

Six Ulster Composers

Roy Johnston

The six musicians who are the subjects of these brief biographies are the eminent forerunners of the present-day company of Ulster composers. This prefatory note displays and comments on the diversity of their origins, their musical education and the milieux in which they made their careers. Let us use **Charles Wood** as a template.

He was born into a musical Armagh family and had an outstanding local teacher, Thomas Osborne Marks, cathedral organist and possessor of high academic qualifications. Then as now, musicians consciously lived in a nationwide musical network. How else could Wood have applied for one of the six scholarships allocated to Ireland by the nascent Royal College of Music in London? Three of the scholarships went to students of the Royal Irish Academy of Music, and had Charles Wood not succeeded, he might well have started on his academic career by enrolling there. But he got one of the other three, and in London the RCM gave him a metropolitan musical education. London and Cambridge then provided him with the best possible bases in which to make his chosen career. He had the mighty figure of Stanford as composition teacher and mentor, and Wood would crown his career by succeeding Stanford as professor of music at Cambridge.

The times were not propitious for him to have sought such a career nearer his birthplace. By the time he died, broadcasting had just arrived in Belfast but there was as yet no Ulster university offering music degrees. He was by no means unaware of his roots. When the Irish Folk Song Society was formed in London in 1903 he accepted a vice-presidency. Since he does not seem to have contributed to its published researches, it may be assumed that the post was honorary. In his own composing career,

however, as the brief biography confirms, he drew frequently on his Irish heritage and when he died he was working on a short opera on an Irish subject.

Hamilton Harty too was born into a musical family. He needed no local tuition other than that given him by his father William Harty, organist of the parish church at Hillsborough. It sufficed to get him his first placing as a local church organist at the age of fourteen. The next steps in his career were of his own making: the move to an organ in Belfast, where he first played in an orchestra and leapt into composition with, among other pieces, the atmospheric and assured ‘Sea Wrack’; the further move, at the age of sixteen, to an organ in Bray, which brought him into the wider field offered by the musical life of Dublin. Unlike Wood, he did not become a student of a musical academy. But by his own assiduous efforts and the constant, if informal, encouragement of Michele Esposito of the RIAM, he became a good pianist, a player of several string and brass instruments and an increasingly prolific composer. The RIAM would, as we have seen, been available to Charles Wood, but not the Feis Ceoil. The Feis Ceoil was inaugurated while Harty was in Dublin; he became its official accompanist, and if he did not compete in the competitions as a pianist, he did so as a composer and won prestigious prizes.

The centripetal force which had drawn him to Belfast and Dublin now drew him to London – again, having of his own volition obtained an organ post. As with Wood, London provided the broad base on which Harty in his turn could establish a career, in his case as accompanist, conductor and composer. It was not blighted by his lack of an academic qualification; unlike Wood, he was not one of nature’s academics.

Harty wrote within the European late-romantic style, but with a number of important compositions ranging from the ‘Irish Symphony’ first performed in 1904 to *The Children of Lir* and the ‘John Field suite’ in the last year of his life, there was no question as to the value he put on his Irish heritage. By the time he died the great stimulus of broadcasting had arrived, but not yet the B Mus course in Queen’s University, Belfast; the creation of the Harty chair was a posthumous tribute.

With **Norman Hay**, compliance with the Charles Wood template is the exception rather than the rule. Yet, if there was no musical figure of the stature of Marks or William

Harty in his background, the two aunts who reared him in Coleraine ensured that he had lessons in violin and piano from local teachers, and had him travel to Belfast for six years, where he could study under Dr Koeller, conductor of the Philharmonic Society, who also gave him experience in the Society's orchestra, and be taught the organ by Charles Brennan of St Anne's cathedral.

That was the sum of his musical education: no RIAM, no London college. But it sufficed, and Belfast was to remain his lifelong base. His compositions competed successfully in the Feis Ceoil. He obtained a doctorate in music from Oxford with a piece for chorus and orchestra. He was fortunate in having as mentor Edward Godfrey Brown, Koeller's successor in the Philharmonic. An RCM graduate himself with limitless contacts in the world of music, Brown became the BBC Northern Ireland's first director of music in 1926, and with a professional orchestra at his disposal, Hay's persistent encourager and champion. Hay's music was to be heard at the Henry Wood Proms and the Three Choirs festival.

Norman Hay drew extensively on his Irish heritage, musical and literary; his Oxford doctorate piece was a setting of Joseph Campbell. But where Harty's direct encouragement of Irish traditional music was, as with Charles Wood, confined to his acceptance of a vice-presidency of the Irish Folk Music Society, Hay campaigned for the recovery of Ulster traditional music in the influential weekly column he wrote for the *Belfast Telegraph*. In 1936 the BBC launched its 'Ulster Airs' scheme for setting the airs for orchestra. Hay had reservations about the arrangement principle, but he accepted the editorship; some 150 arrangements were made by a number of composers, and Hay contributed several himself.

Howard Ferguson fits the template much more closely. He had good local teaching and won his piano class at the Belfast feis when he was thirteen years of age. As with Charles Wood, one fortunate bound was to take him straight to London and to a career which, like Wood's, was to be based in London and Cambridge. The adjudicator, Harold Samuel, offered to be responsible for his musical education in London and to have him live there with his family. In the troubled Ireland of the early 1920s it was a

great opportunity, and his family – his father was a managing director of the Ulster Bank – were able to accept. Samuel's perception of an outstanding talent was accurate, and as a well-known pianist himself he was able to act as Ferguson's mentor both in his RCM days and in establishing him later in a career as a pianist. The composition teaching he had had at RCM set Howard Ferguson confidently on his way as a composer. Where Wood had based himself in both London and Cambridge from the start and composed most of his church music in his later days at Cambridge, Ferguson did not move to Cambridge until after he had made the momentous declaration that he would compose no more; Cambridge was an ideal base for his later career as a musicologist.

He retained his family links with Belfast and made frequent visits. His music has always been popular with Belfast concert-goers. He wrote a piano concerto for the Arts Council of Northern Ireland in 1951 and had it performed by the Belfast City Orchestra with himself as soloist; two years later, to a BBC Northern Ireland commission he wrote his 'Overture for an occasion'. Although as a student at the RCM he wrote 'Five Irish pieces' for cello, viola and piano and he contributed arrangements to the 'Ulster Airs' scheme, there is no Irish accent in his writing comparable to that in Harty or Joan Trimble.

Joan Trimble from Enniskillen embroiders the template in style. She had Charles Wood's advantages of a musical family background and good local teaching, with the additional benefits of a mother who was a member of a notable family of Dublin musicians with strong RIAM connections, and the company and stimulus of a talented younger sister. The sisters entered the RIAM together; Valerie Trimble proceeded to the RCM, where Joan joined her after taking degrees at TCD. As with Harty and Ferguson, the piano was to be the performing instrument of both sisters. To make a joint career as two-piano duettists was a novelty, but successful. The repertoire benefitted from the numerous pieces which Joan composed for it. Harty had made a tripartite London career; so did Joan Trimble, the elements in her case being her concert career with her sister, her own composing, and a professional post in the RCM. Broadcasting, by now well developed, was a benevolent and happily voracious presence. It was Joan and Valerie Trimble's weekly broadcasts on a BBC popular music programme which made them

household names. Joan's composing output ranged from student pieces, through her two-piano contributions, to BBC and Radio Eireann commissions; late in the day came a further encourager, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland; the BBC requests included songs commissioned by BBC Northern Ireland Children's Hour and a one-act opera for television. Not all her compositions, but a great many of them, drew on her Irish heritage. She set the poems of Irish writers, and the many compositions which she based on traditional melodies had a distinctive Irish voice. Like Hay and Ferguson, she contributed to the 'Ulster Airs' scheme.

Joan Trimble divided her time between London and Ireland, possibly devoting more time to Ireland than Wood, Harty or Ferguson had done. When she returned to Enniskillen for good it was to manage the family newspaper business and to look after an ailing husband.

Havelock Nelson was born in Cork but never failed to insist that his family's roots were in Kilwaughter. His father's career move to Dublin meant that there were no preliminary studies in provincial towns. It was a home-based progress from school to the Feis Ceoil, the RIAM, TCD and a varied musical career in Dublin as organist, orchestral musician, conductor, chorus master and répétiteur. Taught composition by John Larchet, he had pieces performed by the Dublin Orchestral Players and other orchestras. Uniquely in this group of musicians, Havelock Nelson had another string to his bow. At TCD, alongside his musical degree studies, he ran up a formidable list of qualifications in medicine. When he joined up in the second world war it was not, like Ferguson, to be a member of the RAF Band but as a medical officer. The BBC got in first after the war with a career offer, and pathology was the loser – but it was close.

With his qualifications, track record and personality, Havelock Nelson would have thrived in a London posting should the BBC have given him one. In his Belfast career, however, at the centre of broadcasting in general and music in particular, he had a unique opportunity, which he honoured even more than Hay did, to play, compose, disseminate and encourage, in an Irish context and beyond it, and he did this in the BBC and in many fields outside.

With all six, early recognition, in the home, of superior musical ability, seems to have been essential; the next requirement to be sent to local teachers who knew the network. The outstanding pupil had to be sent, part-time or full-time, to a centre which offered more. How was he or she to get there? Howard Ferguson and Charles Wood made the leap direct to London; Hamilton Harty got himself to London via Dublin, so did Joan Trimble. If Dublin was to provide all Havelock Nelson's musical education, Belfast, a much less developed centre, was to suffice for Hay. The capacity for self-education, alongside formal study, is by no means to be under-rated, perhaps principally in Harty and Hay.

The church, on both sides of the Irish Sea, had been throughout the period a benevolent and powerfully musical presence, offering teaching practical and academic on the most sophisticated of instruments, and almost limitless career opportunities as organists. The ancient universities of Oxford and Cambridge, with their unmatched traditions, were there, if the student could get to them; the same went for the London colleges when they came into being, and, nearer home, the RIAM and TCD. The towering presence in the careers of all but Wood and to a lesser extent Harty is broadcasting, with its power to encourage, commission and disseminate. As a university department of music – so potent a force in present days - QUB led the way with its establishment of a full-time lectureship in 1947, the B Mus degree in 1949 and the Harty chair in 1951. Playing its own unique role since near the end of the second world war, the Arts Council has honoured in full the obligation laid on it by its first title, 'The Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts'.

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The brief biographies

The music of **Charles Wood**, through his church services and anthems and hymn arrangements, is probably more widely and enduringly known than that of any other Ulster composer. He was born in Armagh on 15 June 1866. He had his early musical education from Thomas Osborne Marks, the organist of St Patrick's Anglican cathedral, a

considerable musician and composer of church music, with degrees from Oxford and Dublin, and the encouragement of his elder brother William Wood, himself a professional musician. The Royal College of Music came into existence in London in 1883, just when Wood was in a position to benefit from one of its first initiatives, the award of fifty scholarships open to students throughout the British Isles. Of the six allocated to Irish students Wood was awarded one. At the RCM 1883-7, where Stanford taught him composing, he carried off the Morley Scholarship for composition. On graduation he opted squarely for an academic and composing career: in 1888 he was appointed to teach harmony at the RCM, and also took up residence at Cambridge, first at Selwyn College and then at Gonville and Caius, where he became the first musician to be elected to a fellowship. He graduated BA and MusB at Cambridge in 1890 and MA and MusD in 1894. Leeds conferred an honorary PhD on him in 1904 and Oxford an honorary DMus in 1924. In 1924 he succeeded Stanford as professor of music, only to die in Cambridge two years later at the age of sixty.

He brought fastidious taste and fine scholarship to all his compositions. From his early years after leaving the RCM there date several short works for voices and orchestra: *Ode to the West Wind* (1890); a setting of Swinburne's *Ode to Music* for the opening of new premises of the RCM (1894); a setting of Milton's *Ode on Time* (1898); his *Dirge for Two Veterans*, based on Whitman, for the Leeds festival (1901); *Song of the Tempest* (1902); and *A Ballad of Dundee* for the Leeds festival (1904). Among his dramatic works were scores for Cambridge performances of *Ion* (1890) and *Iphigenia in Tauris* (1894) and two Dickens-inspired chamber operas, *Pickwick Papers* (1922) and *The Family Party* (1924). His chamber instrumental works include six string quartets and one uncompleted; the Master and Fellows of his college published an edition of them in his memory. During his later years he became increasingly active as a composer of church music and short choral pieces. His liturgical works include four settings of the Communion service, two of the Te Deum and Benedictus, some twenty of the Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis and over thirty anthems. The best of his evening canticles are as well established as those of Stanford, and they and the anthems are well known and frequently performed in many churches besides the Anglican. His largest church work is his *St Mark Passion* of 1921.

He was also drawn to Irish traditional melody. He was a founder member and a vice-president of the Irish Folk Song Society. His interest manifested itself in several collections of arrangements in collaboration with A P Graves, P J McCall and Padraic Gregory, as well as in a number of instrumental works: *Patrick Sarsfield*, symphonic variations on an Irish air (1907); the string quartets Nos 3 and 4 (1911-12); the 'Variations on an Irish Folk Song' (c. 1917); and an unfinished opera *Pat in Fairyland*, to a libretto by J Todhunter.

It is obvious from his career that he had a considerable contribution to make to academic musical life at its highest level, but it is worth considering what would have been the prospect of his talents being liberated should he have come home to Armagh on the completion of his primary degree in London. His teacher was a composer, and the musical life of Armagh was far from negligible, but it could not have nurtured Wood's composing and academic talents as London and Cambridge did.

Hamilton Harty, born in Hillsborough, County Down on 4 December 1879, also had the advantage of an excellent early musical education. The Downshire family had appointed a long line of able and distinguished organists to St Malachi's, their parish church in Hillsborough, County Down, and Harty's father, William Michael Harty, a Limerick man, was the latest holder of the post. Taught viola, piano and musical theory by his father, and having played his way through his father's comprehensive music library, he became a church organist at the age of fourteen and shortly afterwards of St Barnabas' in Belfast. It was in Belfast that he first encountered the orchestra, and where he wrote what remains his most popular song, 'Sea wrack'. An organ post at Christ Church, Bray, County Wicklow, brought him into the musical life of Dublin and marked the beginning of a lifelong creative friendship with Michele Esposito of the Royal Irish Academy of Music; as Harty said himself in later years, he had never been Esposito's pupil 'in the formal sense of the word, but in truth he had never been anything else'. It was as an accompanist that Harty showed a rare talent that was to earn him a living and open many doors. He became official accompanist at the Feis Ceoil which had been inaugurated in 1897, and the Feis Ceoil prizes which he won annually between 1899 and 1904 provided him with the opportunity to secure good performances of his own

compositions. They included his string quartet in F (Op.1), the *Fantasiestücke* for violin, cello and piano, (Op.3), his string quartet in A (Op.5) and the piano quintet in F (Op.12). The best known is his 'Irish symphony', which was to become popular and undergo many revisions; when it was first performed in Dublin in 1904 it was the first time Harty had conducted an orchestra.

He moved to London in January 1901, and in concerts and recitals accompanied many celebrities vocal and instrumental. In 1907 his *Comedy overture* was performed at a Queen's Hall promenade concert, and his setting of Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale* at the Cardiff festival. Joseph Szigeti gave the first performance of his violin concerto in the Queen's Hall in 1909. There was also a substantial output of songs. By his thirtieth birthday Harty had made a metropolitan reputation in all three of his chosen musical activities – as accompanist, composer and conductor. The tone poem *With the Wild Geese*, based on two poems by Emily Lawless, was performed at Cardiff in 1910; he conducted his 'Variations on a Dublin air' in February 1913. His cantata *The Mystic Trumpeter*, to words by Whitman, performed at the 1913 Leeds Festival established him among the foremost British composers. He became well known as a conductor in the north of England. Frequently appearing in Manchester with the Hallé orchestra, it was to that orchestra that he was appointed in a full-time capacity in 1920. At Fiesole on holiday with the Espositos in 1922 he completed his piano concerto in B minor. It was first performed in November 1922 at Leeds; at Manchester in the Hallé season in March 1923 Beecham conducted it and Harty was the soloist. His popular florid arrangements for modern orchestra of Handel's *Water music* and *Music for the royal fireworks* belong to the years 1920 and 1923 respectively.

In thirteen years Harty had made the Hallé into what was probably the best orchestra in England. That so sympathetic an accompanist should have an abrasive side to his nature became increasingly evident, however, and his contract was not renewed at the end of the 1932-3 season. Besides his knighthood in 1925 he had many honours conferred on him: a fellowship of the Royal College of Music in 1924; honorary doctorates of TCD (1925), Manchester University (1926), QUB (1933); the gold medal of the Royal Philharmonic Society in 1934.

play sometimes in the Philharmonic orchestra. He also had organ lessons from Charles Brennan, organist of St Anne's Cathedral. Earning his living as an organist (with a fellowship of the Royal College of Organists) and teacher, he became extern examiner in music in TCD in 1923 and 1924.

He won composition prizes at the Feis Ceoil, which included a prize from Stanford for his 'Sonata for cello and pianoforte on Irish folk tunes' in 1916 and a year later the Cobbett Prize for his 'Fantasy for string quartet on Irish folk tunes'. In 1918 he received an award for his string quartet in A major, published in 1920 as part of the Carnegie Collection and described by the Carnegie adjudicators as 'a work of remarkable originality, large conception, and high achievement'. For the degree of doctor of music from Oxford, conferred in 1919, he wrote a choral and orchestral setting of a poem by Joseph Campbell, *The Gilly of Christ*.

Edward Godfrey Brown, Dr Koeller's successor, became Hay's close friend and encouraging supporter. In 1921 the Philharmonic Society gave the first performance of his symphonic tone-poem *Dunluce*; four years later Sir Henry Wood accepted it for the Queen's Hall Promenade Concerts in London and Hay conducted the performance. One of his best works, a cycle of seven poems from *The Wind among the Reeds* by W B Yeats, set for solo voice, choir and orchestra, dates from 1921. A number of his works were published by Stainer and Bell. *To Wonder*, a tone poem for solo voices, chorus and orchestra, to words by Hay's friend Robert N D Wilson, one of his most effective works, was commissioned by Godfrey Brown for the Philharmonic Society's 1924 Jubilee.

The year 1924 also marked the coming of broadcasting to Belfast. Hay composed an orchestral 'Fantasy on Irish folk tunes' for the opening of the station. He also wrote incidental music for the 1925 radio production by Tyrone Guthrie of Yeats's *The Land of Heart's Desire*. In 1928-9 he wrote three 'Irish Sketches' to which a fourth was added in 1932. In 1930 he wrote a large-scale choral and orchestral piece, *Paeon* (published by Stainer and Bell in the following year), a setting of five George Herbert poems, dedicated to Godfrey Brown 'in appreciation of his interest in my works'. In 1932 it was performed at the Three Choirs Festival at Worcester and at the Proms in 1934. His compositional career ended with an orchestral 'Irish Rhapsody' of 1932 and some songs, of which 'Tryste Noel' is outstanding. In 1936 BBC Northern Ireland launched the 'Ulster Airs'

Among his favourite holiday places in Ireland was the north Antrim coast, to which he came in 1936 to stay in Portballintrae. Recollecting that the sea beside him was the Sea of Moyle, he embarked on a composition based on the old legend. With the BBC Symphony Orchestra and the soprano Isobel Bailie he conducted the first performance of *The Children of Lir* in the Queen's Hall on 1 March 1939. Terminally ill with a brain tumour, his appearances on the rostrum were now infrequent, but he conducted the Liverpool Philharmonic in the first performance of his 'John Field suite' in November of that year. In the second world war his house in London was bombed. He took a flat in Hove on the south coast of England, where on 19 February 1941 he died. When the war ended, his ashes were brought to Hillsborough and buried near the west door of St Malachi's church. His papers (including iconography) and music library went to QUB, and the Harty chair of music was created in his honour.

Many of Hamilton Harty's compositions, all written in the late-romantic style at which he arrived early and never left, are still in the performing repertoire, and a good many are on accessible recordings. His orchestration was brilliant and resourceful, and his experience as an accompanist and conductor gave him, in Raymond Warren's words, 'an unerring instinct as to what would come off well in performance'. By far the largest number of his songs were set to Irish poems. Although a great deal of his orchestral work has an Irish flavour, it was in such overtly Irish pieces as the 'Irish symphony' and the two tone poems, *With the Wild Geese* and *The Children of Lir*, that (Warren again) 'he came nearest to expressing his deep love of his native country, no doubt made the more poignant by his having, like Stanford, to work elsewhere'.

Norman Hay differs from Wood and Harty in that virtually all of his training and career took place in his native Ulster. He was born on 19 April 1889 in Faversham in Kent, the only child of parents from Coleraine, his father a customs and excise officer on a temporary posting. When his mother died some six weeks after his birth, his father obtained a transfer back to Ulster and Norman Hay was brought up and educated by two aunts who lived in Church Street, Coleraine. As a child he learned violin and piano from local teachers, and for six years he journeyed to and from Belfast to study music under Dr Francis Koeller, conductor of the Belfast Philharmonic Society, with the opportunity to

scheme, its object to preserve Ulster folk-song by setting the airs for either string or full orchestra. Hay had reservations about the arrangement principle, but he accepted the editorship, and the end result was some 150 arrangements by composers such as Charles Brennan, Howard Ferguson, Redmond Friel, Joan Trimble and Hay himself.

In 1925 a new critical voice began to be heard in the *Belfast Telegraph*. Hay wrote under the house pseudonym of 'Rathcol', and displayed a style of his own characterised by a breadth and depth of interest and a determination fearlessly to speak his mind. His weekly column reached a wide readership and placed him in a unique position in the formation of musical taste. He crusaded for the creation of a music teaching service and an Ulster college of music. Impressed by the collecting work of his fellow-townsmen Sam Henry, he pressed also for the recording of traditional music as performed by its practitioners in the countryside in their traditional styles before it would vanish. In 1941 Hay was appointed lecturer in music at QUB. His health had broken down, however, and in that year he returned to Portstewart, where he died two years later on 10 September 1943 at the age of fifty-four.

His music dropped out of sight and hearing after his death, until it reappeared, contemporaneously with the Hamilton Harty revival, both enterprises brought about by the alliance of the Ulster Orchestra with the advocacy of the BBC. It was David Byers, head of music in BBC Northern Ireland, who recognised the quality of the music, from the well-argued string quartet to the Elgarian directness and drive of *To Wonder*; many of Hay's works have been performed by the Ulster Orchestra and several broadcast on BBC Radio 3. The 'Rathcol' articles are a treasure-ground for the researcher of the musical life of the period.

Howard Ferguson, like Charles Wood, found his way to the Royal College of Music, but by a different route. He was born on 21 October 1908 in Belfast, son of a managing director of the Ulster Bank. He was taught the piano by Frederick Sawyer and won his class at the Belfast Musical Competitions ('the Feis') in April 1922. The adjudicator was Harold Samuel, an established pianist who a year earlier had begun the innovative Bach recitals for which he was to become famous. Recognising an exceptional talent, he offered to take over Howard Ferguson's musical education in London; he

would be sent as a day boy to Westminster School for his general education while being prepared by Samuel for entry to the RCM. His parents, aware of the difficulties that could face a young artist in fulfilling his promise in Ireland in the disturbed conditions of that time, agreed, on terms; they sent with him his former nanny, May Cunningham (known affectionately as 'Pu'), who would see to his welfare and also help care for Samuel's elderly mother. Howard Ferguson became a member of the Samuel household in London and duly entered the RCM in 1924. He studied harmony and counterpoint with Reginald Owen Morris and conducting with Malcolm Sargent, and in his final year composition with Vaughan Williams. He realised that he would be a composer but not a prolific one, and decided to work also as a performer of chamber music. For three decades he pursued with distinction the twin careers of pianist and composer. His main work as a pianist was in duet partnerships with Denis Matthews (piano) and Yfrah Neaman (violin), which involved extended tours in many parts of the world. He never lost touch with his family and made frequent visits to Belfast. It was 'Pu' and her niece Betty who ran the bachelor household in London and enabled Ferguson and Samuel to pursue their busy separate careers. In 1937 Harold Samuel died, leaving Howard Ferguson as his principal heir.

On the outbreak of the second world war Sir Walford Davies, the Master of the King's Music, suggested that 'musicians might contribute more to a war effort as musicians rather than as inefficient aircraftsmen', and the Air Ministry agreed. Musicians, Howard Ferguson among them, were drafted to Uxbridge where the RAF Band was stationed: as he said, 'we were only required for duty (i.e. rehearsals) during the morning, which left us free to return home in the afternoon and sleep there at night'. He was thus able to play a major part with Myra Hess in the organisation of the famous lunch-time concerts in the National Gallery in London and to perform in them occasionally. They ran without a break until April 1946; nearly 1,700 concerts were given and more than 800,000 people came to listen to them.

After his 'Five Irish folk tunes', for cello, viola and piano, written while he was a student at the RCM, compositions appeared at more or less regular intervals, building up into a catalogue which, while modest in size, was as consistent in quality as it was broad in scope. A discriminating self-critic, he spent four years over the powerful and atmospheric 'Two Ballads', for baritone and orchestra (Op.1) and was rewarded with

their good reception at the Three Choirs Festival in Gloucester in 1935. By then he had drawn serious attention as a composer with his violin sonata (Op.2), performed in 1932, and the octet (Op. 4) of 1933. The composing career thus begun continued steadily; each new work made its decisive impression. The 'Partita' of 1935-6 was simultaneously published in two versions, one for orchestra (Op.5a), the other for two pianos (Op.5b); the orchestral version was first performed by the BBC Symphony Orchestra in 1937. The flute sonata (Op.8) of 1938-40 was followed by the 'Five Bagatelles for piano' (Op. 9) in 1944 and the second violin sonata (Op. 10) in 1946.

In 1936 BBC Northern Ireland inaugurated its 'Ulster Airs' scheme and invited Ulster-born composers of the day to contribute arrangements to it. In Ferguson's 'Four diversions on Ulster airs' (Op. 7) 'The old Irish house', 'The king of Spain's daughter', 'The flower of Magherally' and 'The rambling shuiler' in turn make their contributions, forming the basis of a well-constructed composition in his by-then-customary style. In 1951 the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, as part of a scheme to encourage composers, stimulated by the Festival of Britain of that year, commissioned a work from him, which appeared as his 'Concerto for piano and strings' (Op.12). It was given its first performance in June 1951 by the City of Belfast Orchestra with Denis Mulgan as conductor and Ferguson himself as soloist. Two years later, to a BBC Northern Ireland commission for a work to celebrate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, he produced his 'Overture for an occasion' (Op. 16). He had shown that he could write in the larger forms, and while he continued to produce such well-wrought and effective works as the song cycle 'Discovery' for voice and piano to words by Denton Welch (Op. 13) in 1951, his 'Two fanfares for trumpets and trombones' (Op. 15) in 1952, and his 'Five Irish folksongs' (Op. 17) of 1954, he ventured, with assurance and lasting success, into the larger field of oratorio with *Amore Languet* for tenor solo, chorus and orchestra (Op. 18), and *The Dream of the Rood* for soprano and tenor solos, chorus and orchestra (Op.19), performed at Gloucester in the Three Choirs Festivals of 1956 and 1958 respectively.

Howard Ferguson then considered that he had said all he wished to say as a composer and that he would write no more. It was a decision to which, with characteristic self-knowledge and level-headedness, he was to adhere. He had written in a variety of forms, miniature and extended, with equal success. His style was basically diatonic,

combining lyrical warmth with firmness and clarity of construction. Traditional forms and procedures served his needs, and he handled them with a genuine sense of vitality. Having found a confident style in his twenties he remained faithful to it.

He had taught composition at the Royal Academy of Music in London from 1948 until 1963. He now established a new and equally respected career in musicology. To it he brought his musical intelligence, his insights and impeccable craftsmanship as a composer, and his practical experience as a performer. His meticulously researched, practical editions of keyboard music eventually included Henry Purcell's complete harpsichord works, Schubert's complete works for solo piano, the shorter piano works of Schumann and Brahms, volumes devoted to Scarlatti and Mendelssohn, editions of such English composers as William Tisdale, John Blow and William Croft, and a six-volume anthology of keyboard music of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, issued over several years by Oxford University Press under the title *Style and Interpretation*.

He was awarded an honorary doctorate from QUB (1959), and honorary membership of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge (1973). In 1973 he moved from London to live in Cambridge, and there he died in his sleep on 1 November 1999. He had placed his manuscripts in the Bodleian Library and seen his music definitively recorded on CD.

Joan Trimble was to be, like Wood and Ferguson, a student of the Royal College of Music. She was also to be a student of the Royal Irish Academy of Music. She was born on 18 June 1915 in Enniskillen. Her father, Egbert Trimble, was the son of the editor and proprietor of the Enniskillen-based newspaper *The Impartial Reporter*. In 1914 he had married Marie Dowse of Dublin. All the Dowse children were musical: no fewer than eleven brothers and sisters studied at the RIAM and eight of them were scholars and exhibitioners. Joan showed early promise as a pianist and violinist, and she and her younger sister Valerie entered the RIAM together in 1931. Joan was awarded piano, violin and composition scholarships while studying there. She won a scholarship to TCD and in 1936 graduated BA and in 1937 Bachelor of Music. Valerie had gone to the RCM, and Joan joined her there to study composition with Herbert Howells and Vaughan

Williams and piano with Arthur Benjamin. The sisters were encouraged by Arthur Benjamin to give performances as a two-piano duo. They made their debut in 1938, and their ability and rapport with each other made them successful and gave them a concert career, which included appearances in the lunchtime concerts organised in the National Gallery in London during the second world war by Myra Hess and Howard Ferguson. In the 1950s and 1960s, besides being busy concert artists, they became household names through their regular weekly broadcasts on the popular *Tuesday Serenade* with the BBC Concert Orchestra conducted by Stanford Robinson; the 'Jamaican Rumba' composed by Arthur Benjamin became their signature tune.

Joan Trimble had opened her composing career with two songs, 'My grief on the sea' in 1937 to words by Douglas Hyde and 'Green rain' to words by M Webb in the following year. Some of the best-known of her compositions in the late 1930s and early 1940s – 'Buttermilk Point', 'The Humours of Carrick', 'The Bard of Lisgoole', 'The Green Bough', and the more extended 'Sonatina' and 'Pastorale' – were written for herself and her sister to perform, nearly all in the Irish idiom which informs her distinctive style. Her 'Phantasy Trio' for violin, cello and piano won the Cobbett Prize at the Royal College of Music in 1940 and, having composed 'The Pool among the Reeds' for clarinet and piano and 'Rosa Breathnach' for violin and piano in the same year, she was awarded the Sullivan Prize for composition. Encouragement to compose for larger forces was provided by BBC Northern Ireland; she was one of the composers invited to write orchestral arrangements for the 'Ulster Airs' scheme in the late 1930s. They also commissioned from her 'Erin go Bragh', a march rhapsody for brass band, in 1943, and in 1949 a song cycle, 'The County Mayo', written for the Irish baritone Robert Irwin to poems by James Stephens. 1953 saw a group of compositions: two songs for two voices and piano, 'The milkmaid' to words by T Nobbes and a setting of Blake's 'The lamb', commissioned by BBC Northern Ireland 'Children's Hour'; a setting for solo voice and orchestra of Thomas Moore's 'How dear to me the hour when daylight dies'; and the accomplished 'Suite for strings', commissioned by the Radio Eireann Symphony Orchestra and performed, with Arthur Duff conducting, in the Phoenix Hall in Dublin. In 1956 the BBC in London had broken new ground with one-act operas specially commissioned for television; Joan Trimble's *Blind Raftery*, to a libretto by Cedric Cliffe,

was commissioned by BBC Northern Ireland and performed in May 1957. The flow of compositions ceased thereafter for some years. There was an 'Air for two Irish harps' in 1969. Then, as interest in her career and her music revived, she accepted a commission from the Northern Ireland Arts Council to mark her 75th birthday, and the result was her 'Three Diversions for wind quintet', acclaimed at the time and widely performed since.

In the second world war both Joan and her sister became Red Cross nurses. In 1942 Joan married John Gant, a Yorkshireman who was a captain in the 5th East Lancashires Medical Corps. After the war they lived in London, Joan continuing with her musical career, he working as a general practitioner. Egbert Trimble became editor and proprietor of *The Impartial Reporter* in 1941 on his father's death, and on the formation in 1954 of William Trimble Ltd became its managing director. After his death, in London in February 1967, Joan took over his role of managing director and later became chairman of the company. During the 1960s and 1970s she had been employed as a professor of accompaniment and general musicianship at the RCM and worked as an examiner for the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music. For several years she made regular business trips between Enniskillen and her home in London. In 1978, however, her husband had to retire from practice for health reasons, and they came back to live in Enniskillen. John Gant died on 22 July 2000, Joan a fortnight later on 6 August.

Writing music over a long career, in the increasing clamour of competing schools and theories, Joan Trimble expressed her own robust and coherent credo: 'I have always written music "subject to neither schools nor period". As a performer-composer, communication with the listener is essential and response follows. Shape and form, rhythm and clarity, as well as freedom of expression, are all important. I am free to be myself, regardless of fashion.' *The Times* obituary said that 'the best of her music, attractive and always beautifully crafted, deserves the appreciation that she won early in her career and which is beginning to revive.' Although no commercial recordings of her early work or of the piano duo performances were made, a good deal of her music has now been recorded on CD. Her papers are deposited in the Contemporary Music Centre, Dublin.

Havelock Nelson had formidable academic qualifications, in two disciplines. He was born in Cork, of County Antrim farming stock, on 25 May 1917. His parents had married in 1916 in Dublin, and shortly afterwards his father, a chartered accountant, had taken a job in Cork. Havelock Nelson was a month old when his parents moved to live in Sandycove, Dublin. While he was a pupil at St Andrew's school in Dublin he won a scholarship to the Royal Irish Academy of Music which gave him a year's free piano tuition and a harmony course. He also studied viola and double bass, and had organ lessons from Dr George Hewson. In 1936 he became organist of Centenary Methodist church on St Stephen's Green, and wrote a cantata, *Songs of the Longing Spirit*, performed there in 1937.

In 1935 he entered TCD to read natural science, changing over after two years to medical science and specialising in bacteriology and serology. After taking an honours degree in medical science in 1939 he spent two years on a research grant in bacteriology. By the time he left TCD in 1943 he had become MA, MSc and Doctor of Medical Science. He had concurrently become Bachelor of Music; he later added a doctorate of music, also from TCD. In 1940 he helped to form the Dublin Orchestral Players, an ensemble designed for trainee professional and good amateur instrumentalists; he was also chorus master and répétiteur for various amateur operatic companies. He had lessons in composition with Dr J F Larchet, and was occasionally engaged as guest conductor with the Radio Eireann Symphony Orchestra.

In 1943 he became an officer in the medical branch of the Royal Air Force. After the war he had a career choice to make between medicine and music. When the BBC advertised vacancies for staff accompanists he was appointed in that capacity to BBC Northern Ireland; pathology in Sheffield was the loser. Based in Belfast, he took up duty in 1947. His original assignment in Belfast was, simply, to take an active part in any musical output of the station. This gave him a roving commission, accompanying recitals and concerts, auditioning, providing background and incidental music (scoring and arranging where necessary), improvising to order. Nearly all of the station's output was broadcast live, and in the days when broadcasting meant sound radio only, most of it from the local BBC, his work and his voice became widely known. He kept his compositional skills in play, producing original songs and instrumental pieces and

arrangements of Irish airs. His best known works include the 'Concertino for piano and strings' (1956), 'Four Irish Songs for soprano, horn and piano' (1993) and the ever popular 'Dirty Work' for voice and piano (1985).

He became involved in musical activities away from Broadcasting House. He became conductor of the semi-amateur Studio String Ensemble, which progressed to become the Studio Symphony Orchestra. A leading choir in Belfast was the Ulster Singers; when its founder John Vine fell into ill health, Havelock Nelson became conductor. With these singers and this orchestra as his base he began to put on and conduct performances of Bach's *St Matthew Passion*, which became an annual Easter fixture, and of major works new to Belfast, including Tippett's *A Child of our Time*, Britten's *War Requiem* and Honegger's *King David*. In 1950, in a Studio Orchestra concert, he interpolated a staging of *La Canterina*, a one-act comic opera by Haydn. It was the beginning of the Studio Opera Group, which over three decades, using largely amateur resources, progressed in a remarkable track record through the shorter works of Mozart, Rossini and other major composers to their full-length operas, and gave the first performances in Ireland of a number of the operas of Benjamin Britten. The Studio Opera Group was his own initiative, each production masterminded and fronted by himself. When in 1984 it became part of Opera Northern Ireland, he took the opportunity to retire.

The competitive musical festival, of which the best Irish exemplar is the Feis Ceoil, had been part of his life during his student days. Most of the larger towns in Northern Ireland had their own musical festivals, and he had many engagements as an adjudicator. His first overseas experience in that activity came in 1956 when the BBC granted him special leave to adjudicate on the Canadian festival chain from February to May. This led to a lasting association with Canada. He was invited in 1964 to adjudicate at festivals in Hong Kong and Trinidad and Tobago. Invited back to adjudicate on several occasions, and sensing the lack of continuity in musical activity between festivals, he brought into being the Trinidad and Tobago Opera Company, with orchestral support provided by the Trinidad Sinfonia.

He had always honoured his appointment in the BBC, and as its most well-known and respected public face in Northern Ireland he had done a great deal for its image. When he left the BBC in 1977 he had enough of a workload at home and at many places

abroad to keep him busy till the end of his life. He was awarded the OBE in 1966 and among his honorary degrees were Doctor of Music from QUB in 1977, honorary fellowship of the RIAM in 1985, Doctor of the University of the Open University in 1991, Doctor of Letters of the University of Ulster in 1993 and Doctor of Letters of the University of the West Indies. He died in Belfast on 5 August 1996.

His work, in the BBC and outside it, as stimulator, *animateur* and innovator, was always of high quality, firmly grounded in an educated musical talent and with impeccable taste. He did not go for short-term effects: many of his major initiatives, such as the Studio Symphony Orchestra and the Studio Opera Group, were notable for their longevity, and the same can be said of his influence on the musical life of Northern Ireland.

Roy Johnston on his retirement from salaried employment found himself free to indulge a lifelong musical hobby. He has been a member of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and chair of its music and opera committee, a member of the Governors of the Linen Hall Library and of the board of Castleward Opera, and a trustee of the Grand Opera House. After some years of writing, lecturing and broadcasting on opera and musical history he wrote a dissertation on 'Concerts in the musical life of Belfast to 1874' for which Queen's University awarded him a doctorate in 1996. He has published 'Bunting's *Messiah* [Belfast 2003] and contributed to academic books chapters on 'The Ulster Hall' [OUP 2000], on 'John Frederick Lampe in the summer of 1750' [Ashgate 2004] and on 'Auditoria in Belfast in the 19th century' [Four Courts Press, forthcoming 2006]. He wrote the chapter on music in Northern Ireland 1921-1980 in volume VII of *The New History of Ireland* [OUP 2003] and has contributed biographies of Ulster musicians to the new *Dictionary of Irish Biography* [CUP, forthcoming 2006]. In 2004 he was invited to read a paper on Edward Bunting at an international musicological conference in Melbourne.