

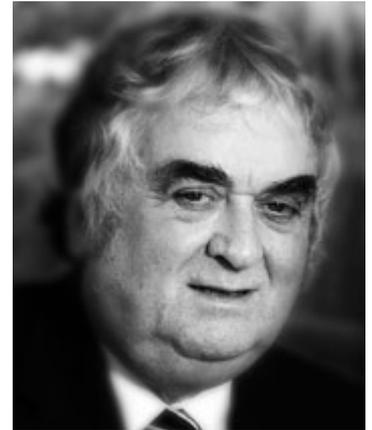
SEOIRSE BODLEY

David C F Wright DMus

Here is an Irish composer of deserved stature. He was introduced to me by my friend Gerard Victory and Bodley's Symphony no 3 is one of his many works that I value highly.

Seoirse Pascal Lauri Bodley was born on the 4 April 1933 at home, 90 Phibsboro Road, Dublin. He had an older brother, Dermot, who was born on 15 March 1922.

Seoirse's father was George James Bodley, an office clerk who was born on 28 September 1879. He married Mary Frances Gough, born 17 September 1891 and this wedding was in Dublin on 14 July 1920.



School for young Bodley began when he was six years of age at a private school where he was for one year. Then he was at the Holy Faith Convent School at Glasnevin, in Dublin. From the age of nine to seventeen he attended an Irish-speaking school run by the Christian Brothers in Dublin. His final year at school was at the College of commerce, Rathmines.

At school, he won the Dublin Corporation Scholarship. He had studied both the piano for a while (his mother played the piano to some extent) and the mandolin with his father who was a member of a mandolin band.

He began piano lessons at the age of nine to the age of eleven and then from the age of thirteen upwards he resumed his studies. At first, it was with private teachers before he became a pupil of Dina Copeman at the Royal Irish Academy and then piano and composition with Dr Hans Waldemar Rosen who was Polish, conductor, choir master and well-admired teacher. Bodley was at University College, Dublin from 1951-1955 successfully taking his BMus.

He undertook two years of study in Stuttgart between 1957 and 1959 on a postgraduate studentship from the National University of Ireland studying composition with the Austrian composer Johann Nepomuk David who was devoted to Bach and Mozart. Bodley returned to his alma mater, UCD, to teach there until his retirement.

In the early 1960s on a Macaulay Fellowship in Composition he spent three summers at the Ferienkurse and heard many avant garde works including those by Stockhausen and Ligeti.

His parents were not initially supportive of their son's desire to have a career in music but later came round to this. Bodley had been sent to a respectable art class but the sound of scratching pencils and nervous breathing was too much and so he decided to pursue music. He had composed some juvenilia from the age of thirteen and from a child, Bodley adored Mozart. In his teens he embraced Dvorak, Tchaikovsky and Beethoven. The literary works that impressed him included James Joyce with his books, Dubliners and Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.

His first work with a serious performance was given by the Radio Eireann Men's Octet of a text by Milton entitled See, how from afar conducted by Rosen and broadcast by Radio Eireann on Christmas Day 1950. Bodley is grateful to Rosen, Brian Boydell and John Larchet for their help and encouragement.

However, he regards the first work of his maturity to be his Music for Strings of 1952.

At the age of nineteen, he changed his first name from George to Seoirse.

He has been married twice. From his first marriage, he had three children namely Blanaid born 22 June 1958, Evelyn born 5 September 1961 and Ronan born 21 July 1962. From his second marriage there was Dara, born 5 October 1989 but who died on 16 November 1958, and Ruairi born 21 December 1991.

But to return to music, he won the Oireachtas prize for a part song in 1956 and, again, this prize for his Symphony no 1 in 1959. There was an Emmy award for a film for which he composed the music in 1982.

In the 1980s his style changed from the modern to be more friendly. Parts of his Mass for Peace was performed during the Papal Mass celebrated by John Paul II at Phoenix Park in 1979.

His Symphonie no 4 was commissioned by the Orchestra Sinfonie dell'Emilia Romagna ' Arturo Toscanini ' and premiered on 21 June 1991. It is a curious work in that it is very good in parts but not consistently good. It contains some glorious romanticism.

His Symphony no 5 subtitled the Limerick symphony was also premiered in 1991 and is in five movements. Its inspiration is the Siege of Limerick in 1690 and relating events. Limerick was a Jacobite fortress attacked by the forces of William III. The Jacobites won the conflict while William's army suffered heavy losses including about 2000 men who died of disease during very cold weather.

This symphony is also good in parts but some sections seem to get nowhere.

I often wonder about whether it is always wise to write music on political and historic subjects particularly if it indicates a military victory. There are some Irish works which give the strong impression of their victories over the English crown and, consequently, do not travel well outside of Ireland. Fleischmann's Clare's Dragoons is a splendid work but is a tribute to Ireland's émigré soldiers who, among other things, made the French yield. The Dragoons operated in the 17th and 18th centuries.

In the late 1990s Bodley returned to his more avant garde style but with the String Quartet no 4 of 2007 his music had become strongly tonal. He seems to have had a problem with style reconciling Irish traditional music with European art music. He helped found the Folk Music society of Ireland in 1970 and always had an interest in sean nos singing which is a complex highly ornamented style of Gaelic singing particularly in the west and south of Ireland.

In general, the critics may not have savaged his works for when he receives a bad review he also receives positive reviews. He explains that he is a musician and not a musicologist. Personal events do not inspire him to write music but he has composed music for personal occasions such as presents for people but nothing as shown, for example, in the Violin Concerto by Berg.

He used to be a smoker but it did not stimulate composing. His drinking is moderate by Irish standards and that does not stimulate composition either. He has an interest in art exhibitions, the theatre and films and basic fitness. He maintains an interest in contemporary music stating that even less able works have an inherent interest and an adjustment of a viewpoint can lead to some aspect of good in the music. He does not have ' pet hates ' in music.

Naturally he has an interest in poetry particularly that of Patrick Kavanagh. Bodley's song cycles are worthy of great attention.

His appreciation of music and forms is wide. Serial music was an important development and aleatory music can achieve good effects and is useful unless it is used as a refuge from compositional responsibility. Electronic music has impressed Bodley since he founded the UCD electro-acoustic studio and has taught students about this.

He composes at a midi keyboard which has taken the place of a piano and once a work has been written he does not revise. Occasionally he scraps a work only to find later that someone else has found value in it and rediscovered it.

His assessment of composers is astute. Bach is superb and always gives enjoyment ; apart from some of the lesser known works, Mozart is the greatest of them all; Beethoven is wonderful especially that late quartets ; Brahms is treated unfairly as by people by Nietzsche but Brahms has human warmth ; Schubert has written a few fine pieces whereas Schumann is better in his piano music and songs and his orchestral works are good on spite of the orchestration ; hearing Tchaikovsky in Moscow was a revelation ; Liszt was the great innovator and works like Via Crucis is wholly admirable ; Webern was a great master ; Berg was a genius and listening to Schoenberg is like having a cold shower on a muggy day ; Bartok and Stravinsky are exceptional but Vaughan Williams has little appeal.

Bodley received other prizes such as the Arts Council Prize for composition and the Marten Toonder award. In 2008 he was elected as a member of Aosdana.

He is clearly very proud to be Irish and is patriotic and, perhaps, a little biased. He loves Ireland as proved in his Symphony no 2 and other works. Nationalism is inherent in many composers works.

A Cradle Song	1950	Soprano, pf	2'
O Mistress Mine	1950	Baritones pf	3'
Music for Strings	1952		17'
A Drinking Song	1953	Baritone/pf	3'
Cré	1953	Baritone/pf	3'
Deire Fomhair	1953	Baritone/pf	3'
Do Bhádhasa Uair	1953	Baritone/pf	3'
Ná Déan Gáire	1953	Baritone/pf	3'
Paidir	1953	Baritone/pf	3'
Stróll	1953	Baritone pf	3'
The Fairies	1953	Baritone/pf	3'
Four Little Pieces	1954	Piano	4'
Cúl an Tí	1954	satb	3'
Movement for Orchestra	1955–1956		8'
An Bhliain Lán	1956	Tenor satb	11'
Salve Maria Virgo	1957	orchestra	8'
Sonata	1958	violin/pf	12'
Symphony No. 1	1958–1959		20'
Gogaí-ó-Gaog	1960	cor anglais/pf	3'
An Bás is an Bheatha	1960	satb	12'
An Teicheadh go hÉigipt	1960	ssa	1'
Caoineadh na dTrí Muire	1960	ssa	4'
Cuirfimid Deaindí Deaindí	1960	ssa	2'
Gogaí-ó-Gaog	1960	voice/pf	3'
Divertimento	1961	strings	17'
Trí Aortha	1962	satb	6'
Prelude, Toccata and Epilogue	1963	pf	6'
Chamber Symphony No. 1	1964		
Never to have lived is best	1965	soprano and orchestra	
Configurations	1967	for orchestra	
Scintillae	1968	2 harps [Irish]	6'
String Quartet No. 1	1968		24'
Ariel's Songs	1969	soprano/ pf	6'
Meditations on Lines from Patrick Kavanagh	1971	A-solo and orchestra	

The Narrow Road to the Deep North	1972	2pf	5'
The Narrow Road to the Deep North	1972	pf	6'
September Preludes	1973	fl pf	17'
A Small White Cloud Drifts over Ireland	1975	for orchestra	
The Tightrope Walker Presents a Rose	1976	pf	3'
Mass of Peace	1976	unison choir org	12'
Aislingí	1977	pf	25'
A Chill Wind	1977	satb [div.]	15'
Three Congregational Masses	1977–1981		
From Ireland's Past	1978	for ensemble	13'
A Girl	1978	mezzo/ pf	35'
The 'O' Antiphons	1978	satb org	
Mass of Joy	1979	unison voices, org	12'
The Radiant Moment	1979	satb	13'
I Have Loved the Lands of Ireland: (Symphony No. 2 for orchestra)			
	1980		40'
Ceol: Symphony No. 3	1980	Soprano, Mezzo, Tenor, Baritone, satb, speaker, semi-chorus, children's choir and orchestra	25'
James Joyce Film Music	1981	for ensemble	
Chamber Symphony No. 2	1982	for orchestra	30'
I will walk with my love	1982	Soprano, sa satb	3'
The Banshee	1983	S-solo, Mez-solo, T-solo, B-solo, live electronics	
Celebration Music	1983	3 tpt 2 vn va vc	17'
Celebration Music	1983	3 tpt str	17'
A Concert Mass	1984	Soprano, Mezzo, Tenor, Bass, satb, strings	30'
A Passionate Love	1985	Mezzo / pf	8'
Trio for Flute, Violin and Piano	1986		30'
Canal Bank Walk	1986	Mezzo-so, pf	3'
The Fiddler	1987	vn va vc speaker +opt. chorus, perc, instr.	
The Naked Flame	1987	medium voice/ pf	40'
A Carol for Christams Day	1988	Mezzo, harp [Irish]	
A Carol for Twelfth Day	1988	Mezzo, harp [Irish]	
Ar Éireann ní neosfainn Cé hÍ	1988	Mezzo, harp [Irish]	
Bí 'Íosa im Chroíse	1988	Mezzo, harp [Irish]	
Carta Irlandesa	1988	medium voice, pf	15'
In Bethlehem City	1988	Mezzo, harp [Irish]	
Let Folly Praise What Fancy Loves	1988	Mezzo, harp [Irish]	
Song for Jerusalem	1988	Mezzo, harp [Irish]	
Suantraí na Maighdine	1988	Mezzo, harp [Irish]	
The Enniscorthy Christmas Carol	1988	Mezzo, harp [Irish]	
Upon My Lap My Sovereign Sits	1988	Mezzo, harp [Irish]	
Phantasms	1989	fl cl hrp vc	20'
Symphony No. 4	1990–1991		25'
Symphony No. 5 (Limerick)	1991		40'
String Quartet No. 2	1992		25'
Ceremonial Music	1995	2 tpt hn trb tuba	15'
By the Margin of the Great Deep	1995	medium voice/ pf	5'
Fraw Musica	1996	Mezzo, satb, organ, strings	30'

Fraw Musica	1996	Mezzo/ pf	7'
Look to this Day!	1997	voice/ pf	2'
Pax Bellumque	1997	soprano, fl cl vn pf “	14'
Sinfonietta for orchestra	1999		20'
Chiaroscuro	1999	pf	5'
News from Donabate	1999	pf	50'
Earlsfort Suite	1999–2000	Soprano/ pf	12'
In Quiet Celebration...	2000	pf	3'
An Exchange of Letters	2002	pf	27'
Wandrer's Nachtlid	2003	Mezzo-solo/ pf	2'
String Quartet No. 3	2004		18'
Metamorphoses on the name Schumann for orchestra	2004		11'
Mignon and the Harper	2004	Soprano, Baritone/ pf	20'
Islands	2006		guitar
Squall	2006	Soprano/ pf	4'
String Quartet No. 4	2007		10'
Remember	2011	voice/ pf	4'
The Hiding Places of Love	2011	Soprano/ pf	40'
Gretchen	2012	Soprano, Mezzo, voices/pf	25'
An Dreóilín		ssaa	2'

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