



CHANDOS COLLECT

Sir Hamilton Harty

A John Field Suite
The Londonderry Air
In Ireland
Suite from Handel's 'Water Music'

Ulster Orchestra
Bryden Thomson

CHAN 6583

Sir Hamilton Harty (1879–1941)

A John Field Suite

1	I Polka	4:49
2	II Nocturne	5:23
3	III Slow Waltz 'Remembrance'	4:02
4	IV Rondo 'Midi'	5:12

5	The Londonderry Air	5:25
	Pan Hon Lee solo violin	

Suite from Handel's 'Water Music'

6	I Allegro	2:40
7	II Air	4:44
8	III Bourrée –	0:47
9	IV Hornpipe	0:54
10	V Andante espressivo	3:22
11	VI Allegro deciso	3:15

12	In Ireland	9:14
	Fantasy for flute, harp and orchestra	
	Colin Fleming solo flute	
	Denise Kelly solo harp	

TT 50:17

Ulster Orchestra Bryden Thomson

Harty: A John Field Suite and other works

Herbert Hamilton Harty was born in Hillsborough, Co. Down in 1879, the fourth of the ten children of William and Annie Harty. His father was organist of the parish church (a position he held for forty years) and music teacher, and it was from him that Bertie (as he was known in the family) received most of his musical education. Music in his early life consisted of deputising for his father at the organ, accompanying his sister Edith at the 'Grand Concerts' which were a regular feature of village life, and playing chamber music in the family string quartet. As well as the organ and piano he learnt to play the viola, and it is a happy coincidence that one of the violists in the Ulster Orchestra plays the instrument that once belonged to Harty. From his father's large collection of music of all kinds he gained his knowledge of the standard repertoire, and towards the end of his life he recorded in an unpublished autobiographical 'Memoir' his father's repeated injunction:

There is most of the greatest music that has been written. Play it through, all of it – everything – and at the end you will have gained a good musical education.

Harty's *entrée* into professional musical life

came through his exceptional gifts as an accompanist. Although he lacked the highly developed technique to become a great soloist, he was fluent, sensitive, a superb sight-reader, and had an easy-going manner which enabled him to collaborate well with other artists. So it was that when, at the age of sixteen, he moved down to Bray to take up an organist's post, he was soon in great demand in Dublin's musical circles, accompanying (among others) Ella Russell when she sang for Queen Victoria during the royal visit in 1900, and the young John McCormack when he made his debut at the Dublin music festival, the *Feis Ceoil*. Subsequently he moved to London where, during the first decade of the twentieth century, he established himself as a leading accompanist. One of the singers with whom he performed was the soprano Agnes Nicholls, whom he married in 1904. The period up to the First World War was also his most prolific period as a composer. He had been composing since his boyhood days at Hillsborough – mainly songs and chamber music – and it comes as something of a surprise to discover that one of his most impressive songs, 'Sea-Wrack', was written

when he was only sixteen. Several of his early works were written for the composition classes of the *Feis Ceoil* – more, he admitted in his 'Memoir', for the certainty of a good performance than for any interest in the prize money, a remark typical of his down-to-earth self-instructing attitude. Songs formed a large part of his output simply because there was a ready demand for such music at the soirées and 'ballad concerts' at which he appeared so often, but there was also a number of substantial orchestral works: the *Irish Symphony* (a *Feis Ceoil* piece composed in 1904 and subsequently revised several times), the *Comedy Overture* (1908), the tone poem *With the Wild Geese* (1910), and the two violin works: the *Concerto* (1908) and *Variations on a Dublin Air* (1912).

During the second decade of the century he became prominent in yet another capacity, that of conductor, a development which culminated in his appointment as conductor of the Hallé Orchestra in 1920. Harty's thirteen years with the Hallé, the extraordinary rapport that he achieved with his players, the finesse and vitality of their performances, notably in the music of Berlioz, a composer whose music Harty championed in particular – all this is now part of musical legend. In the 1930s he consolidated his reputation during a number of tours abroad, notably in America, where he was hailed as the 'Irish Toscanini'. Inevitably,

however, his success at the rostrum meant that he had less time to compose, and in the 1920s and '30s he wrote comparatively little, apart from the Piano Concerto (1922) and several arrangements of music by Handel, of which that of the *Water Music* is the most famous. Only during his long final illness was he able once more to give all his time to composition, especially to the tone poem *The Children of Lir* (1938–39), which was to be his swan song. He died in February 1941.

During the 1920s and '30s his career as a conductor left little time for original composition, but Harty did produce a number of fine arrangements. In this activity his innate skill as an orchestrator (something that he shared with his idol Berlioz) stood him in good stead, and this was enhanced if anything by his experience on the rostrum of what was effective. *A John Field Suite* (1939) was based on the music of a fellow Irishman. John Field was born in Dublin in 1782, became a salesman in Clementi's music shop in London, and subsequently achieved fame throughout Europe as a pianist, composer and teacher. He finally settled in Russia, where he died in 1837. For this suite Harty chose the following pieces:

1. Rondo from the Piano Sonata in E flat major, Op. 1 No. 1
2. Nocturne for piano in B flat major
3. Waltz in E major for piano, entitled 'Remembrance' ('Sehnsuchts-Walzer')

4. Rondo in E major ('Le Midi') for piano quintet

All the originals were piano pieces (piano quintet in the case of the last movement), so Harty had to rethink the music completely in orchestral terms: indeed, his creative role went beyond orchestration to minor reshaping of the music, such as the addition of a few introductory bars to the second movement. Neville Cardus perceived this when after the first performance in 1939 he wrote:

It was no mere transcription. The orchestration and general layout of Field's charming if naive rhythms and tunes were evidence of assimilation to another form and idiom.

Usually Harty liked the sound of a full orchestra, but here the scoring is for a small ensemble, consisting of a single wind, percussion, harp and strings, so that we have a wide range of instrumental colour without the weight of a full orchestra.

The arrangement of *The Londonderry Air* was made in 1924, and Harty conducted a recording of it with the Hallé Orchestra in 1929. Scored for strings and harp, it consists of two statements of the well-known melody, with a few introductory bars which also serve as an interlude between the statements. The melody is first played by a solo violin, then by the violins *tutti* to a rich accompaniment of divided strings, rising to a sonorous climax.

The love which Harty conceived for the music of Handel went back to his childhood days when his father used to play to him on the organ. The *Suite from Handel's 'Water Music'*, first performed in 1920 and published in 1922, was just one of a number of Handel arrangements by Harty, but it has always and deservedly been the most popular. He selected six movements from two suites that Handel composed for a royal occasion in 1715, five from the F major suite and the sixth from the D major suite, and arranged them for modern symphony orchestra (without trombones). As in *A John Field Suite*, which begins in E flat and ends in E major, Harty is not concerned with overall unity of tonality, for after four movements in F major and a fifth in D minor he ends in D major. The stately first movement is characterised by antiphonal writing between the horns and strings. The second is a beautiful Air, with a middle section in F minor taken from a different movement of the original suite. The sound of the horn is once again prominent in the recapitulation, and notably, to magical effect, that of four muted horns in the coda. Two short movements played in succession, Bourrée and Hornpipe, form what might be described as the scherzo of Harty's suite. The pensive *Andante espressivo* in D minor prepares the ear for the D major of the finale, where trumpets enter for the first time to contribute to the climactic effect.

The Fantasy *In Ireland* has a headnote which reads, 'In a Dublin street at dusk two wandering street-musicians are playing'. The term 'fantasy' conveys both the free-flowing improvisatory character of the writing for the solo flute and the quick-changing mood of the music, between plangent melancholy and dance-like gaiety. But it should not be taken to imply any looseness of construction, for it is in fact a tightly wrought piece. The following layout will show how the sections are linked:

- *Moderato con passione*: Introduction, leading to florid flute theme (a)
- *Moderato, ma deciso*: theme (b), in Dorian mode
- *Tempo I*: return of theme (a)
- *Vivace*: dance tune in Aeolian mode, derived from (a)
- *Andante*: slow variant of (b)
- *Vivace*: continuation of previous *Vivace*

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