

ALOYS FLEISCHMANN

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The human dynamo in music in Southern Ireland for over fifty years was Aloys Fleischmann. In 1934 he founded the Cork Symphony Orchestra, became professor of music at University College, Cork and, four years later, in 1938 founded the Cork Orchestral Society and became its chairman. That year he also founded and chaired the Music Teachers' Association formed to raise the standard of music teaching and to provide a platform for professional musicians to meet, discuss their problems, discriminate between good or poor teaching methods, consider examining bodies and, initially to expose the proprietary colleges of music which are run for profit without regard for standards. Some such colleges still exist today in various locations throughout the world. In 1948 he became chairman of the Cork Ballet Company and, for ten years, from 1973 he was vice-chairman of the Irish National Ballet. In 1954 he founded and became director of the now internationally famous Cork International Choral Festival and in 1982 became Life President of the Association of Irish Choirs.



In addition to his untiring services to music his contributions to the public service of the city of Cork and to Ireland in general has been nothing short of phenomenal. He was a member of the Advisory Committee on Cultural Relations in the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs for eight years from 1955; first chairman of the Cork Sculpture Park between 1961 and 1989 and a member of the Irish Commission for UNESCO between 1962 and 1980. In his religious activities he was, for five years, from 1983 a member of the Music Advisory Committee for the Irish Episcopal Commission for Liturgy. One can understand why he was made a freeman of the city of Cork in 1978.

Yet for all this, how will he best be remembered? Will such memorials represent him merely as one who strove to give impetus to music education and to composition in Ireland which, in his words, is a country, which under a colonial regime for centuries, has had its own traditions swamped and was trying to start, virtually from scratch, to build up a new tradition from the second and third decades of this century. He was the editor of the book *Music in Ireland* published by the Cork University Press in 1952 and *Sources of Irish Traditional Music*.

Fleischmann was born on 13 April 1910 in Munich when his mother, Matilda Fleischmann was on a concert tour. Tilly Swertz, who was born in Cork in 1879, had in 1899 been sent by her father to Munich to study the piano with Bernhard Stavenhagen, a pupil of Liszt. Young Aloys was always surrounded by music. His father, also named Aloys, was organist at Cork Cathedral for fifty years until 1956, and also taught at the Cork School of Music. He taught his son the organ and harmony, whereas Mrs Fleischmann taught young Aloys the piano. From 1920 to 1924 he had violin lessons with W E Brady who was to become leader of his distinguished pupil's Cork Symphony Orchestra. In addition to this his maternal grandfather, Hans Konrad Swertz, had been Cork's cathedral organist from 1890 to 1906 before emigrating to the USA, being disillusioned on having to abandon the fine, mixed choir he had established in the cathedral because of the ban on women in church choirs imposed by Pope Pius X.

Many prominent musicians visited the Fleischmann household such as Herbert Hughes, E J Moeran, Harriet Cohen and Sir Arnold Bax who paid an annual holiday visit there each year for over twenty five years, and in fact, on one such visit died there in 1953.

Aloy's schools were Kindergarten at Scoil Ita, Cork, from the ages of four to seven; the Christian Brothers' College, Cork, until the age of twelve and St. Finbar's Seminary, Farran Ferris, until he was seventeen. In his school leaving certificate he took first place in Ireland in Music, German (having German parents was a considerable advantage), History and second place in Latin. He attended University College, Cork, obtaining a Bachelor of Arts degree in English, German and Music in 1930; becoming a Bachelor of Music in 1931 and a Master of Arts the following year in musicology with a thesis on the Neumes and Irish Liturgical manuscripts which was recommended for publication. >From Cork he went to the State Academy of Music in Munich until 1934, where he studied composition with Joseph Haas (1879-1960), in his time a well-known composer who had studied with Max Reger and, in fact, wrote his biography in 1949. Haas wrote operas and oratorios and his chamber music was highly regarded.

Fleischmann studied conducting with Dr Heinrich Knappe and musicology at Munich University with Dr Rudolf von Ficker (1886-1954), an eminent scholar specialising in medieval and sixteenth-century music; and with Dr Otto Ursprung (1879-1960) who had produced a *History of Church Music*, complete editions of the works of Kerle and Senfl, and became well-known for deciphering the music of an Egyptian papyrus *Der Hymnus Von Oxyrynchos*. Ursprung was very helpful to Fleischmann when preparing his first publication in a German music journal in the summer of 1934.

During his time in Munich, Fleischmann composed his Suite for piano and a motet, *Illumina Oculos Meos*, which was sung by the Munich Cathedral Choir under Monsignor Ludwig Berberich at a service in the Cathedral in February 1934. Fleischmann had started composing juvenilia at the age of five and by about 1925 had written some songs and a string quartet. His urge to compose is understandable, as he grew up hearing Beethoven, Schumann, Chopin, Liszt and Debussy practised by his mother, as well as hearing Palestrina, Vittoria et al rehearsed and performed by his father's choir. His father had wished him to become a church organist as well as an academic musician and to succeed him at Cork cathedral but Aloys had other plans, including concentration on research, composition and conducting. He has always been a resolute individual. It has stood him in great stead. Back in Ireland he was appointed professor of music at UCC, starting with two students; at his retirement from the chair in 1980 he had over a hundred undergraduates and eighteen post graduate students. His chief teaching was in composition - harmony, counterpoint, canon and fugue, orchestration, form, harmonic analysis and the vast subject of the history of music which topic was divided between Fleischmann and his five lecturers.

On his appointment in 1934 he had felt it essential both for the city and the music department of the university to have a symphony orchestra. The best string players in the city, many of them professionals from the days of silent films, and wind players from the local army band were recruited and in March 1935 the first concert was given with an orchestra of sixty. This fifty-seven year old orchestra is now listed in the current Guinness Book of Records for "durability". This was also the year that saw the first performance of a song cycle for tenor and orchestra, though with piano accompaniment, only. It was composed under the pseudonym, Muiris Ó Rónáin (Maurice Ronan). Being filled with enthusiasm for the Irish language and Irish poetry, he thought his German name inconsistent with his aims, His first work performed by professionals was the Piano Quintet given by the Kutcher String Quartet and the composer's mother at Clarence Hall, Cork in 1938. The same year saw his first broadcast: the orchestral version of his Song Cycle to Irish Texts sung by Heddle Nash with the Radio Eireann Symphony Orchestra and the composer conducting, in Dublin's Gaiety Theatre. This is probably the first work of Fleischmann's maturity, although his Suite for piano is impressive. Throughout his life his music has been consistently tonal; he has eschewed trends and has reacted adversely to the prevailing fashions - firstly serialism; then the *Gebrauchsmusik* of Hindemith and the minimalism of today. He has written some music in a diverting folk style and other pieces in a powerful but very personal style such as the superlative *Sinfonia Votiva*. In common with Reginald Smith Brindle in England, Fleischmann has a staggering knowledge of music. He says that he has no favourite composers or works because he admires too many master works of every period. He has, however, been deeply affected in the past by performances of Mahler's *Song of the Earth*, Delius's *Sea Drift*, Berg's *Lyric Suite*, Dallapiccola's *Il Prigionero*, Bax's *Symphony no 3*, Moeran's *Violin Concerto*, Messiaen's *O Sacrum Convivium*, Ligeti's *O Lux Aeterna* and Britten's *War Requiem*. As might be expected, he finds little appeal in Gilbert and Sullivan, Bernstein, Steve Reich and John Cage or for that matter, Donizetti or early Verdi. To him Mozart is superb when inspired; Bach is "as potent as the sea when properly played but dull when reproduced without expressive or emotional content in the manner of what Bax called 'sewing machine music'. Beethoven is probably the greatest composer of all; Wagner is a Titan of the theatre; Brahms is always warm, majestic or serene. As for English music, Fleischmann believes that Britten brought 'fresh air and a new sense of wonder' into British music whereas he finds Tippett seldom impressive. The works of Elliot Carter, Henze and Lutoslawski he finds intriguing. With such wide tastes and a devotion to things Irish he enjoys reading the modern poets Thomas Kinsella, Robert Farren, John Montague, Seamus Heaney and others. When time permitted he enjoyed gardening.

On 4 June 1941 in the Honan Chapel at the University he married Anne Miriam Madden, a medical graduate of UCC. There are five children: Ruth, born in 1942 who is a lecturer in Anglo-Irish literature at Bielefeld University in Germany; Neil, born in 1944 who is a business man in British Columbia; Anne, born in 1945 who teaches at a secondary school in Killarney; Maeve, born in 1948, who took an MA in Archaeology, is assistant to an Irish music publisher and honorary secretary of the Cork Orchestral Society; and Alan, born in 1952 who is practising medicine in Caledonia, USA.

Returning to Professor Fleischmann himself, he composed "as he must". His idiom has changed over the years, having begun with a strong folk influence. He wrote for "the public who are likely to be able to hear his work". Sadly there is a waiting public beyond the Irish Sea and the Atlantic Ocean who should be introduced to the pleasing and aurally accessible music of this accomplished composer who told me that he was much affected by praise or criticism since the standard of criticism in his beloved Ireland is "abysmally low". He won first prize competition in 1953 for his *Four Fanfares for An Tóstal* and there are works commissioned for special occasions such as the overture *The Four Masters* (1944) for the tercentenary of the seventeenth-century Irish Franciscan historians; *Clare's Dragoons* (1945) for baritone, war pipes chorus and orchestra which was commissioned for the Thomas Davis and Young Ireland Centenary and first performed in the Capitol Theatre, Dublin on 9 September 1945, with the war pipes played by Joan Denise Moriarty, founder of Irish National Ballet, who, as a teenager, had won the Piping Championship of Ireland. The invited audience

for this occasion consisted of the President and Mrs O'Kelly, members of the cabinet, senate, dail and judiciary. This was the first time the war pipes had been used orchestrally, and the work was probably the composer's first public success; it is certainly one of the works that gives him most pleasure. After its first British performance with the BBC Chorus and London Philharmonic Orchestra under Maurice Miles on 27 June 1957, it was apparently suggested for inclusion in a forthcoming Promenade Concert, but rejected because the text was believed to be capable of giving offence to an English audience. The setting, to words by Thomas Davis, begins with an orchestral introduction which builds up into a magnificent march; there follows a "battle section" in which the main theme is foreshadowed. Into this wonderful confusion comes the choir singing the first two verses. An interlude follows when the war pipes are heard off stage. The third verse is given to the baritone with the pipes echoing the refrain. The polyphonic fourth verse moves at a fast pace, while the last verse is begun by the soloist and continued by the chorus. For the final refrain the piper appears on the stage. The march ends the work in a vein of resplendent patriotism devoid of the pomposity that often disfigures attempts to give a boost to national pride. *Clare's Dragoons* is an impressive and absorbing work that should be enjoyed for its musical content alone. Its anti-English bias does not rule it out for English audiences, any more than one would rule out *La Traviata* because it involves prostitution; or Britten's *Death in Venice* because of its homosexuality, or Ligeti's *Le Grand Macabre* because of its use of strong language.

For the Cork Ballet Company, of which Fleischmann is chairman, he wrote three ballets, *The Golden Bell of Ko* (performed for a week at the Cork Opera House in 1948 and again in 1953, and for a week at the Gaiety Theatre in Dublin in 1973), *The Red Petticoat* (1951) to a scenario by Michael MacLiammóir and Macha Ruadh (1955). For Irish National Ballet he collaborated with Miss Moriarty in the first full-length Irish ballet, *The Tán*, based on an early Irish epic, which was performed to capacity houses in the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin, in 1981, and was adjudged by one critic as the chief success of the Dublin Theatre Festival of that year. A dance suite from the ballet has received a number of concert performances.

Fleischmann's *Poet in the Suburbs* was written for the twenty-first Cork International Choral Festival in 1974 and, incidentally, includes a brief aleatoric device to create a final climax. The work is imaginative and infectious. *Homage to Padraic Pearse* (1979) was written to mark the centenary of the birth of the revolutionary leader executed in 1916. This, scored for mezzo-soprano, speaker and orchestra was first performed by Bernadette Greevy, Bill Golding and the RTE Symphony Orchestra under Colman Pearce at the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin on 18 November 1979. An impressive introduction leads to the first song which, like the fourth song, shows the dark way of life Pearse had chosen; the second song is both lyrical and strangely beautiful, whereas the third is playful but with allusions to the sinister secrets of his revolutionary activities. The narrator quotes from Pearse on Education which denounces the English education system in Ireland at that time as "ruthless" and "a murder machine". Pearse on Nationality speaks of the condition of the nation as spiritual and not material; that freedom is "so splendid a thing" that it defies definition and how, for centuries, it has been stifled in Ireland. The last song is the most moving poem of all recalling the ultimate sacrifice that many mothers made and were going to make. Whether this work would be acceptable to British audiences in the present climate is doubtful but, as music, as art, it is a moving piece full of interest, enhanced by the contrast of speech and vocal writing. The first three of Pearse's poems are in the Irish language; the last and the narration being in English.

The Planting Stick for chorus, string quartet, flute and percussion was written for the Cork Ballet Company's performance at the International Choral and Folk Dance Festival of 1957 and is a good example of Fleischmann's folk style. *Song of the Provinces* dates from 1965 and is for audience, chorus and orchestra. The audience is required to sing a refrain three times, finally in a different time signature. The text tells of an Anglo Saxon prince who visited Ireland in the seventh century and spoke well of all the provinces, extolling the virtues of each. Here is an eminently singable piece that captivates the listener and causes him to feel something of the rich Irish heritage. *Tides* for mezzo soprano and orchestra (1974) successfully sets four poems by John Montague, displaying Fleischmann's expertise in vocal writing. But it is as an orchestrator that one has to admire his *Sinfonia Votiva* of 1977. It is in two movements, the first being an introduction and funeral march written in 1960 in memory of his friend, the writer and critic Edward Sheehy, while the second is a bacchanal which follows the precedent of the funeral games of antiquity, and the merry-making which used to take place at Irish country wakes. The first movement was originally performed on 28 February 1961 in the Phoenix Hall, Dublin, with the composer conducting. He also premièred the complete work on 6 January 1978 at the Dublin Festival of Twentieth Century Music. The introduction poignantly portrays the reaction and shock on first hearing of the death of a close friend; the frenzy of grief and the numbness of desolation. The Funeral March is deeply felt and moves to a prolonged climax. A trio follows in a nostalgic vein recalling precious memories. A stentorian trombone returns to harsh reality and the march is then resumed. The coda is both ominous and poignant and resolves into final quiescence. The Bacchanal begins with a percussion cadenza and conveys a sense of exhilaration; there is an amusing duet between two drunken revellers represented by the double bassoon and tuba. A reflective passage precedes

the forceful recapitulation of the carousal. This is a powerful work, realistic and wholly convincing; it is all the more impressive because, while the anguish is clearly evident, it does not wallow; it is a work devoid of sentimentality.

In 1964 Professor Fleischmann was made a honorary Doctor of Music of Dublin University. Two years later he was awarded the Order of Merit from the German Federal Republic, "primarily", he says "for having commissioned eight German composers to write for the Cork International Choral Festival and for having invited over the years some forty German choirs to participate, often two or three each year; but also being of German parentage it was because of my contribution to music in Ireland". In 1966 he was made a member of the Royal Irish Academy. In 1973 the Director of the Irish American Cultural Institute awarded Dr Fleischmann a Silver Medallion in recognition of his work with the Choral Festival. In 1976 the United Dominion Trust honoured Fleischmann with their annual National Endeavour Award "supposedly", as the recipient told me, "because of the Choral Festival".

With all this detail before us how do we explain the fact that Fleischmann's music is largely unknown outside Ireland? Was he merely a very clever academic to be respected and remembered exclusively in Ireland just because his major achievements have all been there? Are we to say that in his lifetime he has received recognition far beyond what many composers ever obtain? Are we so naive as to believe that his music would only be admired by the Irish? No, such a response is more likely to be predicated on the implicit premise that the world still thinks of Ireland as a land of traditional music and rebel songs and will not accept that she is producing composers of real calibre. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the case of Aloys Fleischmann.

Aloys Fleischmann died on 21 July 1992. He will be remembered for all his many qualities. He loved the countryside and was quite an expert on birdsong. He loved to listen to silence and also the sea. Like Humphrey Searle, he had a wonderful capacity for friendship. He enjoyed life and loved dancing, even when he was eighty years old.

On the day of his funeral in Cork Cathedral, the rain poured in torrents. It seemed to aptly typify universal sorrow at the loss of a fine musician and a truly great man.

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