

CHANDOS

BARRY DOUGLAS CELTIC NOCTURNE





John Field

Portrait now at the State Central Glinka Museum of Musical Culture, Moscow / Sputnik / Performing Arts Images / ArenaPAL

Celtic Nocturne

John Field (1782 – 1837)

- 1 **Nocturne No. 5, H 37** (c. 1817) 2:45
in B flat major • in B-Dur • en si bémol majeur
Cantabile (Nicht zu geschwind)

Traditional

- 2 **The Wild Colonial Boy** (nineteenth century) 2:20
in B flat major • in B-Dur • en si bémol majeur
Traditional Irish-Australian folk ballad
Arranged 2025 by Barry Douglas
Vivace serio! – Coda
- 3 **The Snowy-breasted Pearl** (seventeenth century) 2:59
in C major • in C-Dur • en ut majeur
Attributed to Turlough O'Carolan (1670 – 1738)
No. 35 in *A General Collection of the Ancient Irish Music* (1796)
Edited by Edward Bunting (1773 – 1843)
Arranged 2025 by Barry Douglas
Andante

4 **The Harp that Once through Tara's Halls** (1807) 2:48
in C major • in C-Dur • en ut majeur
Traditional Irish folk tune
Reworked 1807 by Thomas Moore (1779 – 1852)
Arranged 2025 by Barry Douglas
[]

Barry Douglas (b. 1960)

5 **Bataille des Celts** (2011) 2:18
in E minor • in e-Moll • en mi mineur
Andante serioso

Traditional

6 **Madam Cole** (eighteenth century or earlier) 3:47
in A minor • in a-Moll • en la mineur
Attributed to Turlough O'Carolan
No. 16 in *A General Collection of the Ancient Irish Music*
Edited by Edward Bunting
Largo

- 7 **Young McDonough** (1713) **3:09**
 in G minor • in g-Moll • en sol mineur
 Attributed to Turlough O'Carolan
 No. 55 in *A General Collection of the Ancient Irish Music*
 Edited by Edward Bunting
 Very Slow
- 8 **The Summer Is Coming** (eighteenth century or earlier) **2:10**
 in F major • in F-Dur • en fa majeur
 No. 7 in *A General Collection of the Ancient Irish Music*
 Edited by Edward Bunting
 Largo
- 9 **Cockles and Mussels** (nineteenth century) **3:57**
 in D flat major • in Des-Dur • en ré bémol majeur
 Traditional Irish folk tune
 Reworked by J.B. Geoghegan (1815 – 1889)
 Arranged 2025 by Barry Douglas
 []
- 10 **The Mountains of Mourne** (eighteenth century or earlier) **3:50**
 in A flat major • in As-Dur • en la bémol majeur
 Traditional Irish folk tune
 Arranged 2025 by Barry Douglas
 Allegretto

- | | | |
|-----------|--|-------------|
| 11 | The Town I Loved So Well (1973)
in G major • in G-Dur • en sol majeur
Original melody by Phil Coulter (b. 1942)
Arranged 2025 by Barry Douglas
Andante | 3:01 |
| 12 | Skibbereen (nineteenth century)
in C minor • in c-Moll • en ut mineur
Irish folksong
Arranged 2025 by Barry Douglas
[] | 2:24 |
| 13 | The Flower of Sweet Strabane (nineteenth century)
in B minor • in h-Moll • en si mineur
Traditional Anglo-Irish love song
Arranged 2012 by Barry Douglas
Tendrement et lent | 4:02 |

John Field

- 14 **Nocturne No. 1, H 24** (c. 1812) 3:14
in E flat major • in Es-Dur • en mi bémol majeur
Molto moderato

Barry Douglas

- 15 **Song of the Sea** (2014) 2:07
in E minor • in e-Moll • en mi mineur
[]

John Field

- 16 **Nocturne No. 11, H 56** (c. 1832) 5:26
in E flat major • in Es-Dur • en mi bémol majeur
Moderato

Traditional

- 17** **Welsh Lullaby** (seventh century) **2:58**
in G minor • in g-Moll • en sol mineur
Arranged 2017 by Barry Douglas
Andante

John Field

- 18** **Nocturne No. 10, H 46** (c. 1821) **2:48**
in E minor • in e-Moll • en mi mineur
Adagio
- 19** **Nocturne No. 9, H 30** (c. 1815) **3:42**
in E flat major • in Es-Dur • en mi bémol majeur
(Romance)
Andante spianato

Barry Douglas

- 20** **Celtic Waltz** (2013) **2:47**
in D minor • in d-Moll • en ré mineur
Lento

Traditional

- 21** **The Rose of Tralee** (nineteenth century) **2:31**
in D flat major • in Des-Dur • en ré bémol majeur
Melody attributed to Charles William Glover (1806 – 1863)
Arranged 2025 by Barry Douglas
Andante – Coda
- 22** **The Bard of Armagh** (mid-nineteenth century) **2:06**
in G major • in G-Dur • en sol majeur
Irish ballad, commemorating Patrick Donnelly (1650 – 1716)
Arranged 2025 by Barry Douglas
Adagio cantabile

TT 67:17

Barry Douglas piano

© Benjamin Ealovega Photography



Barry Douglas

Celtic Nocturne

Introduction

In *Celtic Nocturne* Barry Douglas creates an immersive narrative, stepping back into the traditions of Irish musical invention, paying homage to the great blind harpist Turlough O'Carolan (1670 – 1738), and settling into the magical colours embedded in the nocturnes of John Field (1782 – 1837). Lyricism and melody are central to this collection. Douglas gives performances that are delicately observed and poised. His deeply sentient arrangements connect to his Celtic heritage, showing that he understands the ebb and flow of time and memory.

John Field

The composer and pianist John Field was born in Dublin. His father, a violinist, and his grandfather, an organist, both of modest means, fostered his prodigious musical talent. At the age of nine, he performed in public, impressing the Dublin music circle. The family moved to London in 1793 where Field refined his composition and piano technique under the tutelage of Muzio Clementi. Early London performances reflected his musical precocity. Whilst working in Clementi's piano showroom

Field also demonstrated new developments in piano manufacture.

After touring Europe with Clementi in 1802, Field settled in Russia. His rapid success was celebrated by elite Russian musical circles. His independence manifested itself in the development of exquisite technique, poetic enthusiasm, and heightened creativity.

Field published the first of his eighteen nocturnes around 1812 – 14. These elegant works, largely in ternary form, explored lyrical, vocal melody and gentle harmonic development, balancing classical structure with romantic expressiveness. These nocturnes, intended to evoke the night, were no doubt influenced by the timelessness and magic of the white nights of summer in St Petersburg.

Dating the publication of John Field's *Nocturnes* accurately is challenging. This is largely owing to the manner in which Field originally presented his works. He frequently improvised and altered his scores, and few autograph manuscripts survive. Dates are often inferred from publication records, contemporary correspondence, and stylistic context. These works were first published

as either individual pieces or as small sets. There remains a confusion about order and numbering.

However, in 1961 Cecil Hopkinson published A Bibliographical Thematic Catalogue of the Works of John Field 1782 – 1837. This is widely considered as the authoritative reference for Field's Nocturnes and the catalogue includes *incipits* (opening bars) of each nocturne to ensure accurate identification. It also provides detailed bibliographical information about early editions and manuscripts, all of great interest.

Nocturne No. 1 in E flat major

In Nocturne No. 1, there is a sense of the magic held within nocturnal hours, and of soundscapes in which sounds emerge fleetingly and vanish. The arpeggiated left-hand and *bel canto* right hand are hallmarks of the genre, and the music begins with quiet intimacy. Form is fluid, moving from distinction between slow and fast through the lyricism of the right-hand melody which traverses multiple colours, reaching to the heights, then effortlessly cascading downwards to the grounded solidity of the undulating left hand.

Nocturne No. 5 in B flat major

Piano music had previously focused on works with a formal design such as rondo and theme and variations but in his nocturnes,

Field sought to emphasise mood. The melodic line in Nocturne No. 5 has a gentle swinging folk-like character recalling his Irish roots, but also demonstrates a somewhat improvisatory quality. The broken-chord accompaniment provides rhythmic impetus, but the music unfolds in an unhurried and timeless manner, the use of *rubato* – 'stolen' time – enhancing the moments of expressivity which so clearly define the genre.

Nocturne No. 9 in E flat major

Nocturne No. 9 shows a marked definition in form, distinct from the earlier nocturnes. The piano melody has the character of the *cantilena* of Italian opera. The 6/8 rhythm generates a gentle dance-like energy and the lyrical upper melody, enriched with ornamentation, culminates in a quasi-cadenza passage before the final section.

Nocturne No. 10 in E minor

Nocturne No. 10 holds a haunting sense of nocturnal mystery, deep personal sadness, and nostalgia. There is a notable sparseness in the texture and Douglas's interpretation manifests a reverence for space and silence.

Nocturne No. 11 in E flat major

The opening left-hand intonation on B flat

in Nocturne No. 11, in E flat, is reminiscent of the many church bells of St Petersburg and Moscow. Subsequent oscillation between B and D, and between B flat and D, in only the left hand produces a sense of uneasiness. Chromaticism, whirling scale passages, and repeated-note figurations are new departures. This is a work of profound pathos and great emotional depth and maturity.

Welsh Lullaby

This arrangement by Barry Douglas of 'Welsh Lullaby' is subtle in its bareness and purity. There is hidden pathos in the melodic line and carefully measured tempo. The opening repeated drone-like figure is transformed as the music unfolds, illuminated as it resonates in the upper registers. Written in the margin of a copy of the seventh-century Welsh heroic poem 'Y Gododdin' were the first four lines to an ancient Celtic nursery song called 'Pais Dinogad' or 'Dinogad's Smock'. More than 1,400 years old, it is believed to be one of the oldest songs of its kind from the Celtic past.

Bataille des Celts

'Bataille des Celts' opens with a tentative circular repeated melody which is then transformed through a forceful dark undertow

in the lower register of the piano. Celtic battles were known for their ferocity, 'furore', where fighting soldiers assumed a 'spiritual frenzy' which manifested itself in their war cries and banging of shields.

Song of the Sea

'Song of the Sea' – in Gaelic 'Amhrán na Mara' – taps into a genre of songs connected to the ocean and Ireland as an island. In his rendition Douglas focuses on the purity of the melodic line, outlined as a series of musical breaths. There is a strong sense of time suspended and gently released.

Celtic Waltz

Irish waltzes are typically on the fast side and often performed in Irish dance ceiliidhs. After a few faster group sets are danced, a waltz is often played to give people a respite. The Celtic waltz blends classic waltz structure with distinct Celtic melodies and rhythms. The opening material in Douglas's 'Celtic Waltz' makes extensive use of grace note ornamentation in the upper melodic line before the music transforms itself and flows.

The Snowy-breasted Pearl

The title of the traditional Irish folksong 'Péarla an Bhrollaigh Bháin' (The Snowy-breasted Pearl) is a poetic term for a fair

woman of great beauty. The tune is attributed to Turlough O'Carolan, the blind piper who wandered his native Ireland, bestowing his music on wealthy benefactors and repaying their hospitality by the dedication of his compositions. Douglas's arrangement draws on the rhythmic precision of O'Carolan's harp writing and builds to an illuminated rendition of the lyrical melody.

The Rose of Tralee

The authorship of the tragic ballad 'The Rose of Tralee' is disputed. It was credited to the poet Edward Spencer in 1846, its musical setting by Charles William Glover (1806 – 1863). However, there is evidence that it was taken from the poem 'Smile, Mary, My Darling' by the wealthy merchant William Mulchinock. He fell in love with Mary O'Connor, a poor maid in service to his family, in Tralee, Ireland. Because of societal pressures concerning the class divide she would not marry him. The lyrics express his undying love and his sorrow after she died. The song has been recorded by many artists, including Bing Crosby. This unsentimental and pure arrangement by Barry Douglas maintains strong forward motion.

The Wild Colonial Boy

'The Wild Colonial Boy' is one of Ireland's most famous anti-colonial ballads. It tells

the story of the convict Jack Donahue who arrived in Australia aboard the convict ship Ann and Amelia, out of Cork, in 1827. Carrying on his criminal ways, Jack was found guilty of committing highway robbery and condemned to hanging, but he escaped. He was finally shot in 1830, after which his escapades were immortalised in song. Douglas's arrangement delivers the narrative with punch and rhythmic zeal.

The Flower of Sweet Strabane

In Barry Douglas's arrangement of 'The Flower of Sweet Strabane' there is a melancholic fragility. The song was part of oral tradition since the 1840s and was published in Northern Ireland in 1909. It tells of a draper's assistant who sought in vain the hand of his employer's daughter, Miss Martha Ramsay, of Strabane. It is a lilting ballad of longing and loss, which uses the cold blossom of the blackthorn as a metaphor for Martha.

Skibbereen

Recorded by the pioneering musicologist John Lomax (1867 – 1948) from Irish immigrants in Michigan in the 1930s, 'Skibbereen' is named after the town of that name, in Co. Cork. This was one of the worst affected areas during the great famine of the 1840s when large numbers of the Irish

population were forced to resettle in America as a consequence of repeated crop failures. Douglas's arrangement of this minor-key ballad displays an urgency and sense of despair as if the music is running away. The song has become an anthem for Irish immigrant descendants worldwide and is cherished for touching on themes of loss, love, and resilience.

The Town I Loved So Well

The work of the songwriter Phil Coulter (b. 1942), 'The Town I Loved So Well' emerged from the political conflict known as the Troubles in Northern Ireland. In it, Coulter reflects on his Derry childhood in the 1950s, later tainted by the political events of the 1970s. The song was released in 1973 and its final wish for a 'bright, new day' has become a beacon of hope. Douglas's arrangement holds powerful solidity and conviction.

The Mountains of Mourne

Its words written by the Irish musician Percy French (1854–1920) using a traditional Irish folk tune, 'The Mountains of Mourne' deals with the subject of the Irish diaspora. The lyrics describe the experiences of a naïve country labourer who has come to London seeking his fortune and describes his unsuccessful attempts in doing so. He reminisces on the

view of the Mourne mountains in Co. Down, which 'reach down to the sea'.

Cockles and Mussels

In his arrangement of 'Cockles and Mussels', Douglas outlines the tragic narrative of the life of Molly Malone with a sense of play and of reverence, generating a defiant *crescendo* as well as harmonic warmth as the story unfolds. The song tells the tale of an impoverished fishmonger who plied her trade on the streets of Dublin and died young, of a fever. Credited to J.B. Geoghegan (1815 – 1889), it was first published in 1876 and has become the unofficial anthem for the city of Dublin.

The Harp that Once through Tara's Halls

Thomas Moore (1779–1852) wrote the lyrics and music to the march-like ballad 'The Harp that Once through Tara's Halls' in 1807. Douglas captures the spirit of the poem's narrative, his harp-like left-hand accompaniment supporting the strong expressive melodic line. Tara is a mysterious hilltop in Co. Meath, a site that was once home to the Irish high kings. At the time the piece was written, Ireland was under English rule, and Moore seizes Tara as a symbol of the seat of Irish government and the rule of Ireland. The harp evokes Irish culture and spirit, lamenting that it is now in ruin.

The Bard of Armagh

The origins of the plaintive ballad 'The Bard of Armagh' are attributed to Patrick Donnelly (1650 – 1716), an Irish Catholic Bishop also known as The Bard of Armagh. Because of Catholic suppression, Donnelly had to operate disguised as a wandering minstrel. He assumed the title of Phelim Brady, the Bard of Armagh. The song, like many heroic rebel outlaw ballads, dates from the mid-nineteenth century.

Madam Cole

Edward Bunting (1773 – 1843) made a live transcription of the tune of 'Madam Cole', by Turlough O'Carolan, from the playing of an old Irish harper, probably in the summer of 1796. There are transparent and ethereal qualities in the music. The lyrical upper line, direct and focused in its simplicity, steps gently across subtly placed fixed left-hand chords.

Young McDonagh

'Young McDonagh' was composed by Turlough O'Carolan on the death, in 1713, of the distinguished Irishman Terence MacDonagh, of Sligo. This lament is his elegy, a beautiful example of O'Carolan's control of harmonic resolution.

The Summer Is Coming

'The Summer Is Coming' – in Gaelic 'Tá an

Samhradh ag Teach' – comes from Edward Bunting's *General Collection of the Ancient Irish Music*, 1796. It is a traditional air used in Ireland to usher in the summer and is often associated with May Day celebrations. The arpeggiated harp-like accompaniment is outlined by the slowly evolving, delicate melody, and at the same time allows that melody to resonate like bird song above.

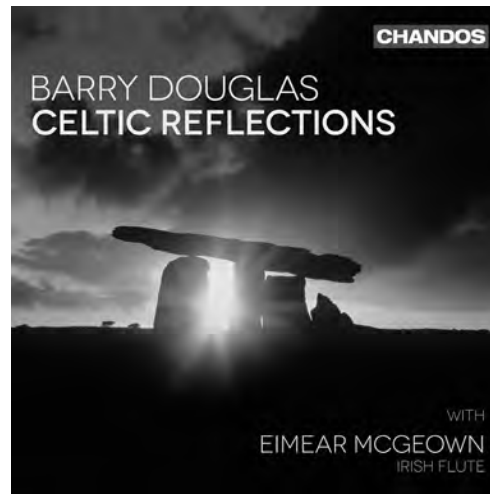
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Barry Douglas CBE has established a major international career since winning the Gold Medal at the 1986 Tchaikovsky International Piano Competition, in Moscow. In January 2021 he was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire for services to music and community relations. He celebrates his Irish heritage as Artistic Director of Camerata Ireland, the only all-Ireland orchestra, and of the Clondeboy Festival. In recent seasons he has performed with a list of orchestras that includes the London Symphony Orchestra, Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra, Estonian National Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre national de Lille, Nürnberger Symphoniker, and Staatskapelle Halle, among others. Other recent highlights include a major UK tour with the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra

and appearances with the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra, Orquestra Simfònica de Barcelona, and Sydney Symphony Orchestra. A highly sought after recitalist and chamber musician, he has given performances across the globe, from the Royal Albert Hall, Barbican, Wigmore Hall, and Verbier Festival to the Forbidden City Concert Hall, in Beijing, Grand Theatre, in Shanghai, and other cities

throughout China. An exclusive Chandos recording artist, Barry Douglas recently completed a six-album recording series of the complete works for solo piano by Brahms. His current recording projects focus on works for solo piano by Schubert and Tchaikovsky. This is his third album devoted to popular Irish tunes, having previously released *Celtic Reflections* (2014) and *Celtic Airs* (2016).

Also available



Celtic Reflections
CHAN 10821

Also available



Celtic Airs
CHAN 10934

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Steinway Model D (serial no. 541 687) concert grand piano courtesy of the MTU Cork School of Music

Piano technician: Christopher Terroni

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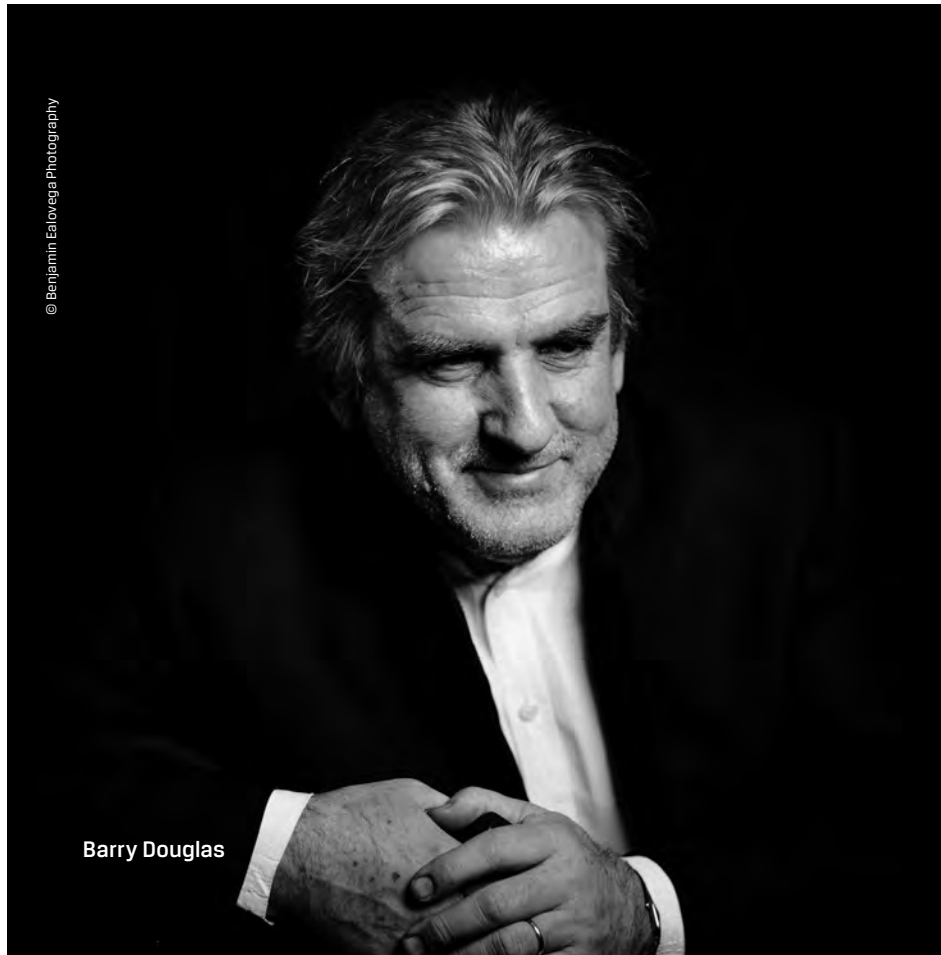
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Barry Douglas

CELTIC NOCTURNE – Douglas

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CELTIC NOCTURNE

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