its notice by quoting one of the 'denizens of the top gallery' who shouted for all to hear 'We don't like Wagner, and we don't want him!'⁶⁰ The critic, however, refused to make any value judgments, preferring instead to narrate the libretto and comment on the performance. By contrast, the *Freeman's Journal* offered its own reasons why Wagner was too difficult for the audience, and concluded in a tone that was to characterize its attitude to Wagner for years to come: 'On the whole, we think this generation will rest satisfied with the music of the past, and leave Wagner willingly to posterity'.⁶¹ Notwithstanding the various shadings of reticence and antipathy to Wagner among the public and the press, a substantial body of critical material emerged over the concluding decades of the century and brought about a sea change in Wagner reception and musical criticism in Ireland.⁶²

While the Bayreuth Festival was widely reported in the Irish dailies, most of the articles, of variable length and quality, were reproduced from English and continental papers.⁶³ However, it would be a mistake to assume that the Irish critical reception merely recycled foreign opinion. The independence from British influence of the Irish critical reception is signalled by Robert Prescott Stewart's assertion that 'Wagner is not so bad as the English press will have him, nor so good as his own ... pretend to consider him'.⁶⁴

Thus one could divide the 1876 reportage into two categories: the many second-hand social and gossip articles that reported on the doings of Wagner and the nobility on the one hand, and the few lengthy music criticisms by Irish writers on the other.⁶⁵ Predictably, pro- and anti-Wagnerian trends were immediately

58 George Bernard Shaw, 'Voices and Registers', *The Star*, 11 October 1889. 59 11 October 1875, the Royal Italian Opera under Julius Benedict in the Theatre Royal, in a season that featured *Rigoletto*, *Don Giovanni*, Gounod's *Faust*, *inter alia*. 60 'Theatre Royal - Lohengrin', *IT*, 21 October 1875. 61 'Wagner's new opera', *FJ*, 12 October 1875. 62 See Joachim Fischer's chapter in this volume for an exploration of Wagnerism in Ireland in the wider literary, cultural and political contexts. 63 For example, on 17 August 1876 the same one-sentence bulletin reporting the presence of County Andrassy appeared in the *CE* and *FJ*; similarly, the *FJ* (18 August) and *Limerick Chronicle* (19 August) carried the same brief report on the performance of *Siegfried*. By contrast a lengthy summary of *The Ring* originating in the *Daily News* entitled 'The Wagner Festival at Bayreuth' appeared in the *DE* and *FJ* on 18 August and again in the *CE* on 22 August 1876. The *DE* carried two further articles, one, unattributed, on 22 August and another on 25 August reproduced from *The Times* which was penned by Davison: see Reid, *The music monster*, pp. 114 and 202-4 for extracts from that article (the article on 22 August was probably taken from Davison also judging from the style and content). 64 Letter of 19 September 1876 to Vignoles in O.J. Vignoles, *Memoir of Sir Robert P. Stewart* (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, 1898), p. 117, quoted in Lisa Parker, 'Robert Prescott Stewart (1824-1894): an assessment of his compositions and contribution to musical life in Dublin', MA diss. (National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 2000), p. 67. 65 The *CE*'s reportage

apparent. Stanford mentioned Robert Prescott Stewart and Hercules MacDonnell, both Wagnerians, writing in the *Daily Express* and the *Irish Times* respectively.⁶⁶ However, Stanford greatly exaggerated the quality and significance of MacDonnell's article claiming it was 'far the best which appeared; scholarly, brilliant, and unbiased [*sic*].'⁶⁷ As Wagnerian criticism goes, MacDonnell's article is disappointing as it provided little more than a scene-by-scene summary of the 'wild, strange, legendary drama', in addition to some vacuous speculation as to how Wagner might have felt about the success of the whole enterprise.⁶⁸ And while Stanford mentions that MacDonnell 'put his clever finger on the weak spot of the work, when he said that the underlying mischief was the composer being his own librettist'⁶⁹ there is no indication of any negativity in his *Irish Times* article. Stewart's article, on the other hand, was scholarly in its attention to the musical score, giving many details of orchestration, harmony, texture and staging.⁷⁰ Stewart defended Wagner against the charge of dispensing with melody by pointing out passages such as the love scene between Sieglinde and Siegmund. And with a characteristic sense of civic duty, he was aware that he was writing for a home audience, and while not patronising his readers' lack of knowledge, he wrote in a familiar style: for example, he criticized the 'ugly, droning, utterly unvoccal stuff, against which both my ears rebelled, albeit long trained to dissonance by a life devoted to teaching!'

Stanford's commendations of MacDonnell's and Stewart's articles noted that they were 'Written far away from the clash of party, and the intrigues of the foreign stage'.⁷¹ While undoubtedly invoking the 'ultra-Tory critics', Davison, Joseph Bennett of the *Telegraph* and Charles Lewis Gruneison of the *Athenaeum*,⁷² this is also a veiled reference to the *Freeman's Journal*. If in 1875 the *Freeman's Journal* played to the gallery, as it were, in 1876 the anti-Wagnerian line was championed by the Paris correspondent in his regular column, 'Continental Gossip', wherein he took his cue from 'one of the most pungent Parisian critics', Albert Wolf, who wrote for the *Figaro*.⁷³

The next body of Wagner criticism were the notices of Carl Rosa's productions of *The Flying Dutchman* in 1877. In an unsigned article, which was presumably by MacDonnell (judging by the style) the summary of the drama was succeeded by some observations on Wagner's significance for musical taste.⁷⁴ The rest of the article attempted to educate the reader on the terminology associated with the 'Wagnerian school': the role of the music in conveying the drama, the *leitmotif*,

appeared under the general heading 'Latest Telegrams' which carried brief items from all over the world. ⁶⁶ C.V. Stanford, *Pages from an unwritten diary* (London: Edward Arnold, 1914), p. 50, 169–70; and Stanford, *Interludes, records and reflections* (London: John Murray, 1922), pp 143–4. ⁶⁷ Stanford, *Interludes*, p. 144. ⁶⁸ MacDonnell's unsigned article, 'The Wagner Festival at Bayreuth', was published in two instalments in *IT* on 21 and 24 August 1876. ⁶⁹ Stanford, *Pages*, p. 169. ⁷⁰ Stewart's unsigned article, 'The Wagner Festival', appeared in three instalments in *DE* on 1, 2 and 4 September 1876. ⁷¹ Stanford, *Pages*, p. 50. ⁷² See Stanford, *Interludes*, pp 143–4 where he describes George Osborne defending Wagner against those named critics during the interval at the festival. ⁷³ 'Continental Gossip: A word about Wagner', *FJ*, 24 August 1876. ⁷⁴ 'Gaiety Theatre – English operas: *The Flying Dutchman*', *IT*, 10 August 1877.

the 'music of the future', the summative meaning of the overture, chromaticism etc. It would seem that this was necessary as the 'audience did not appear exactly to comprehend its scope or meaning'. The *Freeman's Journal* ran an equally long article on the same date.⁷⁵ Despite the customary ambivalence, high praise was forthcoming for the melodic beauty of the music, reminiscent of Weber and Rossini.

In 1878 Carl Rosa returned for another short season which again featured *The Flying Dutchman*. The inclusion of Wagner in the programme drew a substantial notice from the *Irish Times* but this time signed by 'Faust' (who was not MacDonnell), and, moreover, not under the heading 'Gossip'. The article is notable for its equivocation: although Wagner's music will never be as 'popularised' as Italian opera, one cannot deny the 'many remarkable beauties' in his music, and 'Without any profession of faith in the composer or his school ... there is ample evidence of surpassing ability'.⁷⁶ And while 'Faust' conversed on Wagner's theories he rather supposed that producing Wagner in Ireland did not represent value for money for the 'great paying public' who '[do] not care to go deeply into recondite theories of music' but who rather '[want] to be amused, not enlightened – diverted, not instructed.' Once again, the traditional dichotomy between the sublime and the diversionary was reinforced. Significantly, 'Faust' turned to a meditation on the nature of music criticism, and in particular the position of the critic *vis-à-vis* the public:

From one point of view there is no more misleading pronouncement than to say that the critic who "knows what pleases himself and says so," is competent enough to judge of a great musical work. [...] But there is a higher function belonging to the office of a critic, and that may best be filled when one invites attention to such works as that which now claims our notice.

But for 'Faust' *The Flying Dutchman* was the culmination of Wagner's 'best period' after which

he allowed himself to wander in the mazes of a fantastic and extravagant aestheticism which like all exaggerations, overshot the mark, and met the fate of him who held with too rash and daring a hand the reins which controlled the horses of the sun.

Having thus established the limits of Wagner's art, 'Faust' continued with unreserved praise for *The Flying Dutchman*.

By contrast the *Freeman's Journal* had nothing to say about this production of Wagner beyond listing the main performers and concluding with an apology: 'Pressure on our space prevents our noticing the merits of the performance.'⁷⁷ The

⁷⁵ 'English Operas', *FJ*, 10 August 1877. ⁷⁶ 'Theatre Royal – English operas', *IT*, 29 April 1878. ⁷⁷ 'English opera at the Royal', *FJ*, 27 April 1878.

pressure seemed to be coming from the Rathmines Ladies' Association whose 'public entertainments' were noticed in some detail beneath the Wagner item.

In the 1880s Wagner's presence was invoked by those who sought to improve musical taste in Ireland. The journal *Hibernia*, in the spirit of the *Irish Builder*, took up the challenge to the daily press as it lamented the impoverished repertoire and the equally impoverished public discourse on musical matters. The economic relationship between musical taste and imported opera was explicitly stated: 'Impressarii cannot and will not risk the experiment of teaching classical music at cheap prices, when they know that a profitable return cannot be expected.'⁷⁸ The omnipresence of Anglo-Italian opera was contrasted with the dearth of Austro-Germanic symphonies: the 'public vastly prefers Balfe and Wallace to Beethoven and Wagner' not for 'patriotic considerations or prejudices' but because 'The best music, like everything else, can only be got by paying for it, and we are not musical in the highest sense because we are poor.'⁷⁹ The second of these articles hoped that Carl Rosa would return and perform Wagner's music dramas, and thereby 'do much to compensate for the comparative dearth of artistic musical instruction in our city, and the utter absence of progress in our musical ideas and knowledge.'⁸⁰ The writer continued with an eloquent discourse on the 'twin cultures' and the nature of aesthetic value judgments:

It is not a question of taste to like or dislike the *Flying Dutchman*. The grave reasons we have been laying down as art principles are conclusive in its favour, and in any case time will tell the truth, just as it has settled the relative merits of Rossini [and] Beethoven [...] In short, this certainty of final judgment, recognised as true by the awakened and developed faculties of all mankind, shows very plainly that there is no such thing as difference of taste in such matters, save in so far as there is the question of truth or falsehood, light or darkness, clearness of perfection, or the misty haziness of error.⁸¹

While musical education is ultimately blamed for the aesthetic lacunae in Ireland, these comments implicitly indict the press, the vehicle of the bourgeoisie, the 'taste-bearing stratum' to use Dahlhaus' phrase.

However, things did improve, Carl Rosa did return, and Wagner's oeuvre (some of it at least) became normalized in the eyes of the public and the press. The degree to which this happened can be best assessed by considering the *Freeman's Journal's* critical acclaim of *Tannhäuser* in its first Irish performance by the Carl Rosa Company in 1893.⁸² In addition to an article dedicated to an explication of the overture (30 August), and two long notices of the performances (31 August and 5 September), Wagnerian ideals were contrasted with the other works in the season *inter alia* Gluck's *Orpheus*, Verdi's *Otello*, and Gounod's

Faust. Notwithstanding the critic's admission that he was not familiar with Wagner's later works,⁸³ coupled with his warning that Wagner's 'admirers are idolising him too much',⁸⁴ he nevertheless surrendered to Wagnerian theory and its musical realization: 'Song uniformly sustained so nobly is more effective than any succession of "tunes". To call such music "heavy" is impossible for anyone with music anywhere in his soul.'⁸⁵ Most significant, perhaps was the historicist tone of regret at the belated appreciation of Wagner in Ireland:

How extraordinary it seems now that all through the days of Grisi and Mario, and Lablache and Cruvelli, and Viardot Garcia and Titiens, and all the other great vocal stars who have appeared here in succession, during that long interval the opera of the great German should never have found its way hither ... Of course we know better than that now.⁸⁶

In a curious reversal, the *Irish Times* devoted less space than the *Freeman's Journal*, and although staunchly in support of Wagner it sustained the factual tone of its previous coverage.⁸⁷

Wagner's music had, over a period of two decades, gradually altered the benchmark of musical criticism. However, just as the achievements of German romanticism were assimilated into the mainstream musical press, Irish nationalism was in the ascendant, and had a decisive influence on musical criticism at the turn of the century.

MUSICAL IRISHNESS, NATIONALISM AND THE PRESS

'Mother dear, don't sing that song again; its makes me sorrowful,' whispered the little child, with broken voice, and eyes charged with tears. Here was the true poetic and musical temperament ...

The Nation on William Carleton⁸⁸

The issue of 'Irishness' in music was present in the musical press throughout the century. Unsurprisingly it was inseparable from the relationship between England and Ireland, and the changing nature of that relationship had the profoundest effects on musical criticism and musical life in general.

On the occasion of Catalani's first visit to Ireland in 1807 the *Freeman's Journal* drew attention to the issue of national singing styles, and, moreover, the critic's role in making comparisons between native and visiting artistes: 'A hearer is apt to perceive the value of the music of other countries as they approximate to

⁷⁸ 'Music in Dublin 1', *Hibernia*, 2 January 1882, 6–8. ⁷⁹ Ibid. ⁸⁰ 'Music in Dublin 2', *Hibernia*, 1 April 1882, 63. ⁸¹ Ibid. ⁸² See the daily notices entitled 'The Carl Rosa operas' from 24 August to 8 September 1893, *FJ*.

⁸³ 'Wagner's *Tannhäuser*', *FJ*, 5 September 1893. ⁸⁴ 'Wagner's *Tannhäuser*', *FJ*, 29 August 1893. ⁸⁵ '*Tannhäuser* at the Gaiety', *FJ*, 31 August 1893. ⁸⁶ 'Wagner's *Tannhäuser*', *FJ*, 5 September 1893. ⁸⁷ "'Tannhäuser" at the Gaiety', *IT*, 31 August 1893. ⁸⁸ 'Music, the interpreter of nationality and literature', *The Nation*, 2 February 1850.

his own.⁸⁹ In 1831 the same newspaper considered how techniques associated with Italian opera and 'modern English' music were not suited to singing Irish melodies. Thus Mrs Wood's singing of 'the charming Irish melody, "Sa Yourneen Deelish" was a complete failure' because her 'scientific embellishments' destroyed the 'natural pathetic ease and softness of the Irish melody'. In a resonant phrase the critic claimed 'the old airs of Ireland, like natural beauty, are most adorned when adorned the least'.⁹⁰ It seems that Wood had learned her lesson for she was later praised for 'divinely' singing 'Though the last Glimpse of Erin' because her singing expressed the 'tender pathos of the plaintive Irish air'.⁹¹

At this time, due to Daniel O'Connell's attempt to repeal the Union after his success with Catholic emancipation, the press in Ireland was subject to extreme censorship from Dublin castle which retaliated to sedition with fines and imprisonment.⁹² The chief secretary of Ireland considered the *Freeman's Journal* to be the most dangerous of all the Dublin newspapers and prosecuted the owner for publishing a letter by O'Connell who had been arrested in January 1831. Political commentary in the musical notices was therefore rare and potentially dangerous. In this context, the *Freeman's Journal*, in July 1831, used its musical notices as a weapon against the state, and blamed the decline in Irish musical life on the Union. Thus the poor attendance at Rossini's *The Maid of Judah* served as an opportunity for defiance of the lord lieutenant whose presence was customarily acknowledged in all opera notices:

If the taste for splendid music, good scenery, and fine acting, which once rendered Dublin famous were not defunct, or what is a more probable cause, if the city had not been pauperised by accursed legislation, there would have been an overflow of fashion in the boxes, of easy trading, comfort in the pit, and of laughing artisans in the galleries last night.⁹³

It was rare indeed for Italian opera to be associated in any way with Irish political independence, but wider political circumstances could engender unexpected results as we have already seen in relation to the Musical Festival of the same year.

A more conspicuous and familiar political reading of Irish music *per se* emanated from the academic journalists particularly from within the folds of Dublin University. While many notices praised Bunting's 1840 edition of *Ancient Music of Ireland*,⁹⁴ the *Dublin University Magazine* offered a conspicuously nationalist interpretation. The writer waxed eloquent on the power of native music to overcome the 'intemperate, and often disgraceful contentions of our sects and parties amongst our countrymen'. In the absence of 'a philosophical national spirit' music can provide a common ground on which all men can unite:

⁸⁹ *FJ*, 24 September 1807, quoted in Hogan, *Anglo-Irish music*, pp 117–18. ⁹⁰ 'The Theatre', *FJ*, 12 July 1831, 2. ⁹¹ 'The Theatre', *FJ*, 25 July 1831, 2. ⁹² See Brian Inglis, *The freedom of the press in Ireland, 1784–1841: Studies in Irish history*, vi (London: Faber & Faber 1954), pp 194ff. ⁹³ 'The Theatre', *FJ*, 8 July 1831, 2. ⁹⁴ See, for example, P[etrie], 'Ancient music of Ireland', *Irish Penny Journal*, i/1, 4 July 1840, 8, and 'Ancient music of Ireland', *The Citizen*, 2, (August 1840), 207–12.

Yes, the time shall come when we shall be a great, because a united, nation ... glorying in our ancient music, the common property of all.⁹⁵

Davis famously made that very notion the seminal impulse of *The Nation* which had a profound influence his contemporaries and later generations of nationalists.⁹⁶ Davis' famous distain for the 'paltry scented things from Italy, lively trifles from Scotland, and German opera cries'⁹⁷ led him to crystallize an exclusive and prescriptive view of what music in Ireland should be. By placing Balfe and Rossini in the same category he was able to pit them both against an essentialist construction of native Irish art music that saw Carolan as its last great exponent:

those [composers] we have do not compose Irish-like music, nor for Ireland ... Balfe is very sweet, and Rooke very emphatic, but not one passion or association in Ireland's heart would answer to their songs.⁹⁸

For Davis, it was bad enough that these foreign imports should dominate the stage, but, woe of woes, even the Temperance bands included them in their arrangements.⁹⁹ It is not surprising, therefore, that *The Nation* did not concern itself with reviewing Italian opera, and its influence on its contemporary titles was slight in this regard.

The significance of *The Nation*'s perspective on the issue of Irishness in music is brought into sharp focus when we compare its musical journalism with that of the other dailies at the time of Catherine Hayes' tour of Ireland in the winter of 1849/1850. While the mainstay of Hayes' repertoire was drawn from Italian opera, she always included Irish ballads in her repertoire, notably 'Kathleen Mavourneen', 'Why do I weep for thee?' and 'Terence's farewell to Kathleen'. While these were usually performed as 'encores', on occasion they found their way into the opera itself, a phenomenon that was considered a triumph for Irish music. For example, during a performance of *Lucrezia Borgia*, Hayes acquiesced to the audience's calls for 'The harp that once':

The progress of a serious opera stopped for the performance of an Irish ballad! It was, in truth, an incident without precedent, and equally without precedent were the roars of gratification that followed; one ardent gentleman in the middle gallery shouting with a voice that was heard above all the tumult, 'Musha! God bless you, Catherine darlin.'¹

⁹⁵ *DUM*, 17, (January 1841), 5. ⁹⁶ See White, *The keeper's recital*, esp. p. 53ff. for a conspectus on Davis' three essays 'Irish music and poetry', 'Irish songs' and 'Ballad poetry of Ireland' which are anthologized in *Essays literary and historical by Thomas Davis*, ed. D.J. O'Donoghue (Dundalk: 1914). ⁹⁷ Davis, 'Irish music and poetry', *The Nation*, 29 June 1844: see note 96. ⁹⁸ *Ibid.* ⁹⁹ Notwithstanding *The Nation*'s support for the Temperance movement, it was highly critical of the damage done to the airs in those arrangements. ¹ *Dublin Evening Packet*, 5 November 1850, quoted in Basil Walsh, *Catherine Hayes, the Hibernian prima donna* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2000), p. 158.

The press revelled in such patriotism. Moreover, rather than dichotomize European opera and Irish melody, the Irish papers revelled in the dignity which one could lend the other. In this regard, the dailies competed in their attempts to claim Hayes as an *Irish* operatic star: 'The Irish *prima donna*' (*Cork Examiner*), 'The Irish Queen of Song' (*Limerick Chronicle*), 'Irish Queen of Melody and Song' (*Wexford Independent*), 'The Irish Jenny Lind' (*Evening Packet*), the latter title which became a commonplace. Moreover, this branding of Hayes as 'Irish' was simultaneously a reaction to and an imitation of the English press who referred to her as an 'English *prima donna*' (*Daily News*) or 'English vocalist' (*Times*) which again rated her second only to Lind. The editor of the *Dublin Evening Packet* intervened in this discourse with a substantial article that addressed the comparisons with Lind. (Up to that point the *Dublin Evening Packet* was itself guilty of over-using the phrase 'The Irish Jenny Lind'.) It is a notable article for its sustained national tone and its return to the themes which had exercised the *Freeman's Journal* in 1807: the Irish are praised for their 'delight in the charms of perfect vocalism ... unlike our English neighbours, who invariably neglect their native singers'.² Where Lind's singing was 'like the mechanism of an instrument', by contrast 'the triumph of Miss Hayes is in the combination of sweetest sounds into a stream of melody, which gradually sheds itself into the heart.' Waxing eloquent he continued:

Or we might compare the foreign artist to one of her native landscapes, basking in splendour, and clear in its outline and objects beneath a starry sky: Miss Hayes' beauties are those of our own clime, with its features of tenderness melting into light, or darkening into shade.

Undoubtedly the concurrent disaster of the Great Famine added an urgency to the appropriation of Hayes as 'Irish' both in her singing and her physical appearance. While the famine *per se* was scarcely mentioned in the notices of Hayes' performances it remained an unspoken presence. The *Cork Examiner* let the veil fall in a delicate reference to that calamity:

The personal appearance of Miss Hayes is most attractive; and were we inclined to be at all poetical in this age of iron realities, we might regard her as the impersonation of the grace, and delicacy, and innocence of Irish modesty and Irish beauty.³

While someone so beautiful could hardly personify the present condition of a wretched nation, she could represent a vision of a glorious past or future, or of an Ireland that simply did not exist other than on the musical stage and in the public imagination. If, as Declan Kiberd has noted, Ireland after the famine was 'a sort

of nowhere, waiting for its appropriate images and symbols to be inscribed in it',⁴ the Hayes mania was the first major national event that was conspicuously successful and cosmopolitan.

But the famine in Ireland is inseparable from the consequent emigration to America which was widely reported in the press. Thus Ireland's fascination with America was seminal to the success of Hayes' tour. By the time she had arrived in Ireland, newspaper readers were familiar with the reports of Jenny Lind's recent success in America, or rather with the success of T.P. Barnum's promotional techniques. It was through the press that the Irish learned how to overreact in the American style, and even allowing for exaggeration, it seems that Irish audiences exceeded all bounds of normalcy in encoring Hayes.⁵ The pervasive sentimental pride at a time of national tragedy would have seemed more appropriate coming from Irish-American exiles than from those who stayed at home. But the Irish in Ireland distanced themselves from the surrounding disaster and shared in the euphoria of American prosperity through the newspapers, particularly through the activity of reading the reportage of their own behaviour. There were few other activities that allowed people to see themselves in such a good light at such a bad time. The musical press thus recorded a poignant time when the Irish became disembodied in their own country and were transported to another imagined Ireland personified in Hayes and expressed in her singing.

Unlike most of the notices of Hayes in the Irish press which contained nothing overtly political other than rivalry with England, the *Cork Examiner* approached the expression of cultural nationalism reminiscent of *The Nation*:

It is a singular fact that Ireland, so essentially the land of song, whose bardic remains have obtained a world wide reputation – whose national melodies alternate from the touchingly simple to the thrillingly superb, being alike 'beautiful exceedingly' whether they breath the soul of pathos or glow with the fervour of martial enthusiasm – whose 'keens' express the very passion and abandonment of grief – whose war songs stir up the heart like the sound of a trumpet – it is a remarkable fact, we repeat, that our musical Island has given to the lyric stage but a single female vocalist within our memory capable of interpreting with success the highest order of dramatic music. Although in every other branch of art our country has given proof of that genius and talent which are the inalienable birthright of her children, as a vocalist, Irish by birth and Irish in heart, who has already achieved triumphs which place in the sake many of the proudest lyric victories of the Italian and German *prima donnas*, Miss Catherine Hayes stands alone.⁶

However, while the influence of Davis is evident here, the *Cork Examiner* did not disdain those perfumed Italian melodies. By contrast, *The Nation*, apart from

⁴ Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: the literature of the modern nation* (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 115. ⁵ See, for example, the reports in the *Wexford Independent*, 6 November 1850, reproduced in Walsh, *Catherine Hayes*, p. 160. ⁶ 'Catherine Hayes', *CE*, 4 November 1850, 4.

² *Dublin Evening Packet*, 7 March 1850, reproduced in Walsh, *Catherine Hayes*, pp 141–2. ³ *CE*, 16 November 1849.

advertising some of the musical merchandise associated with Hayes' repertoire,⁷ all but ignored her presence in the country. Rather than attend Hayes' performances, *The Nation's* reporter audited six lectures entitled 'National Music of Ireland' delivered by Mr William Murphy, B.Mus., in the Dublin Mechanics' Institution in December 1849.⁸ While Murphy received some praise for his efforts, he was censured for performing English music as illustrative examples. This in turn prompted the critic to pour scorn on those audience members who encored those works.

The 'twin cultures' manifested itself in a specifically nationalist context in *The Nation* in two articles that were probably written by Henry Philerin Hudson or John Edward Pigot.⁹ The author of these articles lamented the impoverishment of Irish intellectual life due to the pervasive ignorance of European art music: 'The unnatural divorce between Intellect and Music which exists in Ireland, is a bad symptom in the health of both.'¹⁰ The sublime works of Beethoven were repeatedly referenced as the zenith of musical art, and due reverence was given to the modern romantic composers; Berlioz, Chopin, Liszt, Meyerbeer, and above all, Mendelssohn. The fact that Ireland could boast no composers of such genius was pitted against the threadbare claim that the Irish were a uniquely musical people. The 'hosts of minor artists' such as Balfe, Osborne and Catherine Hayes were merely 'gathering laurels, to be woven into a garland for our oppressor's brows.' In a sequel to that article, German romanticism was advocated as the epitome of European culture and therefore as a healthy model for Ireland's artists and intellectuals to emulate. Moreover, Ireland had lost contact with the 'electrical soil of Music' from which sprang the creative genius of the nation. In consequence Ireland's contemporary thrall to opera was a symptom, and thus a symbol, of its political oppression: 'A slave surrounded with luxury will sing, and the expression of his content will be sensual, joyous, voluptuous; such is Italian music.'¹¹ The solution to this problem was to foster 'National Music' in the peasantry and for composers to follow the example of Beethoven's 'pastoral symphonies [*sic*]' which painted nature in its various moods and expressed every nuance of sentiment in a truly poetic manner. This article was an extraordinary validation of the Austro-German canon at a time of national crisis (the famine) and national euphoria (Catherine Hayes), and it was a unique claim for mobilising the resources of European instrumental music as a vehicle for Irish national music. It was some time to come before such a discussion would permeate the mainstream press.

⁷ Namely, Richard Frederic Harvey's song 'Home of My Heart' and the 'La Bella Catarina Polka' advertised in *The Nation*, 12 January 1850. ⁸ 'The National Music of Ireland', *The Nation*, 1 December 1849, and 'Irish national music', *The Nation*, 22 December 1849. ⁹ Pigot, who had previously published an article on Mozart, and Hudson, and wrote for the *Citizen*, had translated Beethoven's *Christ on the Mount of Olives*. Both of them had prepared the music for *The Spirit of the Nation* (1845) and were committed to the preservation of Irish folk music: see Jimmy O'Brien Moran's chapter in this volume for their involvement with folk music collections. ¹⁰ 'Modern music and musicians', *The Nation*, 12 January 1850. ¹¹ 'Music, the Interpreter of Nationality and Literature', *The Nation*, 2 February 1850.

Twenty years later *the Irish Builder* (in an article already examined above) regarded the issue of national music as contingent on a professional standard of music criticism:

We have a national music, ancient and modern, sufficient to rouse the most lethargic natives, but why is not some noble or honest attempt made to give it an expression consonant with national desires and feelings? This will never be done until we have an independent Press proprietary in our midst, and critics who understand what they write about.¹²

However, the notion of an independent press was highly unlikely in a country where culture became increasingly nationalized. The remainder of this chapter contrasts one of the established regional newspapers, the *Cork Examiner*, with one of the new national papers, *The Leader* with regard to their treatment of musical topics at the end of the century.

God save the Queen ... and Ireland

The *Cork Examiner* was one of the many provincial newspapers that Dublin Castle subscribed to in its scrutiny of dangerous politics.¹³ In the final decades of the century there would have been little to worry the British with regard to the *Cork Examiner's* coverage of national music. The mainstay of musical criticism involved detailed reports of local musical activities,¹⁴ and while support for the Gaelic League was evident, the British presence was never criticized. At its most pungent, the critic would target the products of the English music hall while praising conspicuously Irish musical efforts. In a substantial and supportive notice of the Gaelic League's first concert in Cork on St Patrick's Day 1895, the writer expressed the opinion that it was

a pleasant departure from the everyday concert with its tasteless doses of the tra-la-la of the Roeckels and the Pinsutis and the other drawing-room minstrels known to young ladies – and a hopeful sign of the times from every point of view.¹⁵

Unsurprisingly, the *Cork Examiner* was as enthusiastic as all the other dailies in reviewing Stanford's *Shamus O'Brien* in the following year. *Shamus* received almost twenty performances in November 1896 in Belfast, Limerick, Waterford, Cork and Dublin and engendered a popular response that was as 'national' as

¹² 'Our "musical festivals" and "musical critics"', *IB*, 15 January 1873. ¹³ For the list of newspapers subscribed to by Dublin Castle see Legg, *Newspapers and nationalism*, p. 126, n6. ¹⁴ The Cork School of Music, the Cork Amateur Orchestral Society, the Cork Amateur Opera Company, the Cork Musical Club. See for example, 'Concert at the Imperial Hotel', 3 February 1890; 'Theatre Royal: The Sultan of Mochal' 7, 8 and 11 February 1890 which reviewed the efforts of the Cork Amateur Opera Company. Also, frequent attention was given to concerts in Mallow, Cappoquin, Valentia, Midleton, and Lismore. ¹⁵ 'The Gaelic League Concert', *CE*, 18 March 1895.

Catherine Hayes' mid-century tour. The Irish papers eulogized its 'realism', which is to say its faithful representation of Irish costumes, speech (the brogue), music and dancing, the latter which impressed the *Freeman's Journal* as 'far more captivating than that French kick-up called 'ballet', and also far more 'dacent'.¹⁶ During its first run, the opera was seen as concurrent with the ideals of the Gaelic League. However, despite the theme of 1798 and the theme of betrayal of the hero by the local traitor, the reception was notable for its avoidance of political meaning. The *Cork Examiner* implied that dangerous politics had no place in art: 'The lyrics for 'Shamus' are boldly written, are in fact, stirring war songs minus vulgar effects.'¹⁷ While the majority of the Irish dailies, including the northern papers, gave it extensive coverage, *The Nation* was the only paper not to review it because of Stanford's dispute with the Feis committee of which he was President and from which he had resigned in that year. While acknowledging that Stanford 'had rendered Ireland sufficiently lasting and useful service',¹⁸ his plan to invite the Hallé orchestra to perform at the opening and closing concerts at the inaugural Feis was seen as an act of betrayal: 'There is, at any rate, something to be grateful for in the fact that if, in too many cases, we have to allow the Saxon to make our boots he shall never make our music.' There was plenty of 'Saxon' music-making in Cork city at the turn of the century. For example, in 1900, the Moody-Manners Opera company was offering *Tannhäuser*, *Carmen*, *Maritana* and *The Lily of Killarney*, 'Fashionable Concerts' were devoted to popular English ballads, and 'attractive' Queenstown (Cobh) Promenade concerts were regularly given by the various British army bands. All of this co-existed with the Incorporated Society of Musicians which promoted classical repertory, and the churches and cathedrals which provided both venerable and recently-composed sacred music, not to mention the Feis and the 'Gaelic Leaguers' who promoted Irish music that was both 'high class' and 'racy of the soil'.¹⁹ The *Cork Examiner* reported on all these musical events and did not attempt to mediate between them in terms of musical taste or political or religious allegiance. In plain terms, if a 'selection of Irish airs' was performed at either the Munster Feis or by the Fourth Battalion of the King's Royal Rifles it received equally favourable comment. More significantly, if one concert concluded with 'God save the Queen' and another with 'God save Ireland' no political loyalty was hinted at by the critic. The Crosbies were all things to all Corkonians.

At the other end of the spectrum lay D.P. Moran's *The Leader: a review of current affairs, politics, literature, art and industry* which was established in 1900 just as *The Nation* was coming to an end. Taking the essentialist claims of the Gaelic League to extreme conclusions, *The Leader* kept a close eye on its contemporary titles for any hint of West Britishisms, notably 'her ladyship' the *Irish Times*. Extensive space was devoted to musical matters, and the

predominant perspective was that of the Irish Ireland movement. Indeed, *The Leader* was less a 'newspaper' than a political institution. Unsurprisingly, it attacked the *Cork Examiner*, not only for its cosmopolitanism, but more pertinently for its claim to be 'The Only Nationalist Newspaper' published in Cork: one correspondent, 'Oisín', responded to that claim with the memorable phrase 'The Devil preaching Christianity!'²⁰

In the spirit of a truly national newspaper, *The Leader* dispensed with anonymity and we are thus able to read the opinions of such notables as Edward Martyn, Heinrich Bewerunge, Heinrich Tils, and Charles G. Marchant. Equally innovative was its sponsorship of lively correspondence on musical matters. The exchanges between the quasi-anonymous 'IMAAL', 'An Irish Musician', 'Oscar', 'Ceólán', 'Cloyne', 'Cornac', and 'G minor' and the aforementioned notables centred predominantly on the issue of native Irish music: for example whether Field was an 'Irish' composer, the 'West-British' nature of the Royal Irish Academy of Music, and the lack of a truly Irish style of singing at the Feiseanna. Other topics included the issue of women singing in church and the practice of secular music (usually operatic favourites) finding its way into the liturgy. These debates were a welcome relief from the musical journalism in the other nationalist titles (e.g. *The United Irishman*) which tended to report on the Feis and Oireachtas concerts to the exclusion of wider issues.

From this overview of music criticism in nineteenth-century Ireland, it is clear that the musical press is more than just a primary source for the study of concert life, performance practice, *inter alia*, and that it can be more profitably treated as a substantive part of musical life in Ireland and not merely its reflection.

¹⁶ "'Shamus O'Brien". Dr Stanford's opera at the Gaeity', *FJ*, 22 November 1896. ¹⁷ *CE*, 17 November 1896, 5. ¹⁸ *The Nation*, 20 June 1896. ¹⁹ 'The Munster Feis: an attractive and thorough Irish programme', *CE*, 18 September 1900.

²⁰ 'Oisín', 'The only nationalist Cork paper', *The Leader*, 27 October 1900, p. 135.