

JOHN KINSELLA, IRISH SYMPHONIST

by Séamas da Barra

Kohn Kinsella was born in Dublin on 8 April 1932. Although his early studies at the Dublin College of Music were devoted to the viola as well as to harmony and counterpoint, he is essentially self-taught as a composer. He started writing music as a teenager and although he initially adopted a straightforward, even conventional, tonal idiom, he began to take a serious interest in the compositional techniques of the European avant-garde from the early 1960s. He embraced serialism in particular as a liberating influence on his creative imagination, and he produced a substantial body of work during this period that quickly established him in Ireland as one of the most interesting younger figures of the day.

In 1968 Kinsella was appointed Senior Assistant in the music department of Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ), the Irish national broadcasting authority, a position that allowed him to become widely acquainted with the latest developments in contemporary music, particularly through the International Rostrum of Composers organised under the auspices of UNESCO. But much of what he heard at these events began to strike him as dispiritingly similar in content, and he was increasingly persuaded that for many of his contemporaries conformity with current trends had become more important than a desire to create out of inner conviction. As he found himself growing disillusioned with the avant-garde, his attitude to his own work began to change and he came to question the artistic validity of much of what he had written. In 1977, after completing his String Quartet No. 3, this uncertainty deepened into a stylistic crisis and he stopped composing for eighteen months.

When he took up his pen again it was with a resolve to find his own distinctive creative voice regardless of current fashions. Given the climate of opinion surrounding contemporary music at the end of the 1970s, this decision was a courageous one, and it marks an important threshold in his career. Stylistically, the way forward had in fact already been adumbrated in the compositional technique of String Quartet No. 3, an approach that he further explored in *The Wayfarer: Rhapsody on a Poem of P. H. Pearse* (1979), a short orchestral piece composed to mark the centenary of Patrick Pearse's birth,¹ and in *Essay for Orchestra* (1980), which subsequently became the first movement of Symphony No. 1 (completed in 1984).

¹ Patrick Pearse (1879–1916) was a barrister, educationalist, journalist and editor and one of the most significant figures in the Gaelic Revival at the end of the nineteenth century. He was also a revolutionary soldier and commander general of the Republican forces in the Easter Rising of 1916.



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‘Why do you Torture Me?’

Patrick Pearse

Why are you torturing me, O desires of my heart?
Torturing me and paining me by day and by night?
Hunting me as a poor deer would be hunted on a hill,
A poor long-wearied deer with the hound-pack
after him?

There's no ease to my paining in the loneliness
of the hills,
But the cry of the hunters terrifically to be heard,
The cry of my desires haunting me without respite, –
O ravening hounds, long is your run!

No satisfying can come to my desires while I live,
For the satisfaction I desired yesterday is no
satisfaction,
And the hound-pack is the greedier of the satisfaction
it has got, –
And forever I shall not sleep till I sleep in the grave.

‘I see His blood upon the Rose’

Joseph Mary Plunkett

I see his blood upon the rose
And in the stars the glory of his eyes,
His body gleams amid eternal snows,
His tears fall from the skies.

I see his face in every flower;
The thunder and the singing of the birds
Are but his voice – and carven by his power
Rocks are his written words.

All pathways by his feet are worn,
His strong heart stirs the ever-beating sea,
His crown of thorns is twined with every
thorn,
His cross is every tree.

This shift in style, although still rooted in serial thinking, involved a change of perspective on the compositional potential of the note-row. Essentially, Kinsella set out to reclaim from the twelve-tone series the structuring force of tonal attraction. He devised ways of organising and manipulating the row so that fundamental pitches released from it could function as substitutes for traditional tonal centres, and the music is generated out of the conflict between the abstract nature of the series, on the one hand, and its tendency to crystallise into moments of transient stability on the other. As he refined and developed the technique over the next two decades, what gradually evolved might be best described as a kind of modality in which the harmony, the thematic material and the relationships in which they participate are still governed by a predetermined series of pitches (not necessarily encompassing all twelve notes), but one that now operates principally in the structuring background of the work rather than necessarily being audible as a distinct entity in itself.

Kinsella was appointed Head of Music of RTÉ in 1983 but remained in the post barely five years, retiring in 1988 – the year he completed his Symphony No. 2 – in order to devote himself fully to composition. Although he has composed both choral music and songs, his primary interest has always been in abstract instrumental music and his most characteristic work is to be found in the string quartet, the concerto and, especially, the symphony. His cycle of ten symphonies is an outstanding contribution to modern Irish music.

Symphony No. 5

Symphony No. 5, *The 1916 Poets*, was completed in 1992. It marks a decided break with Kinsella's earlier approaches to symphonic composition and as a fully text-based work it remains unique in his symphonic output. The subtitle refers to the fact that the three poets whose work he draws on – Patrick Pearse, Thomas MacDonagh² and Joseph Mary Plunkett,³ all leaders of the Irish Volunteers⁴ and signatories of the Proclamation of Independence – were executed by the British forces in Ireland after the Easter Rising of 1916.

Very little of the poetry written by these men is directly concerned with political matters, deeply involved with Irish revolutionary politics though they may have been. The predominant themes of

² Thomas MacDonagh (1878–1916), was a poet, dramatist and revolutionary. He was lecturer in English at University College Dublin at the time of his involvement in the 1916 Easter Rising.

³ Joseph Mary Plunkett (1887–1916) was a poet, editor and revolutionary. The son of a papal count, he was educated at Stonyhurst and University College Dublin. His small poetic output is marked by intense religious feeling.

⁴ A paramilitary organisation formed in 1913 to promote the cause of Irish independence. Initially supportive of Home Rule, it later provided the forces that carried out the 1916 Easter Rising.

their work, which is often shot through with a deep sense of religious mysticism, are love, loss and the transience of life – the standard themes of Romantic poetry. In spite of its subtitle, then, Kinsella's symphony carries no political message and contains no political subtext. Just as his choice of poets is determined by the contingency of their personal and political association, so also the choice of poems and the order in which they are arranged is not intended to form a close-knit composite text that sets out to explore a single theme from different angles. The text of the Symphony represents a loose diversity of ideas rather than conceptual unity that embraces the work as a whole and it is held together more by the tone of its constituent elements rather than by any other common factor.

The words are delivered by two soloists: a baritone and, somewhat less usually, a speaker. Whatever the acknowledged difficulties may be of integrating solo song into the symphony, the symphonic treatment of the speaking voice has only rarely been attempted. In a work that is not symphonic in conception, the technique of providing an accompaniment for the spoken word differs little from that of the song: what is necessary is a support for the vocal part that will reflect the content of the text as appropriate and underline or amplify its emotional import. In a symphony, by contrast, the essential focus is always on musical processes to which the treatment of any text must be subordinated. When this text is spoken, the challenge of providing a suitable musical background for the narration and simultaneously maintaining a convincing symphonic argument becomes acute. These are divergent musical aims and some degree of compromise is inevitable if they are to be satisfactorily reconciled. This compromise will most likely involve a tacit acknowledgment that although the term 'symphony' in such a case may well imply a work of broad scope and range, encompassing contrasting movements and a wide variety of moods, it is unlikely to entail closely argued symphonic development, at least throughout and certainly not in those portions where the spoken voice is paramount. Although just such a pragmatic adjustment is in evidence in Kinsella's Symphony No. 5, it is a testimony to the composer's skill in devising a viable solution to the problem that the work is nonetheless unquestionably a true symphony.

The *Larghetto* introduction to the first movement [1] opens with a twelve-bar theme for two horns (Ex.1), which establishes the principal pitch resource of the Symphony: a hexachordal set, the notes of which constitute, in traditional terminology, a scale of D minor (ascending melodic form) with the fourth degree missing (Ex. 2).

[4] 'The Wayfarer'

Patrick Pearse

The beauty of the world hath made me sad
This beauty that will pass;
Sometimes my heart hath shaken with great
To see a leaping squirrel in a tree,
Or a red lady-bird upon a stalk,
Or little rabbits in a field at evening,
Lit by a slanting sun,
Or some green hill where mountainy men hath sown
And soon would reap; near to the gate of Heaven;
Or children with bare feet upon the sands
Of some ebb'd sea, or playing on the streets
Of little towns in Connacht,
Things young and happy.
And then my heart hath told me:
These things will pass,
Will pass and change, will die and be no more,
Things bright and green, things young and happy:
And I have gone upon my way
Sorrowful.

'O Little Bird'

Patrick Pearse

O little bird!
Cold to me thy lying on the flag;
Bird, that never had an evil thought,
Pitiful the coming of death to thee.

'To a Beloved Child'

Patrick Pearse

Laughing mouth, what tortures me is
That thou shalt be weeping:
Lovely face, it is my pity
That thy brightness shall grow grey.

Noble head, thou art proud,
But thou shalt bow with sorrow;
And it is a pitiful thing I forbode for thee
Whenever I kiss thee.

'O Lovely Head'

Patrick Pearse

O lovely head of the woman that I loved,
In the middle of the night I remember thee:
But reality returns with the sun's whitening,
Alas, that the slender worm gnaws thee
to-night.

Beloved voice, that wast low and beautiful,
Is it true that I heard thee in my slumbers!
Or is the knowledge true that tortures me?
My grief, the tomb hath no sound or voice?

But I found no enemy,
No man in a world of wrong,
That Christ's word of charity
Did not render clean and strong –
Who was I to judge my kind,
Blindest proper of the blind?

God to you may give the sight
And the clear undoubting strength
Wars to knit for single right,
Freedom's war to knit at length,
And to win, through wrath and strife,
To the sequel of my life.

But for you, so small and young,
Born on Saint Cecilia's Day,
I in more harmonious song
Now for nearer joys should pray –
Simpler joys: the natural growth
Of your childhood and your youth,
Courage, innocence, and truth:

These for you, so small and young,
In your hand and heart and tongue.

[2] In an Island
Thomas MacDonagh

Mid an isle I stand,
Under its only tree:
The ocean around –
Around life eternity:
'Mid my life I stand,
Under the boughs of thee.

[3] 'See the Crocus' Golden Cup'
Joseph Mary Plunkett

See the crocus' golden cup
Like a warrior leaping up
At the summons of the spring,
"Guard turn out!" for welcoming
Of the new elected year.
The blackbird now with psalter clear
Sings the ritual of the day
And the lark with bugle gay
Blows reveille to the morn,
Earth and heaven's latest born

Ex. 1



Ex. 2



Although this basic six-note collection acts as a fundamental shaping and directing force throughout, it is treated with considerable freedom. Considering the nature of Kinsella's adaptation of serial procedures, it is interesting to note that the twelve chromatic pitches have little or no collective function in this work: there is no attempt to supplement the set with an additional hexachord (or any other types of formation) derived from the remaining six notes of the chromatic scale.

This horn theme can be considered to constitute the first paragraph of the introduction. In the second paragraph the speaker enters with Joseph Mary Plunkett's 'The Stars Sang in God's Garden', which is read through without a break. The orchestra maintains an atmospheric background which becomes increasingly agitated as it reflects the gathering intensity of the poem and, after the final line has been spoken, it culminates in a searing climax in the strings. The third and final paragraph is characterised by a rapid, scurrying motif on solo violin heard against sustained string chords, a brief development of which leads directly into the ensuing *Allegro*.

All of this introductory material (as well as the D minor pitch-collection) returns transformed at the end of the Symphony in the coda to the finale where it functions as the background to another of Plunkett's mystical poems, the well-known and much anthologised 'I see His Blood upon the Rose', which is also recited by the speaker. The resumption of the overtly religious mood of the opening combined with a recapitulation of the thematic/tonal material thus creates both a musical and psychological frame for the work as a whole. This simple but effective cross-referencing of the opening and the closing sections

of the Symphony creates a strong sense that the work constitutes a single unified, though multi-faceted, experience.

The *Allegro* that follows represents the main body of the movement and it is organised harmonically and tonally around a transposed version (hexatonic F minor) of the original pitch matrix. It is cast in a three-part form and, as is common in Kinsella's work, it has a composite central section. The initial A section and the three component paragraphs of the central portion of the movement – B, C and D – are taken up with a setting for baritone of the opening 31 lines (five stanzas) of Thomas MacDonagh's 'Wishes for My Son'. Kinsella's decision to convey the ardent impetuosity of the poem in broad strokes allows him to achieve the kind of sweep and momentum required in an opening symphonic *Allegro*. The vigorous forward movement seems to be generated in response to phrases like 'joy of power', 'quicker life' and 'grace in stronger days to live', key images in MacDonagh's verse, and the restless nature of the accompaniment combined with the high tessitura of the baritone voice imparts a strong sense of urgency to the setting (Ex. 3).

Ex. 3

Symphony No. 5, *The 1916 Poets: Texts*

[1] 'The Stars Sang in God's Garden' Joseph Mary Plunkett

The stars sang in God's garden;
The stars are the birds of God;
The night-time is God's harvest,
Its fruits are the words of God.

God ploughed His field at morning,
God sowed His seed at noon,
God reaped and gathered his corn
With the rising of the moon.

The sun rose up at midnight,
The sun rose red as blood,
It showed the Reaper, the dead Christ,
Upon His cross of wood.

For many live that one may die,
And one must die that many live –
The stars are silent in the sky
Lest my poor songs be fugitive.

'Wishes for My Son' Thomas MacDonagh

Now, my son, is life for you,
And I wish you joy if it, –
Joy of power in all you do,
Deeper passion, better wit
Than I had who had enough,
Quicker life and length thereof,
More of every gift but love.

Love I have beyond all men
Love that now you share with me –
What have I to wish you then
But that you be good and free,
And that God to you may give
Grace in stronger days to live?

For I wish you more than I
Ever knew of glorious deed,
Though no rapture passed me by
That an eager heart could heed,
Though I followed heights and sought
Things the sequel never brought.

Wild and perilous holy things
Flaming with a martyr's blood,
And the joy that laughs and sings
Where a foe must be withstood,
Joy of headlong happy chance
Leading on the battle dance.

Since September 2010, the ICO has visited 27 venues across fourteen counties, nationwide, in addition to its regular concert-season which runs in Limerick and Dublin (September–April annually, with another fourteen or so concerts). In the past the ICO has toured with success across Europe, Australia, South Korea, China and the USA. Recent acclaimed appearances at the Rheingau and Lichfield music festivals alongside a thirteen-venue US tour with James Galway has raised the ICO profile even more.

The ICO has enjoyed fruitful relationship over the years with an array of Irish composers, most recently the Berlin-based Garrett Sholdice, who has been commissioned to write a piano concerto. Leading Irish composers who have worked with the orchestra include Elaine Agnew, Linda Buckley, Frank Corcoran, John Kinsella, Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin and Bill Whelan.

Plectrum & Bow, the latest CD release, marks a collaborative recording with US composer and guitarist Steve Mackey and features his concerto for violin and strings, *Four Iconoclastic Episodes*, jointly commissioned by the Irish Chamber Orchestra, the Academy of St-Martin-in-the-Fields and the DeBartolo Performing Arts Center, University of Notre Dame, USA. Other recordings include *Night Moves*, conducted by Gérard Korsten and *Hommage* which features works by John Kinsella.

Outside the concert hall, the Irish Chamber Orchestra offers music as an instrument of social change, introducing children to music, creativity, innovation, understanding and openness, thus helping them to reach their full potential as individuals. ‘Sing out with Strings’, the ICO’s popular flagship community engagement programme, brings free music workshops and tuition to primary schools in Limerick’s regeneration areas. It was inspired by El Sistema, the Venezuelan model of music education, which provides free instrumental and vocal tuition to children.

The Irish Chamber Orchestra is resident at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance at the University of Limerick and is funded by the Arts Council of Ireland/An Chomhairle Ealaíona.

It uniquely owns a custom-built studio, which has been acoustically modelled, sharing the properties of some of the world’s finest concert-halls, on campus at UL, Limerick.

The pitch matrix shifts again for the central portion of the movement, and a hexatonic C minor pitch collection replaces the previous F minor (Ex. 4).

Ex. 4

The musical score for Ex. 4 consists of two systems. The first system features a vocal line (soprano) and a piano accompaniment (violin and viola). The vocal line has the lyrics: "For I wish you more than I ev-er knew of glo-ri-ous". The piano accompaniment includes a bass line and a treble line. The second system continues the piano accompaniment, with a bass line and a treble line. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (p, mf, p), articulation (acc), and phrasing slurs.

Although this new transposition underpins both the B and D sections, the basis of the C section remains ambiguous in that the music is not derived from any clear hexachordal formation. Section C is also the most dissonant and the most sustainedly agitated portion of the movement, reflecting the text, which, although couched in general terms that suggest life’s struggle, also seems to contain a clear reference to the fight for Irish independence that MacDonagh understood to be inevitable even as far back as 1912, the year in which the poem was written (and his son, to whom it is addressed, was born). This C section culminates in the principal climax of the movement after which the texture thins out and the hexatonic C minor is once again restored as the final part, D, of the composite central section begins in which the poet acknowledges his refusal to hate the man whom circumstances has made his enemy. The remainder of the poem forms the basis of the recapitulatory section, A¹, and it is shared between the baritone, who sings both the sixth stanza and the concluding couplet, and the speaker who recites the seventh stanza.

The second movement, *Largo* [2], is unusual in that it is asymmetrically constructed. It is essentially in tripartite form, the three constituent sections of which – A–B–C – have little or no thematic or motivic connection with one another. The success of this approach is due, first, to the brevity of the movement and, second, to the fact that it is cast as a kind of continuous recitative for the baritone. The first section, A, for orchestra alone, is linked thematically to the introduction to the first movement. It gives way to a very soft and mysterious *tremolando* passage in octaves for the strings, which marks the beginning of the B section and the entry of the baritone, who sings the first three lines of MacDonagh's 'In an Island'. The orchestral contribution is confined to brief interjections between unaccompanied vocal phrases, which (apart from one undulating figure that illustrates the line 'The ocean around') consist of soft, low-pitched *tremolandi*. Whether the remainder of the movement can be considered a separate section in itself or whether these final bars might be viewed as concluding the B section is open to debate. But, although the two paragraphs in question are loosely linked both by the recurring orchestral *tremolandi* and the through-composed nature of the baritone's free *arioso*, there is nonetheless a definite feeling of a caesura before the last three lines of the poem are sung.

The ensuing *Presto* [3], the scherzo of the Symphony, brings the one moment of relatively carefree exuberance in what is otherwise an almost unrelievedly intense and serious work. It consists of a setting for baritone of Plunkett's 'See the Crocus' Golden Cup', a joyously optimistic poem about spring which has rebirth and renewal as its theme. But although the tempo, mood and position of the movement in the overall design of the symphony identify it as a scherzo, its structure is both unusual and elusive. Unlike most scherzo-type movements, it has no hint of ternary form, even as a background reference – there is no trio or central contrasting section; neither are there any allusions to conventional three-part form in the component sub-sections. The texture is derived from a handful of motivic shapes that are subject to continuous modification as they are deployed and re-deployed in ever-changing patterns. This ongoing stream of constantly varying configurations nonetheless falls into a number of broad paragraphs that are defined by rises to and subsequently fallings away from a series of climactic moments.

At eighteen or so minutes, the finale [4] is longer than all three previous movements taken together. The form can be described as three-part with, again, a composite central section, a much expanded return of the opening section and an extended coda, the function of which, as noted, rounds off the Symphony as a whole as much as bringing the finale itself to a conclusion.

The A section, *Largo*, commences with a substantial passage for orchestra – scored mainly for strings with occasional reinforcement by woodwind and horns – which presents all the principal material of the movement. The two basic motifs from which it is generated are shown in Ex. 5, an initial lyrical idea

performances with the classical radio station RTÉ Lyric FM and from this association onto the international radio stations of the EBU.

In 2004 the RTÉ NSO won the 'Orchestra and Concerto: CD Première' category of the Critics' Awards in the Cannes Classical Awards for its recording of Joly Braga Santos' Symphony No. 4 under conductor Álvaro Cassuto. In 2005 Gerald Barry's opera *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* was released on the RTÉ label as part of a new series 'Composers of Ireland', and has been followed by CDs of music by Raymond Deane, Seóirse Bodley, Deirdre Gribbin and Ian Wilson, the latter three on the RTÉ Lyric FM label.

Highlights of recent seasons have included the complete cycles of Mahler, Shostakovich, Bruckner, Prokofiev, Beethoven and Schumann symphonies, a Brahmsfest, a Stravinsky retrospective, and the orchestral song-cycles of Mahler. Additionally, the Orchestra has given the world premieres of works, commissioned by RTÉ, by composers including Seóirse Bodley, John Buckley, Raymond Deane, Donnacha Dennehy, Benjamin Dwyer, Fergus Johnston, Stephen Gardner, Philip Martin, Gráinne Mulvey, Kevin O'Connell, Jane O'Leary, Eric Sweeney, Ian Wilson and Jennifer Walshe. Collaborations between the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra and RTÉ Television have included 'Rhapsody in the Park', 'The Symphony Sessions' and 'The Mozart Sessions'.

The RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra annual subscription concert season takes place mainly at the National Concert Hall, the Orchestra's residence and runs each year from September to May. The season comprises of weekly concerts plus 'Soundings' – a series of pre-concert talks, 'Horizons' – the contemporary music series featuring works by Irish composers, 'Forté' – the musical-discovery educational programme, a variety of late-night concerts as well as lunchtime concerts, a mentoring scheme for young musicians, open rehearsals and annual regional concerts. The 2011–12 season saw a new feature introduced: 'The Wild Card', an unannounced surprise extra piece of music to selected programmes. The Orchestra also presents an annual summer evening and lunchtime concert series during the months of June and July.

Following a succession of illustrious Artistic Directors, including Fionnuala Hunt, Nicholas McGegan and Anthony Marwood, the **Irish Chamber Orchestra** orchestra has taken a new approach, appointing two artistic partners who are taking the orchestra on a voyage of discovery over the coming years, working with the extraordinary Hungarian conductor Gábor Tákcacs-Nagy (Principal Artistic Partner) and the multi-talented clarinetist and composer Jörg Widmann (Principal Guest Conductor/ Artistic Partner), in presenting a combined vision with two very distinctive styles of programming.

András Mihaly, Zoltán Székely, Sándor Végh and György Kurtag. From 1975 to 1992 he was a founding member and leader of the Takács Quartet, which made many recordings for Decca and Hungaroton. In 1996 he founded the Takács Piano Trio and made world-premiere recordings of works of Liszt, László Lajtha and Sándor Veress.

In 1998 he established the Mikrokosmos String Quartet with compatriots Zoltan Tuska, Sandor Papp and Miklos Perényi, recording in 2008 the Bartók's string Quartets for which they were awarded the 'Excellencia' prize by *Pizzicato* magazine. In 1982 he was awarded the Liszt Prize.

In 2002, following a long-line in the Hungarian musical tradition, Gábor Takács-Nagy turned to conducting, creating in 2005 his own string ensemble, the Camerata Bellerive as orchestra-in-residence at the annual Festival de Bellerive in Geneva. In 2006 he became the Music Director of the Weinberger Kammerorchester and in August 2007 the Music Director of the Verbier Festival Chamber Orchestra. The VFCO performs every summer in the Verbier Festival and also in numerous European and Asian cities throughout the year. With the VFCO he regularly collaborates with Martha Argerich, Joshua Bell, Jean-Yves Thibaudet, Vadim Repin and Emmanuel Ax as well as with the singers Frederica von Stade, Barbara Bonney and Angelika Kirschlager. From 2010 until 2012 he was Music Director of the MÁV Symphony Orchestra Budapest. Since September 2011 he has been Music Director of Manchester Camerata and since September 2012 is Principal Guest Conductor of the Budapest Festival Orchestra. In January 2013 he was appointed Principal Artistic Partner of the Irish Chamber Orchestra.

Gábor Takács-Nagy is a dedicated and sought-after chamber-music teacher. He is Professor of String Quartet at the Haute École de Musique in Geneva and International Chair in Chamber Music at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester. In June 2012 he was awarded honorary membership of the Royal Academy of Music in London.



From its foundation in 1948 the **RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra** has been at the forefront of symphonic music in Ireland, providing an unbroken stream of concerts over a sixty-year period. In that time the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra has firmly established itself as a primary force in Irish musical life, playing a central role in classical music in Ireland through regular live performance and broadcasts alongside regional touring and residential projects; as an integral part of the Irish state broadcaster (RTÉ) the orchestra reaches a high number of listeners through its weekly live

featuring a demisemiquaver turn to which a chain of falling two-note cells is attached as a pendant. This two-note motif is subsequently associated with the word 'beauty' and the sighing, drooping line to which it gives rise conveys well a poignant sense of sadness and regret.

Ex. 5



The baritone soloist delivers the opening lines of Pearse's 'The Wayfarer', emphasising the word 'beauty' (as does the poet) and immediately establishing its connection with the two-note falling motif. The section concludes with first and second violins climbing *stringendo* into their higher registers as the music dies away.

This opening *Largo* gives way to a lively 6/8 *Allegro* marking the beginning of the B section. The mood lightens as the poet recalls the pleasure he derives from the natural world, an atmosphere maintained in the ensuing C section, which quotes, appropriately enough, from Kinsella's 1979 rhapsody *The Wayfarer*.

Gradually the brightness fades as the transient nature of what the poet sees impresses itself upon his sensibility and with the change of mood the initial *Largo* is resumed. But Kinsella expands the moment of return and postpones the recapitulation of the opening material, A¹, by interpolating four additional poems at this point (delivered by the speaker) which further illustrate the poet's sense of pain at the inevitable passing of all living things: the first is a quatrain that describes the commonplace sight of a dead bird lying on the ground and records the feelings of pity it arouses; the second tells of his foreboding about what the future holds for a favourite child; the third recounts a dream of his beloved and his awakening to the cold realisation that she is dead; and, continuing the nightmare theme, the fourth poem grimly acknowledges that only in death he will find respite from the unappeasable desires that torment him.

Kinsella's solution to the problem of providing an accompaniment to this large tract of spoken text is simply to reiterate brief ostinato patterns while the poems are recited. The first two poems are introduced by dramatically explosive gestures in the orchestra out of which these patterns then arise. But as a prelude to the third insert, the baritone makes a brief re-entry with the phrase 'these will pass'. And for the final supplementary poem, the initial dramatic gesture in the orchestra does not collapse into a repeating figure as before but is extended into a developing background that effectively projects the poet's more disturbed state of mind. The effect of this entire passage of arrested movement can be likened to that of the cadenza in a classical concerto where the business of completing the musical structure is suspended while the soloist discourses on the principal themes. Here, of course, the themes in question are literary rather than musical, but the underlying idea is not dissimilar and Kinsella adroitly adapts the principle in a manner that suits his requirements. The identification of the supplementary purpose of this group of poems with the parenthetic nature of the classical cadenza points to Kinsella's ingenious solution to the problem of integrating a large amount of spoken text into the musical fabric. Finally, the initial tempo is regained and the baritone sings the concluding lines of 'The Wayfarer', after which the opening *Largo* is fully recapitulated, with the two-note 'beauty' motif still very much to the fore. The baritone rounds off this part of the finale with a valedictory restatement of the last two lines of the poem and finally and lingeringly twice repeats the word 'sorrowful' as though reluctant to take his leave.

In the first movement, a shift of tonality up a minor third from the prevailing D minor hexachord (introduction) to that on F minor (*Allegro*) was effected. Each subsequent movement then moved the operative centre up a further tone: to G in the *Largo*, to A in the *Presto* and to B in the finale. Now, a second shift by a minor third re-establishes the hexachordal D minor matrix of the opening of the Symphony. And, as mentioned, the material of the introduction is also recalled as a background to the recitation of the final text, Joseph Plunkett's 'I see His Blood upon the Rose'. After the recitation of the poem, the orchestra rises to a final climax that dies away in a descending line constructed out of repetitions of the falling two-note 'beauty' motif. The last pages of the score are based solely on the six pitches of the original D minor set and the Symphony fades out on a sustained low octave D.

Symphony No. 10

Unlike Kinsella's other symphonies, his Symphony No. 10, completed in 2010, was not written in response to a commission: it owes its existence solely to a personal creative impulse and Kinsella found himself in the unusual but welcome position of not having to work to a deadline. It is composed for a modest orchestra of Classical proportions consisting of double woodwind, a pair each of horns and trumpets

In 1978 he was appointed Co-Principal Conductor of the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra, alongside Albert Rosen, with whom he toured Europe in 1980. The programmes featured standard repertoire and works by Boydell, Potter and Gerard Victory, and in which he worked with some of Ireland's leading soloists: Bernadette Greevy, Geraldine O'Grady, Mícheál O'Rourke and Philip Martin. In the following year (1981) he was appointed Principal Conductor of the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra on a three-year contract. In that year, he gave the première of Bodley's Symphony No. 2, and the September he conducted the official opening of the National Concert Hall, which featured the premiere of Bodley's Symphony No. 3, *Ceol*, and Beethoven's Choral Symphony.

In 1979–81 Colman Pearce conducted for the Dublin Grand Opera Society, and for the Wexford Opera Festival in 1981 he conducted Wolf-Ferrari's *Jewels of the Madonna*.

When his tenure as Principal Conductor of the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra ended in 1983, he was appointed Principal Guest Conductor of the Bilbao Symphony Orchestra (1984–87), and then Principal Conductor and Music Director of the Mississippi Symphony Orchestra (1987–99). He continued as Senior Staff Conductor with the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland, and made many recordings on the Naxos and Marco Polo labels of works by Bodley, Boydell, John Buckley, Frank Corcoran, Raymond Deane, Stanford, Victory and James Wilson.

A frequent guest conductor abroad, Pearce has conducted in Germany, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Korea, France, Sweden, Brazil, Canada, Argentina, Italy, Holland, Belgium, Israel, the UK and USA. For Naxos/Marco Polo he recorded in 2002 two operas by the Spanish composer Leonardo Balada (with the Carnegie Mellon Ensemble) and orchestral works by Balada with the Barcelona Symphony orchestra in 2003. In 1998 Balada dedicated the movement 'Echoes' (from his suite *Folk Dreams* to Pearce, who conducted the world premiere of the suite in Dublin the following year. In 2004 Colman Pearce was appointed Principal Guest Conductor of the Dublin Philharmonic Orchestra and toured the USA with them in 2009. He has been Music Director of the Glasnevin Musical Society since 1976 and continues to guest-conduct both in Ireland and internationally.

Since the 1990s he has devoted more time to composition, and in 2009 was awarded a PhD in composition by St Patrick's College, Dublin City University. His compositions have been performed both in Ireland, Europe, the USA and Malaysia.

A native of Budapest, **Gábor Takács-Nagy** began to study the violin at the age of eight. As a student of the Franz Liszt Academy, he won First Prize in 1979 in the Jenő Hubay Violin Competition and later pursued studies with Nathan Milstein. His chamber-music teachers at that time were Ferenc Rados,

Mr Kipling Cakes and as the voice of *The Irish Farmers Journal*. One of the best-known of his many television appearances was as Rory in the long-running RTÉ children's series *Wanderly Wagon*.

Colman Pearce (born in Dublin in 1938) is a composer and pianist as well as a conductor. He studied piano with Gerard Shanahan and competed successfully throughout Ireland, was awarded the B.Mus. at University College Dublin 1960 and later studied conducting with Franco Ferrara in Hilversum and Hans Swarowsky in Vienna.

At the invitation of Hans Waldemar Rosen he began to broadcast for RTÉ in 1961 as an accompanist and guest conductor with the RTÉ Singers. He auditioned with the RTÉ Light Orchestra in 1964 and was offered a contract as an orchestral conductor beginning in 1965. In this capacity he worked with the RTÉLO and, as assistant to Tibor Paul, the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra.

When Ireland hosted the Eurovision Song Contest in 1971 he conducted the RTÉLO (renamed the RTÉ Eurovision Orchestra for the event), and continued to conduct the Irish Eurovision entries until 1975. He also conducted the BBC Concert Orchestra at the Munich Light Music Festival in 1969, and was subsequently a frequent guest conductor with that orchestra and the BBC Northern Ireland Orchestra.

In 1974 and 1976 he hosted his own television programme, *Colman Pearce Presents*, with the RTÉ Concert Orchestra with whom he recorded *Ceol Potter* (Gael Linn, 1974), arrangements of Irish tunes by A. J. Potter. In the 1960s he conducted studio-recordings for radio broadcasts of three operas in the so-called 'Irish Ring' by Michael William Balfe, William Vincent Wallace and Julius Benedict, and *Shamus O'Brien* by Charles Villiers Stanford. With the RTÉSO he made a significant contribution to the modernist art-music tradition through his conducting of works by contemporary international and Irish composers, including many first performances of works by Irish composers at the Dublin Festival of 20th Century Music, including Seóirse Bodley's *Meditations on Lines from Patrick Kavanagh* (1972) and works by Eric Sweeney (1974), Brian Boydell (1977) and Gerald Barry (1978). He particularly championed the music of Andrzej Panufnik.

In 1976 he co-founded, with the oboist Peter Healy, the annual series 'Summer Music at Carroll's', which flourished until 1988. With the specially formed Ulysses Ensemble, many premieres and first Irish performances were presented in these chamber-music programmes, which also featured many works commissioned from Irish composers.



and timpani and strings. The Symphony seems to have been conceived from the outset in terms of these smaller forces, a feature of the work, Kinsella found, that in itself became a creative stimulus once the process of composition had begun.

Symphony No. 10 opens with a fifteen-bar *Largo* for solo clarinet [5] that has all the initial appearance of functioning as an introduction to the first movement. Ex. 6 quotes this passage in full as well as the beginning of the ensuing *Allegro energico*.

Ex. 6

The musical score for Example 6 is divided into two main sections. The first section, labeled 'Largo clar', features a solo clarinet line with a tempo of 'Largo'. The music is in 3/4 time and begins with a series of eighth notes, followed by a more complex rhythmic pattern. Dynamics include *ppp*, *mp*, *pp*, and *p*. The second section, labeled 'Allegro energico', features two clarinets and strings. The tempo is 'Allegro energico'. The music is in 3/4 time and begins with a series of eighth notes, followed by a more complex rhythmic pattern. Dynamics include *mp*, *pp*, *ppp*, *vel, db*, *mente f*, and *ff*. The strings are marked 'strings pizz.' and 'cresc.'.

But this idea plays a far more important role in the Symphony than that of a mere preface because it presents the basic material that serves to bind together the three constituent movements (or episodes, as Kinsella prefers to call them). It is an unusual idea in that it does not appear to have any fixed fundamental form but consists more of a fluid collection of general characteristics that are variously reconstituted at different junctures over the course of the symphony without any particular version being more important than the others. Crucially, the easily recognisable melodic outline as well as the clear harmonic underpinning (essentially, an F sharp minor triad that is spelled somewhat unusually) permit many transformations – some of them far-reaching – while always ensuring that its basic identity is never

in doubt. The timbre of the solo clarinet, the instrument on which the idea is first announced, remains closely identified with it and it returns in this guise a number of times in the course of the work (the final bars included). It is also permanently associated with the pitches of the F sharp minor aggregate, which is eventually confirmed as the tonal centre of the entire Symphony.

The opening section, A, of the *Allegro energico* first movement is a cast as a three-part structure with a modified return of its first idea. This section is then repeated (indicated by repeat marks in the score) and is followed by composite middle section, where B presents two new ideas and C constitutes a development. After a highly condensed return of A, the movement is quickly impelled towards its principal climax, which takes the form of a majestic peroration based on a transformed version of the opening *Largo*. The sonority of the solo clarinet re-emerges in the coda in a final evocation of the mood of the opening.

The second movement, an enigmatic *Largo* [6], is one of Kinsella's idiosyncratic asymmetrical structures, framed by references to the material of the initial *Largo*, which function as prefix and suffix to the main body of the movement. The A section emerges seamlessly from the prefix as the clarinet develops a sustained lyrical melody above a *staccato* figure in strings and bassoons. A new syncopated motif (semiquaver–dotted quaver) is then introduced in the violins, the treatment of which yields to a brief horn solo, which has the character of an appendix or codetta to the section. This codetta leads directly to B, the rhetorical, declamatory nature of which contrasts sharply with the flowing lyricism that precedes it and gives rise to the first substantial climax of the movement. This climactic passage is abruptly arrested – there's a bar's rest for the entire orchestra – before the tempo changes to *Andante* for the measured, chant-like idea that forms the basis of C. After a fleeting reference to the syncopated figure of A, the music builds quickly to a second climax of considerable force, with fanfare-like motifs on horns and trumpets pealing out against repeated notes on the strings. The general texture of the chant-like idea is recalled before the solo clarinet makes its final concluding reference to the motto theme. Once again, the movement comes to an end with an F sharp minor aggregate (still unusually spelled) with double-basses, cellos and violas sounding the fourth D flat–G flat (*pizzicato*) beneath a sustained A on solo clarinet.

Once again, the form of the finale [7] is unusual and, in marked contrast to the preceding *Largo*, it seems to be designed almost as a deliberate study in symmetry. The plan of the movement consists of two more or less equally balanced parts, which also correspond closely to each another in structure – but each part is asymmetrical in construction and consists of a substantial opening section that is immediately repeated in a varied form and then rounded off by a contrasting section based on the motto theme. The movement as a whole is brought to a conclusion with a coda (making the form A–A¹–B¹–A²–A³–B²–Coda).

Gerard O'Connor, bass-baritone, was born in Country Galway and received a degree in music from University College Cork. He later studied at The National Opera Studio in London.

The companies with which he has sung include Opera Ireland, English National Opera, Opera North, Opéra Monte Carlo, Singapore Lyric Opera, Opera Theatre Company, Garsington, Castleward, Opera Holland Park, Lismore Opera and Lyric Opera, as well as Edinburgh and Wexford Festivals and the RTÉ Proms.

His repertoire includes Varlaam in *Boris Godunov*, Zuniga in *Carmen*, Alidoro in *La Cenerentola*, the Mayor in Tchaikovsky's *Cherevichki*, the Abbot in *Curlew River*, Frank in *Die Fledermaus*, Cieco in Mascagni's *Iris*, Dikoi in *Káta Kabanová*, Raimondo in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Fafner in *Das Rheingold* and *Siegfried*, Sparafucile in *Rigoletto*, Reinmar in *Tannhäuser*, König Marke in *Tristan und Isolde*, Priam in *Les Troyens* and Hunding in *Die Walküre*.

Other roles he has sung include Benoît and Alcindoro in *La bohème*, George Benton in Jake Heggie's *Dead Man Walking*, Gremin in *Yevgeny Onegin*, Mephistopheles in *Faust*, Boris in *The Lady Macbeth of the Mtsenk District*, Sarastro in *The Magic Flute*, Orlik in *Mazeppa*, Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, an Officer in Weinberg's *The Passenger* and Croucher in Mark-Anthony Turnage's *The Silver Tassie*.



Photo: Robert Workman

Bill Golding began his career singing opera but soon became known as a major presence in the Irish theatre, and for half a century he has enjoyed a reputation as one of Ireland's finest actors and singers. His career has embraced hundreds of theatrical performances in major venues on both sides of the Atlantic. His repertoire includes many classics, from Shakespeare to Beckett and Arthur Miller and a list of definitive portrayals in roles including Oscar Wilde's Lord Goring, Mr Bennet in Jane Austin's *Pride and Prejudice* and the Player King in Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. As a singer, Bill's rich baritone voice has graced the National Concert Hall, Dublin, on many occasions and has delighted audiences around America on several extensive tours with the RTÉ Concert Orchestra. His talent as a voice-over artist commands an enormous range of accents and has been used for 'Mister Kipling' for



orchestral music as possible, from Europe – particularly the East and Scandinavia – as well as Australia/New Zealand and the USA. It was a fascinating learning experience but whether it had any direct influence on what I wrote subsequently I cannot say. One decision I did carry away was that the new work would be scored for standard classical orchestra – which now seemed like a fresh revitalised sound, where solo instrumentalists could take centre-stage more of the time and the timbre of trumpets and timpani could have their eternally exciting effect.

I imagined the three sections as episodes rather than movements as they are closely linked in many ways and introduced, joined together, and commented upon, by the clarinet. One comment I heard later saw the instrument as the ‘wayfarer clarinet,’ keeping a close eye on proceedings and intervening where necessary. I like that.

The work was not written to a commission or a deadline or with any particular performers in mind but when I offered it to the Irish Chamber Orchestra, they immediately placed it in their schedule and their subsequent performance with Gábor Takács-Nagy was one of the most fulfilling experiences of my musical life.

Kinsella is immensely resourceful in accommodating the degree of repetition this plan involves: all the techniques by which thematic material may be varied and motivic content refigured are pressed into service, and the repeated sections and subsections are subject to ongoing expansions and curtailments as well as often surprising changes of direction as the movement follows its headlong course.

The principal idea from which A is constructed is shown in Ex. 7, which quotes the opening five bars.

Ex. 7

The musical score for Example 7 is titled 'Allrgro energico'. It is a full orchestral score. The first system shows the violin and clarinet 1 parts, with a 'p' (piano) dynamic. The second system shows the woodwind and brass parts, with a 'p' (piano) dynamic. The third system shows the percussion and string parts, with a 'p' (piano) dynamic. The score is marked with 'simile' and 'p' (piano) dynamics.

The forward momentum is largely derived from the repetition of the three-note rhythmic cell (two semi-quavers followed by a quaver) that occurs on each beat, but which is subject to constant modification with respect to its constituent interval structure and its direction. The basic thematic material is created from chains of these cells that articulate the shifting harmonic progressions and combine to form distinct melodic outlines.

The internal division of the A section consists of three principal sub-sections: the first two beginning as shown in Ex. 7, followed a third in which the momentum is broken and more fragmentary material is heard. It is more by its texture – which features *tremolando* strings – than by its thematic content that the third paragraph is defined, although there are conspicuous allusions to the F sharp minor outline of the motto theme. The A¹ section is constructed along similar lines, although the material is re-orchestrated and the material of the three sub-sections is considerably modified, and the B section is based in a variant of the motto theme. Although in its general shape the second half of the movement follows the same general plan of the first half, Kinsella's technique of continuous transformation reveals fresh aspects the basic material at every turn

The B¹ section represents the climax not only of the finale but also of the Symphony as a whole. Here the motto theme achieves its apotheosis in an affirmative peroration of considerable splendour. After a rhetorical pause the coda commences with a brief reassertion of the fundamental three-note rhythmic cell, which is followed by a reminiscence of (rather than a quotation from) the principal idea of the first movement. This moment of recollection may involve little more than a hint at earlier material, but its positioning is perfectly judged, and it suggests a sense of overarching unity across the entire work far more effectively that one might imagine could be achieved in a few bars. This tying-together of the various threads is continued with a resumption of the basic three-note cell of the movement and – against a *col legno* background in the strings – by concluding references to the F sharp minor of the motto theme, first on solo clarinet and subsequently on strings, which brings the Symphony to a quiet close.

Séamas de Barra is a composer and musicologist and currently Senior Lecturer at the Cork School of Music in Ireland. He is co-editor with Patrick Zuk of Field Day Music, a series of pioneering monographs on Irish composers for which he wrote Aloys Fleischmann in 2006. He is the author of numerous articles on Irish music and is a contributor to The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians and to The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland. He is currently completing a study of the symphonies of John Kinsella for Toccata Press.

SETTING ABOUT THE SYMPHONY

by John Kinsella

These two symphonies were written in very different personal circumstances. In 1988 the opportunity arose for me to retire early from the position of Head of Music at RTÉ, Ireland's national broadcaster, allowing me, for the first time, to concentrate fully on composition. The financial situation would be perilous for some years due to family commitments but the situation was helped by RTÉ offering a commission to write a series of orchestral works. Payment for each work would fall due only when the score was submitted for performance. It was a carrot-and-stick situation, the carrot being the opportunity to compose full-time and the stick being that I simply had to complete these works to survive financially. In this way Symphonies Nos. 2–6 were completed in quick succession, about one a year. Fortunately commissions for Nos. 7–9 came in over the following few years.

Having completed Symphony No. 4, *The Four Provinces*, I turned aside from orchestral music to write my Fourth String Quartet. During the composition of this work the late Terry de Valera, a broadcaster on music among many other things, whom I had met during my years at RTÉ, and youngest son of Eamon de Valera, suggested writing a work based on the poetry of Patrick Pearse, Joseph Plunkett and Thomas MacDonagh, three of the leaders of the 1916 Easter Rising. I took to the idea at once and when the time came to work on the settings, I realised that the symphonic idea was the best framework to capture the necessary atmosphere. Even though the chosen poems are entirely non-political, their grouping together in one extended orchestral work, added to the known history of the poets and the impact they and their colleagues had on Irish history, required a unique approach. Interspacing the spoken word among the baritone settings was a way of personalising the three poets and bringing them closer to the listener.

The first act in composing this symphony was to write out a prose version of exactly what would happen during the piece, with directions for mood, tonal centres, tension graphs and other facets of the work. This approach became very useful during the ensuing year as I was able to refer to this draft at times when I needed to take stock and see the overall rather than the particular.

Symphony No. 10 was written after a period of close association with The Vanbrugh String Quartet and The West Cork Chamber Music Festival, which produced a number of new pieces for the medium. Turning again to the orchestra after quite a number of years was exciting. Also, having written nine symphonies, with all the implications that situation carries historically, did strike me from time to time.

Six months away from composing followed during which I made a study of as much contemporary