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The Music of John Ireland

Fiona Richards

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The Music of John Ireland

FIONA RICHARDS

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Preface

I first started work on the music of John Ireland in 1993. The initial impetus was not only the music itself, but also the landscape of West Sussex, where I was living at the time. The beauty of this county – the exquisite village of Amberley, the wind-swept Rackham Banks, the mysterious grove of yews at Kingley Vale and the coast at Bosham – was and remains compelling. The discovery that Ireland was drawn to these same downland landscapes sparked a fascination for the man and his music. I therefore embarked on a PhD, with Professor Stephen Banfield as supervisor. As a starting-point, he suggested immersing myself in the works of E.M. Forster. As it turned out, this was exactly the stimulus I needed. Forster's places with potent yet elusive atmospheres, ancient burial mounds, prim eroticism and concealed emotions have parallels with Ireland's musical places. It is therefore to Stephen Banfield that I owe the most. Throughout my time working on this book, he has offered encouragement and criticism, and has always exuded enthusiasm for John Ireland and English music.

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Fiona Richards

Referencing systems

There are no footnotes in this book, and instead references appear in the text. When an edition of a book other than the first has been used, this has been cited, and details of earlier editions have been given in the bibliography. In the case of books and articles, the author's surname, the date and the page number(s) are given. For newspaper reviews, the source, date and page numbers where identifiable are included. Material drawn from the archive of St Luke's Church, Chelsea, has been labelled *St Luke's*, with dates and page numbers shown. Miscellaneous items are held at the John Ireland Trust. These are labelled *JIT*, 1, etc. All of these sources, which include record sleeve notes, periodical and newspaper entries and reviews, letters and conversations with the author, are listed more fully in the bibliography.

Ireland's correspondence has been used extensively. Details of the provenance of the letters are included in the bibliography. Where a letter is from Ireland, the recipient's initials and the date of the letter are given. Thus, EI: 11 April 1925 is a letter from Ireland to his sister Ethel. Where a letter is from a writer other than Ireland, both writer's and recipient's initials are recorded. Thus HL to GF: 17 June 1932 is a letter from Herbert Lambert to Gerald Finzi. The abbreviations of letter-writers and recipients are as follows:

AB (Adrian Boult)
AGM (Arthur Miller)
AM (Arthur Machen)
AR (Aidan Reynolds)
ARLG (Arthur Robert Lee Gardner)
CC (Clifford Curzon)
CM (Charles Markes)
Cramer (Cramer)
CSS (Colin Scott-Sutherland)
EC (Ernest Chapman)
EClark (Edward Clark)
EE (Edwin Evans)
EI (Ethel Ireland)
EL (Elizabeth Lutyens)
FT (Frederick Thurston)
GB (Geoffrey Bush)
GD (George Dannatt)
GF (Gerald Finzi)
GP (George Parker)
HB (Herbert Brown)
HL (Herbert Lambert)
HP (Helen Perkin)
HR (Horace Randerson)
HRawlinson (Harold Rawlinson)
HRutland (Harold Rutland)
HS (Herbert Sumsion)
HW (Henry Wood)
JB (Jocelyn Brooke)
JI (John Ireland)
JL (John Longmire)
KT (Kenneth Thompson)
KTaylor (Kendall Taylor)
KW (Kenneth Wright)
LS (Linton Shields)
MB (Mary Bentley)
MW (Marjorie Walde)
NB (Nancy Bush)
NK (Norah Kirby)
PG (Percy Grainger)
PW (Paul Walde)
SI (Silvio Ireland)
SN (Sydney Nicholson)

The original underlinings in Ireland's letters have been retained.

With the exception of well-known figures, the first names and dates of birth and death of composers and friends of Ireland have been given at their initial appearance. Where dates are not known, these have been omitted, for example in the case of violinist Bessie Smith. First names of poets and novelists have been given at their first appearance and, where known, their dates appear in the index. References to the musical works quoted in the text have been made by the use of bar numbers.

The list of works appears chronologically, so that periods of productivity and times of focus on particular genres or poets can be discerned. This list contains the following information: the title of the work, the date of composition and of any significant revisions, the scoring and, where relevant, the surname of the poet. The index of works lists pieces alphabetically. Song-cycles and groups of pieces are included as well as individual items.

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Introduction

Aspects of John Ireland

The death of the composer John Ireland in 1962 at the age of 82 prompted a wave of tributes, which alluded mainly to his gift for writing for the piano, his love of nature and his rigorous craftsmanship. It is evident from these obituaries that it is difficult to place Ireland. Though not born early enough to be part of the fabric of the British Musical Renaissance, he did not belong to a modernist generation. He was himself aware of this problem of 'belonging', writing in 1925: 'People of the older school regard me as a revolutionary, while the rising generation look on me as an old fogey, so one pleases nobody but oneself' (EI: 11 April 1925). Several of the obituaries commented on this, *The Times* noting that he 'never went out of his way to court popularity' and 'held himself apart from the English musical renaissance' (*The Times*, 13 June 1962: 12). The *Manchester Guardian* described him as 'a composer moreover of highly independent mind' (*Manchester Guardian*, 13 June 1962: 2). A few years later, writing in 1969, William Mann, at that time music critic for *The Times*, made similar observations on Ireland's separateness:

> During his working life he was, among his composing British contemporaries, something of a loner: not a folksongite, nor a Bright Young Thing, in musical language closer to Debussy and Stravinsky than to any British composers, except perhaps his consciously Irish professor Stanford and the cosmopolitan Delius. These influences were subsumed quite deeply so that Ireland's music always sounded idiosyncratic.
>
> (Mann, 1969: 9)

Ireland's music is highly personal, both because it is nearly always tied to a specific event or place or person in his life, but also because of its individual musical qualities. His music is an expression of a state of mind. There is a sombre side and a rapturous side, intensity and utter gaiety: he could produce lightweight, charming pieces, but also music that was darkly oppressive. 'His music was never written in any sense for the big battalions and will remain the preserve of the poetically-inclined' (*Daily Telegraph*, 13 June 1962).

Ireland the man was as elusive as the music. He was a collector of beautiful furniture and works of art, but for long periods chose to live in what were essentially bedsits. He was Romantic in spirit, but in later life utterly unromantic in his short, squat appearance and domestic obsessions. John Ireland was a public figure with a very private face. Herbert Lambert, a fellow musician who was friendly with him in the 1930s, wrote of him to Gerald Finzi (1901–56) that 'for all his grim & rocklike exterior he is an almost pathetically

sensitive human being – a man of sorrow & acquainted with grief' (HL to GF: 17 June 1932).

While he is now regarded as having led an uneventful life, and indeed some of the obituaries recorded this as having been the case, Ireland had a busy and varied career. In addition to the time spent composing, he was active as a performer, both as pianist and organist, as an Associated Board examiner and as a teacher. There were hectic periods when his diary was full, involving him in travel round the country. His busiest time was probably in the 1920s, at a point when his music was very popular, being performed by major artists such as Harriet Cohen (1895–1967), to whom he dedicated several pieces, including a transcription of J.S. Bach's 'Meine Seele erhebt der Herren', for her *Bach Book for Harriet Cohen* (1932). Other significant performers of his music included Beatrice Harrison (1892–1965), John Goss (1894–1953) and Roy Henderson (1899–2000). To take a slice of Ireland's life as a professional musician, in 1925, for example, he held an organist's post, he taught composition, undertook frequent tours for the Associated Board, worked as editor for the Clarendon Press Series for Oxford University Press, and had many public engagements as a performer of his own music as just a small sample of concerts shows.

6 January: broadcast of his piano solos and accompanist to Ivor James (1882–1963) in the Cello Sonata

20 January: piano solos and accompanist to Carl Fuchs (1865–1951) in the Cello Sonata, Leeds University

25 January: accompanist to John Barbirolli (1899–1970) in the Cello Sonata, London

5 February: piano solos, Leicester

12 March: piano solos, Æolian Hall

27 March: piano solos and pianist in the Phantasie Trio and the First Violin Sonata with Bessie Spence and John Dickson

30 March: accompanist to Carl Fuchs in the Cello Sonata and pianist in the Phantasie Trio with Fuchs and William Primrose (1904–82), Manchester

31 March: piano solos and pianist in the Phantasie Trio with Primrose and Fuchs

2 April: piano solos, Wakefield

3 April: piano solos and pianist in the Phantasie Trio with Primrose and Fuchs, Birmingham

Close friends, such as Thomas Dunhill (1877–1946), for whom Ireland had stood as best man, were truly loyal and supportive, and have left memories of his kindness and integrity. But Ireland also suffered from difficult personal relationships, and there are less salutary recollections of a grumpy, vulnerable man who was at one time an alcoholic. He taught composition and theory for many years, both privately and in his role as Professor of Composition at the

Royal College of Music. In the latter position he worked for one or two days a week, and had on average ten pupils. Of those he taught, E.J. Moeran (1894–1950) thought very highly of him, and described him as 'an exceptional counsellor', who gave 'unstintingly of his very best' (Moeran, 1931: 68). Conversely, the view of Benjamin Britten (1913–76) was that Ireland was unreliable and often drunk (in Mitchell and Reed, 1998: 211). Richard Arnell (*b.* 1917), recalled that:

> The lessons were given in a large, dark studio in the garden of his large, dark Chelsea house. In a sort of yellowish light from the skylight (there were no windows), not much could be seen but a huge piano, given him by some now vanished piano company. The keys were thick with dust and cigarette ash, and I am sure the instrument was never tuned. We would both sit at this monster, sometimes for two hours or more (the lesson was theoretically for an hour) while he stared absentmindedly at my music, making a few extremely telling comments, then digressing everywhere. He had a wonderful eye for a weakness and would spot it immediately.
>
> (Arnell, 1962: 39)

The same sorts of dichotomies and opposites can be found among comments from colleagues, family and friends. Ireland was a profoundly nostalgic man, given to reminiscing about an imagined, happier past, and the theme of remembrance runs deep in his output. He could be irritatingly evasive, but occasionally ardent and open. He eulogized spring and the English countryside, and in doing so betrayed an altogether happier and more effusive nature than has sometimes been suggested. In a radio broadcast Stephen Banfield proposed that the neglect of Ireland's music was possibly because he was 'rather unappetising as a person', but that this is to miss the 'gloriously free, intense, positive quality' of his music (Banfield, 1994). And Ireland himself wrote of the 'fire and inspiration' that he saw in his own music (EI: 2 Nov. 1945). From the expressive nature of the music it is clear that Ireland was a highly emotional person, and there is a dramatic contrast between his buoyant, uplifting music and that produced at moments of trauma. The composer wrote of himself and his family that 'we are liable every few years to some kind of "crisis", when everything in life seems impossible and unbearable, and one feels unable to face up to anything. I have had it several times ... ' (SI: 30 June 1948). From the music alone, it is evident when Ireland was suffering one of these crises. For example, the 1929 Ballade for piano was written at a time of great personal turbulence, with which the music is invested.

Although Ireland could be harping and petty, he could also betray a quirky sense of humour, and this again is manifest in the music in jaunty cameos and joyous ballads. Professional insecurity was one aspect of his nature, and he often questioned his lack of popularity. He was very particular about the manner in which people played his music, yet equally bemoaned the lack of performances.

Though Ireland was more directly involved with the British musical establishment than was his contemporary and friend, Arnold Bax (1883–1953), and though in a way better known, he did not find the same fame. A comparison between the two men accentuates the more private, secret nature of John Ireland. While Bax was knighted in 1937, appointed Master of the King's Music in 1942 and Knight Commander of the Royal Victorian Order in 1953, Ireland received no honours of any kind. Despite his national status, once his student days were over he did not really mix in artistic circles. While Bax consorted with renowned literary figures such as Laurence and Clemence Housman, James Stephens and Padraic Colum, Ireland was drawn to a writer, Arthur Machen (1863–1947), who himself is difficult to place: now little read, it is difficult to say whether his works are fantasy, horror or autobiography. Whereas Bax frequently travelled, to Germany, Austria, Russia and the Ukraine, Ireland was a very British figure who went abroad on only a handful of occasions, and then only to Europe. He met composers from other countries, most notably Ravel and Gershwin, but international figures such as these tended to touch fleetingly on his life (though less fleetingly on his music).

0.1 John Ireland by Edmond Kapp, 1932

Ireland's spiritual roots were in the 1890s and early 1900s. In a number of his pieces he harks back to the attendant images of these years, and in later life presented himself as the English gentleman. He read the Edwardians, and his music is a mixture of the progressive and static that characterized life in the first decade of the twentieth century. Just as it is impossible to label 'Edwardianism' by a single mood or symbol, so it is impossible to pin down Ireland by one 'type' alone. His music is rural, but there is also an urban side. It is full of pain and doubt, but also exudes total optimism. It is about reverie and speculation in the tradition of the Edwardian novel. Just as it is the little novels and bestsellers, minor productions that are so 'Edwardian', so it is often Ireland's miniatures that contain the essence of his nature. He was drawn to the fantasy and whimsy of the day, to the works of Ronald Firbank and Max Beerbohm, ghost stories and escapes into the past. And just as Edwardian England was full of polarities, so too is Ireland's music. Unlike Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958), he never turned to English folk song for inspiration, and was much more interested in the music of Debussy and Ravel. But although his music subsumes many French influences, it is profoundly English, belonging to a particular age and sensibility, with its roots in English places.

Ireland did not write many lengthy works: there are no symphonies, no operas, and only a handful of pieces that last for more than fifteen minutes. Instead, his natural milieu was in smaller mediums, primarily piano, vocal and chamber music, and the *Sunday Times* obituary noted that he 'was at his best, however, on a smaller scale' (*Sunday Times*, 17 June 1962: 36). While some works, such as the orchestral overture *Satyricon*, have an immediate appeal, others are uncompromising in the demands they make of listener and performer, for example the piano piece 'Moon-glade', which yields a stark, compacted soundscape. While there are ballads in the best of ballad traditions, there are also songs that are denser, less immediately appealing than those of his contemporaries. The music demands concentrated listening and relistening. Some works were commissioned, most were not; and there is a fundamental difference between the two types.

Much of Ireland's output is closely inter-related, with a complex system of personal musical symbols, images and ideas infiltrating almost everything he wrote. As a result his music is difficult to categorize. The chamber pieces cannot be analysed in isolation from the piano music or the songs or the orchestral works, because they share so much common ground. The music is elusive because of fleeting motifs, glimpses of other works, half-recognized turns of phrase and recurring fingerprints. There are often extra-musical layers of meanings, with pieces closely linked to dates, places, people and literature, a feature that was noticed in early reviews of his music: 'One feels that Mr. Ireland does not consciously make up his mind to relate his art to life, but just that he cannot refrain from doing so' (*MMR*, Dec. 1918: 268). Because of these

personal associations and connections, a phenomenological criticism of Ireland's music would have limitations. This is why, although the present study is not a comprehensive biographical survey, the composer's life and music are interwoven here. And while an awareness of the background informs the music, the music itself serves as essential biographical material:

> The more or less meagre and ignoble facts tie the [composer's] balloon, his flotilla of balloons to the earth, and tracing the connections tells us something of the nature of artistic creation. The life of a [composer], which spins outside of itself a secondary life, offers an opportunity to study mind and body, or inside and outside, or dream and reality, together, as one.
>
> (Updike, 1999: A 10)

Unfortunately the surviving biographical material is sketchy, and there are big gaps in our knowledge of Ireland's early life, though a picture of sorts can be constructed from clues, both in the music and in letters. At various points in his life, material was either destroyed or disappeared. Mystery surrounds most of these 'spring-cleans'. It appears that Ireland himself periodically threw things away, for example, like most people, when a big house move was imminent. But it may also be the case that housekeepers took matters into their own hands. Similarly, when Ireland's manuscripts were presented to the British Library after his death, several contained systematic and thorough obliterations of dedicatory words. It is unclear whether this was the work of Ireland himself, or of another hand.

Ireland was a prolific letter-writer, and there is much surviving correspondence, though very little from his youth or from the 1920s, the decade in which he was producing his most intense, intimate music. However, a surprising number of letters and other primary sources from the 1940s onwards have survived. Some of the letters are to close friends, others to musicians. They are one of the main ways in which it is possible to build a picture of Ireland's personality, and are essential historical material. They contain information on his composing methods, remarks on the political situation, descriptions of places and throwaway lines that often give much away. Just as there are polarities in the music, so it is evident from the letters that Ireland was an enigmatic and contradictory figure.

To date there has been no book on the music of John Ireland, though writings on Ireland not only as a composer, but also as a notable performer and teacher, have appeared intermittently, from reviews of his earliest works to longer articles on aspects of his compositional style. Two biographical works have been produced. The first, published in 1969, was *John Ireland: Portrait of a Friend* by John Longmire (1902–86). Longmire was a former composition pupil and friend, and this work was an attempt not to write about the music, but to convey something of the composer's personality and domestic and professional life. In 1979 Muriel Searle's *John Ireland: The Man and His*

Music worked information on his output into a chronological biography, but included not a single musical illustration. Both these fundamentally hagiographical though evocative accounts have merits, but leave essential musical issues undiscussed and contain a number of factual inaccuracies. In 1985 Banfield devoted substantial parts of his *Sensibility and English Song* to discussion of Ireland's songs, this time with much greater insight into the meaning of the music. Since then there has been no further attempt to write about Ireland's output other than in short articles, though in 1993 Stewart Craggs' *John Ireland: A Catalogue, Discography, and Bibliography* appeared. Although this is a useful reference work, like the biographies it has shortcomings, and also like them, it is at the time of writing out of print.

In addition to these large-scale works there have been shorter articles and monographs on Ireland. The first significant pieces were written in 1919 by Edwin Evans (1871–1945), a critic and close friend of the composer. These remain among the most astute of any writings on Ireland's music. Noteworthy articles that followed this were in 1943 by Nigel Townshend and in 1946 by another friend and critic, Ralph Hill (1900–50). In 1954 there were two substantial pieces by Hugh Ottaway and the article for *Grove 5* by a former pupil, Peter Crossley-Holland (1916–). Frank Howes included a sizeable chapter on Ireland in his *English Musical Renaissance* (1966), but there was then a gap of several years before Colin Scott-Sutherland's *John Ireland* (1980). Composer Geoffrey Bush (1920–98) wrote on the composer in 1983 and 1993, Barbara Docherty in 1989 and pianist Alan Rowlands first in 1962, and at greater length in 1992 and 1993. The latter was another friend of Ireland. He first met him in *c.* 1956, when he went to play to him, and recalled that 'he greeted me with charm and talked animatedly for nearly two hours and I was soon to experience the pungency of his views and the dryness of his wit' (Rowlands, 1962: 71). One other perceptive writer on Ireland was Christopher Palmer, whose thoughts are preserved mainly as sleeve notes.

All of the writers above have commented in general terms on what they perceive to be the most striking characteristic features of Ireland's music, and all have cited two significant facets of his work. The first is Ireland's command of form; it is recognized that he was able to create and work within concise, organic structures. The second is that he had a great gift for melody; the term 'lyrical' is frequently applied. Geoffrey Bush, as Music Advisor to the John Ireland Trust until 1998, and both a pupil and friend of the composer, was perhaps the closest of these writers to the music. Nevertheless, he found the task of trying to capture the essence of the music in a few words an unrevealing exercise:

> A roll-call of stylistic features – beauty of line, subtlety of harmony, mastery of form, unfailing craftsmanship, sensitive response to poetry, a thorough grasp of the potential of instruments either singly or in combination – however

> applicable it may be to Ireland's music does nothing to convey its inner character. A list of abstract qualities – strength of purpose, empathy with nature, quirky humour, profound feeling, and an even profounder reticence – is scarcely more helpful. The only way to understanding Ireland the composer is by direct contact with the music...
>
> (in Craggs, 1993: xii)

Despite the disclaimer, Bush does begin to identify some of the hallmarks of Ireland's style.

One of the most powerful descriptions of Ireland's music came from a writer, Jocelyn Brooke (1908–66), commenting from the standpoint of a non-musician, with only a rudimentary knowledge of music techniques. Brooke, who found Ireland's music difficult and was not an immediate enthusiast, eventually became more than just an admirer, perceiving in the music a profound sense of place and of the past:

> ... with Ireland I was aware of [an] immediate impact: a sense, as it were, of *recognition*, as though, turning a corner in a strange countryside, I had suddenly caught sight of a familiar landmark. The simile is not accidental, for Ireland's music, at its most characteristic, evokes for me always the idea of a particular kind of *landscape*: a 'country of the mind', remote, mysterious yet essentially English. The scene I envisage, more often than not, is a prospect of bare chalk-downs interspersed with deep woodlands, vaguely apprehended in the bleak twilight of a winter's evening; there is a sense of far, illimitable distances, a hint, perhaps, of some *cor au fond des bois* echoing sadly beyond the lonely downland, on the crest of which the ancient earthworks stand silhouetted against a rainy sunset ...
>
> (Brooke, 1958: 600)

Ireland himself professed a real liking for this interpretation by Brooke, and wrote to him after reading it, affirming that his music was an expression of a state of mind:

> I wish I could write about your work as lucidly and understandingly as you have written about mine, most of which – the really significant thing – remains to the average hearer a mere sequence of notes and conveys none of that strange, secret 'territory of the mind' you and I so clearly share. It is a country unknown to them, hence neither you nor I can expect what is called popularity. But of course neither you nor I have aimed at that.
>
> (JB: 8 Nov. 1958)

Descriptive writing in the manner of Brooke is one way of attempting to articulate something of Ireland's music, and will be revisited in Chapter 1. Another is to approach the music chronologically, and to devise compositional periods. The most decisive attempt to do this came from Crossley-Holland, who in *Grove 5* defined three natural periods. He saw the first of these as being 1903–20, a period in which an individual voice emerges from a traditional inheritance. The second was 1921–29, Ireland's most productive period, when much of his personal biography infiltrates the songs and the piano music. The

years from 1930 were viewed as 'a period of clarification and larger works' (Crossley-Holland, 1954: 534). Others have also attempted to establish discrete stylistic divisions. Townshend saw 1920–30 as a time when Ireland was largely repeating himself and 1930 as a turning-point, with the Piano Concerto marking a move in a new direction and *Sarnia* (1940–41), and 'Le Catioroc' in particular, as the culmination of the search for something new. Ottaway discussed the piano pieces prior to *London Pieces* (1917–20) as being transitional works in which Ireland's true voice is not yet evident, with the Piano Sonata marking a reaching of maturity of thought, despite the limitations which he saw in this work. But a chronological route through Ireland's music is not necessarily the most useful methodology, given that there are motifs that recur over time and that there are very strong links between music of different periods. These connections also make it difficult to talk about the music by genre alone.

Another way of understanding Ireland's music is to approach it via literature. It might seem odd to come to a composer via a writer, but this is a very fruitful way into the heart of this music, a music whose spirit is often literary. Ireland would undoubtedly agree with this, having stated on a number of occasions that literature was as important to him as was music, and that no one who did not read Machen could truly understand his works. And Machen wrote to Ireland that the way into his own literary works was to read the autobiographical ones first, the notion being 'to interest the desired reader in the author, in the concrete; before you lead him to the author's all imagined world' (AM to JI: 17 Sept. 1941). The present book therefore starts not with the music, but with the composer himself, with his birth in 1879.

Chapter 1

Sonatas and fantasies: encountering Ireland

John Nicholson Ireland was born on 13 August 1879 in Bowdon, a prosperous Manchester suburb. He spent the large part of his childhood and adolescence in this area. His first home was a big Victorian detached house, 'Inglewood', St Margaret's Road. His father, Alexander Ireland (1809–94) (Plate 1), was born in Edinburgh, his family having moved from Orkney some generations earlier. He married Eliza Mary Blyth in 1839, but this partnership was cut short by his wife's death. He moved to Manchester in *c.* 1846 to become manager and publisher of the recently established *Manchester Examiner*, the rival paper to the *Manchester Guardian*. In 1865 Alexander Ireland married for a second time. His new wife, Anne (Annie) Elizabeth Nicholson (1839–93) (Plate 2), was of Cumbrian descent, and was herself an author and critic. Her father, Dr John Nicholson, was a scholar of oriental languages at Queen's College, Oxford; her brother Alleyne Nicholson a Professor in Aberdeen. The atmosphere in the Ireland–Nicholson household was therefore a literary one, and Alexander Ireland was acquainted with Thomas Carlyle, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Richard le Gallienne, Leigh Hunt and Walt Whitman. In addition to his role as a newspaper businessman, he published his own writings, including his recollections of Emerson and two works extolling the virtues of literature: *Cheap literature and the love of reading* (1882) and *The book-lover's enchiridion* (1883).

In 1866 Alexander and Annie were living in Alder Bank, Altrincham. Their first child, Lucy, was born in October that year, followed by another girl, Alice, in February 1868. The family then moved to Bowdon. Walter Alleyne (known always as Alleyne) was born in January 1871, and a third girl, Ethel, in January 1873. There was then a gap of a few years before the birth of John in 1879, when his father was seventy and his mother forty years old.

Ireland's mother Annie was the most influential figure in the early part of his life. Although she was in poor health, she lectured on literature, specializing in the poetry of Robert Browning. She published a number of works between 1885 and 1892, and is particularly remembered for her *Life Story of Jane Welsh Carlyle* (1891). Her last work, *Longer Flights*, published posthumously in 1898, includes a chapter entitled 'Train up a child', in which she sets out her parenting manifesto. Given that this was written in a period when obedience and duty were considered to be the most important aspects of a child's upbringing, her piece is remarkably forward-thinking. Although she says that a child should be taught to be

'straightforward, manly, brave, good and upright in his dealings, gentle, merciful, considerate' (Nicholson, 1898: 221), above all she stresses the futility of forcing a child in an inappropriate direction, saying that parents should observe 'patience and forbearance' (ibid.: 222). Perhaps Annie Ireland aimed to practise her suggested tolerance and support of an individual in her dealings with her son, John, but nevertheless it seems that Ireland had an unhappy childhood; comments in his letters refer to this.

The gap between the oldest and youngest child in this family was a big one, and did not make for good relationships between the siblings. Ireland described the fact that his brother Alleyne used to beat him 'mercilessly every night on my way to bed' (SI: 30 March 1948). Alleyne went to sea at the age of sixteen, and his writings were being printed outside Britain by 1897. His publications included political and travel works such as *Briton and Boer in South Africa* (1899). In 1907 he was employed by the University of Chicago, and became companion-secretary to Joseph Pulitzer from *c.* 1910. He wrote *Joseph Pulitzer: reminiscences of a secretary* (1914) and *The New Korea* (1926). After leaving Britain, there appears to have been little, if any, communication between Alleyne and John, and in 1948 the latter wrote that he had heard 'not one word for at least 30 years' (SI: 30 March 1948). Ireland's other recollections of his early family life testify to the cruelty of his upbringing. He recalled that he was 'shut in dark rooms with no food but bread and water, for 24 hours, for the slightest offence' (ibid.).

Of the three sisters, the youngest, Ethel, was the only one to maintain contact with John. She studied at the Royal Academy of Music (RAM), had some musical and literary works published, among them *Some new letters by Leigh Hunt and Stevenson* (1898), and married a linguist, Dr Anton Velleman, after which she moved to Switzerland. She was divorced during the First World War, and John was in touch with her at least until the Second World War, when she was living first in Venice, in 1939, and then in France, in Menton and Juan-les-Pins in 1940. She had two sons, the eldest of whom, Silvio (*b.* 1904), after an education at the King's College Choir School, Cambridge and at King William's School in the Isle of Man, did remain in contact with his uncle, visiting him in Chelsea in the 1920s. Silvio moved to San Francisco, where he took a new name, Henri Lenoir, and settled first as the owner of a café and eventually as a collector and dealer in fine art. Throughout Ireland's life there is affectionate and often lengthy correspondence between them. Silvio sent what were evidently very generous food parcels on a regular basis during and after the Second World War. Ethel's other son, Anthony (1906–89), worked for some time as a language teacher. He married and had three children, Nicholas (*b.* 1939), Caroline (*b.* 1941) and Adrian (*b.* 1945). He travelled widely, and found success as a playwright, with dramatic works including *Byron in Piccadilly* (1945).

While there were evidently problems within the Ireland–Nicholson household, John Ireland's formative years did foster a childhood interest in

music. Ireland recalled that his first lessons were with his mother and that he was drawn to music from an early age:

> My sisters used to play the piano – Chopin and various things like that. And my mother, although she was not a professional musician, took a deep interest in music. I started playing the piano when I was seven or eight, but it wasn't until I came to London in 1893 that I began my serious studies. I can't remember precisely when I began composing, probably at an early age in my head, though I didn't put any of it down on paper until much later. I began writing music before I had any lessons in composition or any of the fundamentals.
>
> (in Schafer, 1963: 25)

In his very early years Ireland had a governess. His first experience of an educational institution, at the age of about eight or nine, was when he was sent to board at a local dame school (Plate 3). This was an unhappy experience, not least because he was made to stay there during the holidays, and because, according to Ireland, the three women who ran the school delighted to 'tyrannize' over him (SI: 30 March 1948). At about this time the *Manchester Examiner* suffered severe financial difficulties and eventually folded. The Ireland family then moved from Bowdon to Southport.

Ireland's next school was Dinglewood Preparatory School in Colwyn Bay, and he then spent two terms at Leeds Grammar School in the first part of 1893, during which time he lodged in the city. He studied music at both schools, learning piano, organ and violin, but he recalled that his early piano lessons were yet again uninspiring:

> I have the most unpleasant memories attached to my first piano teachers. They used to use a round, black and quite hefty ruler which would descend on my fingers the moment they got into trouble. But the difficulties didn't disappear as a result of the ruler treatment; they only became worse, and I became more and more terrified. At the age of ten I associated Beethoven with suffering and punishment.
>
> (in Schafer, 1963: 25)

The early musical training and the haphazard schooling was all rather unfortunate, and did not make for happy or useful early years. However, given that Ireland developed a profound knowledge and love of literature that continued for the rest of his life, it would seem that the family's associations with eminent writers made a much more lasting impression than did his formal education. Ireland himself testified to this. He remembered meeting le Gallienne and wrote that he had 'always been interested in literature as a consequence of my home life' (in Schafer, 1963: 26). He read widely and drew on many fine poems for inspiration. His output of some seventy songs uses poetry that is nearly always finely crafted: there are settings of Thomas Hardy, A.E. Housman, John Masefield, Arthur Symons and several Elizabethan sonneteers. Often he set newly published poems by contemporary writers, and there are also signs of eclectic and idiosyncratic literary tastes, such as his

favouring of now little-known poets such as James Vila Blake. Ireland frequently prefaced his piano pieces with a passage from a poem, carefully chosen to reflect the meaning of the music. As an example, extracts from Victor Hugo's *Les Travailleurs de la Mer* and Charles Algernon Swinburne's 'Thalassius' are attached to the second and third movements of Ireland's piano suite *Sarnia* (1940–41). This work is a reflection of experiences during Ireland's stay on Guernsey between 1939 and 1940, and these two poets themselves lived on the island for short periods. And while there are inevitably some weak settings of poems, mainly from the early part of Ireland's career, there are many songs that show a real understanding of the poem's construction. For example, Housman's 'We'll to the woods no more' (1922) was based on a French *ronde*, hence its restricted rhymes and refrain. When Ireland set this in 1927 he mirrored the rhyme scheme in melodic repetitions.

On 28 September 1893, at the age of just fourteen, Ireland, on his own initiative, enrolled at the Royal College of Music (RCM). His sister Ethel was already at the RAM. She had registered in February 1891, and was studying piano, violin, elocution and modern languages and living in South Hampstead. Her younger brother moved in with her for a short time. Less than a week after he had started at the RCM their mother died, followed a year later by their father. Ireland and his sister were left in the charge of a guardian, and the next few years saw them moving frequently from lodgings to lodgings, Ireland taking work as an accompanist at smoking-concerts to supplement his income. It was the RCM that was to provide the first lengthy period of real stability in Ireland's life. His principal study was piano, with Frederick Cliffe (1857–1931), who had been Professor at the RCM since 1883. Second study encompassed organ and theoretical studies. Ireland's organ teacher was Sir Walter Parratt (1841–1924), who had also been at the Royal College for ten years, and who, from 1893, was Master of the Queen's Music. Ireland was awarded his Fellow of the Royal College of Organists (FRCO) at the age of fifteen. His harmony lessons were with James Higgs, who provided a grounding in the rudiments of music. By 1896 composition had been added to harmony, and a piano Associate of the Royal College of Music had been added to the FRCO.

During these first few years at the Royal College, Ireland also spent time getting to know the standard repertoire, and especially works by Beethoven, Brahms and Dvořák:

> I was able to attend many concerts, both chamber and orchestral. There were the Monday and Saturday 'Pops' at the old St. James's Hall where one constantly heard Chamber Music under such exponents as the Joachim Quartet, and so one became familiar with the classics, and the works of Brahms, who was still the greatest living composer. Also I attended the bi-weekly rehearsals of the RCM orchestra, which familiarized me with many works.
>
> (*JIT*, 1)

One of the most interesting of Ireland's activities during his early years at the Royal College was his membership of the RCM Literary and Debating Society. This was established in 1896 and lasted for one year. The roll of membership included Evlyn Howard Jones (1877–1951), a pianist to whom Ireland dedicated some of his early works, and composers Gustav von Holst (1874–1934), Ralph Vaughan Williams, Fritz Hart (1874–1949), Dunhill, William Yeates Hurlstone (1876–1906) and Ireland. Meetings were held on Saturday afternoons, and were devoted to the reading and discussion of literary works, such as Carlyle's 'Essay on Dante'. Plays were read, with parts assigned to the music students, and there were also debates on musical issues. According to Dunhill, in 1896:

> The first meeting of the Christmas term brought forth two interesting papers by Vaughan-Williams and Von Holst respectively, upon 'Bayreuth' and 'Open-Air Music'. A debate on the motion by Vaughan-Williams 'That the Moderate Man is Contemptible' (which called forth many entertaining speeches on both sides) was held on the 15th of October, and other meetings included discussions on 'Pianoforte Music', 'The Socialism of William Morris', and 'The Philosophy of Schopenhauer'. There was also a reading of 'Cymbeline' and a debate upon the question 'Has Music reached its Zenith?'
>
> (Dunhill, 1908–09: 19)

Ireland was the instigator of one of the topics above, when he 'animadverted on Schopenhauer' (*MT*, Oct. 1958: 535). The meetings always concluded with a gathering for tea and buns at Wilkins' in Kensington High Street.

In addition to these activities, Ireland participated in concerts at the RCM, and began to write music, but it seems that he discredited and abandoned many of his very early compositions. There were a number of orchestral works that have not survived, including an overture, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, the *Prelude: Midsummer* and *The Princess Maleine*. From these first few years at the Royal College, little remains save for *In Those Days*, a piano work comprising two short pieces, 'Daydream' and 'Meridian', composed in 1895, and revised in 1941, though the later revision made few significant alterations to the original. 'Daydream' is a simple, diatonic work, with Brahmsian piano figuration. 'Meridian', also firmly diatonic, is an early example of Ireland's interest in the sea as inspiration. In 1896 there was a Communion Service in A flat major, and a *Pastoral* for piano, and in 1897 another piano piece, a Theme and Variations in E flat major, for which only the theme is extant.

Another work surviving from the early 1890s is an undated part-song for SATB chorus, 'The peaceful western wind'. The part-song was a genre that Ireland used throughout his life, and he produced a number of slight but always well-crafted pieces which punctuate moments of greater intensity in his output. Using a strophic text by Thomas Campion, in 'The peaceful western wind' Ireland establishes an archetype which he was to reuse with slight variations in his later part-songs. The three stanzas employ the same essential harmony, with

only slight motivic variations. There is no sign that Ireland is depicting musically the meaning of the words, and the writing is essentially an exercise in simple four-part harmony (Example 1.1).

Example 1.1

Smoothly, and with moderate movement

The peace - ful wes - tern wind The win - ter storms hath tamed

In March 1897 Ireland wrote his First String Quartet in D minor, and a few months later, in September, he completed his Second String Quartet in C minor. Neither work was published in his lifetime. The two quartets demonstrate that the young Ireland certainly had a good grasp of form and instrumentation, but though well crafted, these are student efforts, exploring the timbral and textural possibilities of the medium, and revealing the influences of Beethoven, Dvořák and Mendelssohn. Both quartets have a clear diatonic framework and follow a four-movement format, with a sonata-form first movement, a slow movement, a scherzo and a quick finale (in the case of the second quartet, a theme and variations). Both works, in particular the first quartet (Example 1.2, bars 25–9) have finales of an ebullient nature, a feature of all Ireland's chamber music.

Example 1.2

[Vivace]

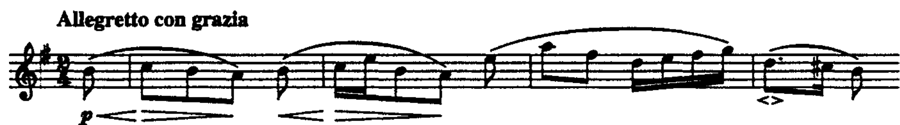
ff

In May 1897, between writing the first and second quartets, Ireland had become a scholar at the RCM and a composition pupil of Charles Villiers Stanford (1852–1924), whose own style of writing and demanding disciplined teaching methods had a considerable impact on Ireland, instilling rigorous craftsmanship in him.

Stanford also had a significant impact on the development of his pupil's personal harmonic language. Ireland wrote that it was Stanford who first 'expounded the modal scales' (*The Times*, 3 Aug. 1959: 10), and the introduction to and emphasis on the modal system of Palestrina certainly led Ireland to his own brand of modality. Between 1897 and March 1901 as Stanford's pupil, and during the first decade of the twentieth century, Ireland experimented with genres, structures and textures in an attempt to develop a personal voice. The major musical influences at this time remained Beethoven and Brahms, and even as late as 1911 Ireland was producing works such as 'Hope the Hornblower', relying heavily on the harmonic language of the first half of the nineteenth century. But there were also other important influences, including the music of Tchaikovsky.

While there are some piano works from the period to 1901, including *A Sea Idyll* in 1900, piano music does not feature prominently in Ireland's output at this stage, the main area of interest being chamber music. The two string quartets were followed in 1898 by a Sextet for clarinet, horn and string quartet, expanded from a single-movement 'Intermezzo' with the same scoring. In terms of its fomal concision it is an advance on the quartets, but there is yet little in the piece to indicate the direction in which Ireland was to move during the next two decades. In four movements, the Sextet is overtly Brahmsian in structure, harmony and texture, and even in melodic construction, as can be seen particularly in the opening of the 'Intermezzo' (Example 1.3).

Example 1.3



Given that Ireland had recently heard the renowned clarinettist, Richard Mühlfeld (1856–1907) performing Brahms' Clarinet Quintet in London, these derivative qualities are perhaps not surprising. The only shades of the later Ireland come in the finale, where there are glimpses of the floating melody lines which were eventually to mature into the fluid writing for clarinet in the 1943 Fantasy-Sonata. Ireland did not return to either the mixed chamber ensemble (save for a Trio for clarinet, cello and piano, rewritten as a Piano Trio) or to the string quartet. Referring to the quartets in correspondence many years later, he said:

> I wrote two, as a student – they were not so bad, either, but wouldn't do now. I have never had the temerity to complete another, though I have made one or two beginnings at different times. It is the purest form of music.
>
> (EL: 14 Sept. 1952)

Although this 'purest' music did not turn out to be Ireland's, the instruments of these early chamber works were all to be explored more fully. His writing for