

Gareth Cox

Seóirse  
Bodley

In this, the fourth volume of the Field Day Music series, Gareth Cox provides a perceptive and informative survey of the career and creative achievement of Seóirse Bodley, one of Ireland's foremost living composers. He documents the context in which Bodley's work has developed over the last sixty years and discusses its most significant technical features. This first full-length study of Bodley's life and work will appeal to a wide range of readers and musicians and, most importantly, it will encourage more performers to play, record and appreciate Bodley's music.

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Field Day Music 4

Series Editors: Séamas de Barra and Patrick Zuk

Field Day Publications  
Dublin, 2010

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ISBN-978-0-946755-48-6

Published by Field Day Publications in association with the Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame.

Field Day Publications  
Newman House  
86 St. Stephen's Green  
Dublin 2  
Ireland

[www.fielddaybooks.com](http://www.fielddaybooks.com)

Set in 10.5pt/14pt Quadraat  
Designed and typeset by Red Dog Design Consultants  
Printed on Munken Lynx



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## Field Day Music

This series of monographs was conceived to provide a scholarly and readable account of the careers and creative achievements of some of the most significant figures in Irish composition. Each volume will provide the reader with some idea of the nature and extent of a composer's work and the context in which it was produced. The monographs are aimed at the general reader as well as at the specialist and will appear in pairs, one devoted to an historical figure and the other to a living composer. Forthcoming volumes will survey the careers of Ina Boyle and James Wilson, and it is envisaged that every major figure will be covered in due course.

Séamas de Barra and Patrick Zuk

## Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Seóirse Bodley for allowing me unrestricted access to his private collection of scores, programmes and scrapbooks, for his unfailing help and extremely prompt responses to numerous queries, for his encouragement over the last few years, and for the hospitality which was extended to me by Seóirse and his wife Lorraine on my many visits to their home. I wish to thank the Research Office in Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, for funding at various stages of this project and the library staff of the Mary Immaculate College, RTÉ and Contemporary Music Centre, Ireland, for their invaluable assistance. I am also very grateful to Paul Collins, Ronald Cox, Axel Klein, and Michael Murphy for reading various drafts of the manuscript and for their helpful observations; to Karen Power and Laurence Beard for their precise work preparing the music examples; to the general editors of the series, Patrick Zuk and Séamas de Barra for their many perceptive suggestions and attention to detail, and to Ciarán Deane of Field Day Publications for his meticulous copy-editing. Extracts from Bodley's works are reproduced with the permission of the composer and the Contemporary Music Centre, Ireland.

Gareth Cox  
Limerick 2010



Seoirse Bodley (1982)  
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## Preface

This book presents an overview of the career and creative achievement of one of Ireland's foremost living composers, Seóirse Bodley. It documents the context from which his work has emerged over the course of the last sixty years, considers its reception and discusses its most significant features. I wish to acknowledge those who have previously written on Bodley's music, including Malcolm Barry, Axel Klein, Pádhraic Ó Cuinneagáin and Lorraine Byrne Bodley. I have also drawn extensively on Bodley's own explanatory writings and on concert reviews and articles on his work in national newspapers.

My own experience of Bodley's music has been quite a long one, stretching from the 1970s to the conference papers and articles of the last ten years in which I discussed specific technical aspects of his compositions. His music has been for me not only a source of pleasure, but also a multifaceted challenge. I hope that this first full-length study of his life and work will appeal to a wide range of readers and musicians, both specialist and amateur, and most importantly, will encourage more performers to study, play and record Bodley's music.



## 1. Studying in Dublin and Stuttgart

Over a period of six decades, Seóirse Bodley has established himself as one of Ireland's best-known composers. He has been integral to Irish musical life since the second half of the twentieth century, not just as a composer, but also as a teacher, arranger, accompanist, adjudicator, broadcaster, and conductor. His long and distinguished career has been recognized in many ways, most notably by his election as the first composer to the title of *Saoi* by his fellow artists in *Aosdána* in 2008, Ireland's highest artistic award. On the occasion of the conferring of this honour at the Arts Council in Dublin on 24 November 2008, the President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, declared that Bodley 'has helped us to recast what it means to be an artist in Ireland'.<sup>1</sup>

Seóirse Bodley was born George Pascal Bodley in Dublin on 4 April 1933 at 90 Phibsboro Road, between Dalymount Park and the Royal Canal. He had an older brother, Dermot (1922–99). His mother Mary (*née* Gough) (1891–1977) worked for the Guinness brewery and his father, George James Bodley (1879–1956), was employed at the London Midland & Scottish Railway Company at their Dublin offices on the North Wall Quay and later worked for the Port and Docks Board. Bodley recalls that there was a great emphasis on education at home during his childhood and that his artistic aspirations were always encouraged. He was enrolled at a private junior school in Phibsboro at the age of six, and after a year moved to the primary school at the Holy Faith Convent in Glasnevin, Dublin. From the age of nine he was a pupil at the Irish-speaking Christian Brothers School at Coláiste Mhuire in Parnell Square, where he succeeded in winning a highly prized Corporation Scholarship for his secondary school education.<sup>2</sup> He subsequently transferred to the

1 Cited on the President of Ireland's website [www.president.ie](http://www.president.ie) (26 November 2008)

2 See Daniel Murphy et al., 'Seóirse Bodley', *Education and the Arts: The Educational Autobiographies of Contemporary Poets, Novelists, Dramatists, Musicians, Painters and Sculptors*, A Research Report (Dublin, 1987), 232

School of Commerce in Rathmines and with the help of a private tutor for the subjects not taught there, Bodley attained his Leaving Certificate in Irish, English, Mathematics, Latin, Drawing and Geography.

There was little music in the various schools he attended, and although with the Christian Brothers he did play violin a little, it was ‘just a question of “who in this class has a violin at home”. And if you put up your hand you got about half a dozen lessons on the fiddle, enough for you to finger it.’<sup>3</sup> Music was encouraged at home. His father, who played in a mandolin band, taught Seóirse how to play the instrument. His mother played the piano and, with her encouragement, he started lessons at nine years of age with a local teacher, Sheila Delaney. However, for a short period between the ages of eleven and thirteen, he developed ‘an intense hatred for music’<sup>4</sup> and gave up the piano, but later resumed lessons of his own accord at the Royal Irish Academy of Music (RIAM) in Westland Row. This time he embraced the piano more enthusiastically, recalling that he would practise up to six hours a day, often entertaining ‘the thought of being a very romantic and dramatic concert pianist, somewhere halfway between Liszt and Chopin’.<sup>5</sup> He also studied at the Brendan Smith Academy of Acting from about thirteen, while reading the works of Stanislavsky on acting and regularly attending productions at the Gate Theatre. Bodley recalled that, although neither of his parents had strong literary interests, he remembered his mother taking him to see *Twelfth Night* at the Gate: ‘In a funny sort of way there may not have been a great knowledge of the arts [at home], but there was a respect for them in a general, abstract sort of way.’<sup>6</sup> In fact at that very young age he felt that he had to choose between the theatre and music: ‘I had an ambition to write plays, at this stage. I’m afraid it never materialised, except for private plays we used to produce when we were kids.’<sup>7</sup> He also recalls that having spent some time at drawing classes he realized that he could not work in a medium where there was no sound.

He began composing in his early teens; there was apparently an early piano piece called ‘Snowdrops’.<sup>8</sup> He had already enrolled for harmony and counterpoint lessons at the RIAM when he also began to study composition privately with the German conductor, Hans Waldemar Rosen (1904–94), while still at school. Rosen had arrived in Ireland in 1948 from Leipzig via a Welsh prisoner-of-war camp and began his Irish career as chorus master of the Dublin Grand Opera Society. He later became conductor of the professional chamber choir maintained by the national broadcasting station, Cór Radio Éireann (which was later reorganized as the Radio Éireann Singers), as well as of its larger semi-amateur choir, the Radio Éireann Choral Society (in which Bodley sang bass for a time). Rosen

3 Murphy et al., ‘Seóirse Bodley’, 233

4 Charles Acton, ‘Interview with Seóirse Bodley’, *Éire-Ireland*, 5, 3 (1970), 119

5 Acton, ‘Interview’, 119

6 Murphy et al., ‘Seóirse Bodley’, 230

7 Acton, ‘Interview’, 118

8 Acton, ‘Interview’, 119



was also highly regarded as a vocal coach and composition teacher. Bodley's lessons with him continued until late 1956. He is particularly indebted to his teacher for being one of the first to recognize his talent, as well as for his remarkable generosity in refusing to accept payment for much of the period of study with him.<sup>9</sup> He repaid this encouragement by making rapid progress. Under Rosen's supervision, he completed two part-songs for male voices to texts by Milton, 'Ring Out Ye Crystal Spheres' and 'Song on May Morning'. These were heard in broadcast performances given by the Radio Éireann Men's Octet, conducted by Rosen, on 25 December 1950 and on 26 May 1951, respectively. He also had some of his early songs performed by the well-known baritone Tomás Ó Súilleabháin on Radio Éireann (RÉ) on 23 February 1952.

During this time he would often go to Pigott's music shop in Grafton Street in Dublin to hire various wind and brass instruments on a short-term basis in order to explore their basic technical possibilities:

I made an arrangement with them to pay five shillings a week for the loan of an instrument. So I would take out a wind instrument, for maybe five to six weeks, buy a tutor for it and teach myself to play it. It wasn't so much for the sound, but just to get the feeling of how the instrument worked. During this time I taught myself the basics of the flute, clarinet, trumpet, trombone and French horn.<sup>10</sup>

He also sang, and at the School of Commerce in Rathmines in May 1952 he took the part of the Sheriff in the students' Choral Society production of Flotow's *Martha*. His main instrument, however, was the piano, and he became sufficiently proficient to be awarded the Licentiate diploma from Trinity College, London. He participated in concerts held under the auspices of the Students' Musical Union in the RIAM in 1951–52, playing works by Beethoven and Bartók. He also appeared in chamber music recitals and as an accompanist, often contributing solo items. He performed with the distinguished Dublin musicians Joseph Grocock and John O'Sullivan, in a performance of Bach's Concerto for Three Claviers and Strings at a concert given by the Dublin Orchestral Players on 3 December 1953. This practical experience of performing in public stood Bodley in good stead and he continued to make regular appearances subsequently both as solo pianist and as accompanist, often performing his own works.

His early music education was further augmented by regular attendance at the two concerts given every week during its seasons by the Radio Éireann Symphony Orchestra (RÉSO) in the recently built Phoenix Hall in Dame Court (between Dame Street and Exchequer Street, Dublin). At these, he had the opportunity to hear leading foreign

9 Over twenty years later, in 1974, Bodley took the opportunity to mark the occasion of Rosen's retirement as conductor of the RTÉ Singers by writing a short piano piece entitled *Planxty Rosen*, which he dedicated to the conductor. This piece was first performed privately, but Bodley subsequently recorded it for RTÉ radio.

10 Murphy et al., 'Seóirse Bodley', 231

conductors such as Carlo Franci, Jean Martinon, Carlo Zecchi, Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt, and Jean Fournet conducting a very wide repertoire of works. Not surprisingly, the standard works of the classical and romantic periods, such as Dvořák's *New World Symphony*, made a vivid impression on him, but he also heard much twentieth-century music, including works by composers of the Second Viennese School conducted by Winfried Zillig, who had studied with Schoenberg.

In the autumn of 1952 Bodley began his three years of undergraduate music studies at University College Dublin (UCD). The Department of Music was then housed in rooms in Newman House, St. Stephen's Green. The well-known composer John Larchet (1884–1967) occupied the Chair, and was the department's only full-time member of staff. He was assisted by Mairead Pigott, who taught Irish Music, and by Rita Broderick from the RIAM, who taught harmony. The student cohort was very small. Bodley's father initially disapproved of him studying music, fearing, not unreasonably, that the outcome would be an uncertain career as a musician. However, both his parents eventually proved very supportive. Bodley threw himself enthusiastically into student life and was active in the UCD Music Society, which organized concerts and promoted other musical events on campus. He also began studying the German language as he recognized that it would be useful for his future plans in that country. Most importantly, perhaps, for the development of his orchestral skills, in his final two years at UCD he completed many arrangements of Irish music (usually one or more a month) for Radio Éireann, which, he recalled, helped towards his upkeep at home.<sup>11</sup> Arranging Irish folk-songs for small orchestras was practically the only way for a composer to earn an income in the early 1950s.<sup>12</sup>

Bodley had continued to compose quite steadily during his late teens, completing a number of songs and chamber works, including two charming *Capriccios* for violin and piano, which were composed for the virtuoso violinist François d'Albert, who taught at the RIAM. *A Cradle Song* appears to be his very first solo song, written when he was aged seventeen. It is an attractive setting of Yeats's poem from the collection *The Rose* (1893) and is reproduced in Ex. 1.

The poet sighs in resignation that he cannot retain the present moment. Bodley sets the text to a lilting 6/8, making frequent use of open fifths moving chromatically from A minor via B major and C sharp minor to E major. The middle verse depicts the 'Sailing Seven' — the Pleiades constellation visible during the sailing season in antiquity — in the rolling arpeggiated figures in the bass.

11 Murphy et al., 'Seóirse Bodley', 234

12 Denis Donoghue, 'The Future of Irish Music', *Studies* 44, Spring (1955), 111. Patrick Zuk notes that such arrangements are 'representative of a kind of light music which has now disappeared altogether, but which was once published in abundance and formed the bulk of popular concert fare and, later, music broadcast on the radio.' Zuk, 'Words for Music Perhaps? Irishness, Criticism and the Art Tradition', *Irish Studies Review* 12, 1 (2004), 20.

Ex. 1 A Cradle Song

**Andante con moto**

*p*

The an-gels are stoop-ing a - bove your bed; They

*p*

5

wea-ry of troop - ing With the whim-per-ing dead. God's

*mf* *p* *mp* *legato*

9

laugh-ing in Hea-ven To see you so good; The Sail - ing Se - ven Are

*mf* *mf*

12 **poco rall.**

gay with His mood.

**poco rall.**

*p*

15 **Tempo primo** *pp* *mp* **poco rit.**

I sigh that kiss you, For I must own That I shall miss

**Tempo primo** *pp* *p* *pp* *mp* **poco rit.**

20 **A tempo** *p subito* *pp, perdendosi* **Lento**

you When you have grown.

**A tempo** *pp, perdendosi* **Lento**

Bodley composed his first significant work, *Music for Strings (Ceol do Théada)*, at the age of nineteen. He commenced this in January 1952 and completed it eleven months later. It was first performed on 10 December 1952 in the Metropolitan Hall, Dublin, by the Dublin Orchestral Players (which had a policy of playing works by Irish composers), conducted by Brian Boydell, in a programme that included Haydn's *London Symphony* and Bach's *Violin Concerto in E major* with d'Albert as the soloist. Encouragingly for Bodley, the work received largely favourable notices. The critic for the *Irish Times* noted that the piece

showed that this young composer can express himself with sincerity and definite purpose, [though] ... his knowledge of string technique is, however, still rather hazy, and he would be well advised to obtain some scientific and authoritative instruction upon the complex harmonic technique which he employs. The free use of modern harmony is rather dangerous unless one has either a sure knowledge or a superlatively sensitive ear.<sup>13</sup>

The *Irish Press* agreed, suggesting that Bodley 'would do well to study modern harmony and orchestration with one of our more eminent composers, as he is undoubtedly a promising musician',<sup>14</sup> while the critic for the *Evening Herald* noted that Bodley had 'a fine grasp of the structure and range of an orchestra, which knowledge he uses to great advantage'.<sup>15</sup>

The first movement, *Alla marcia*, is interrupted twice by an *Adagio rubato*, once over open fifths in the bass gradually settling back into the march via a cello solo and the second time with imitative entries over a sustained pedal. The second movement, an *Adagio non troppo*, opens with solo violin over slowly pulsating D major chords (Ex. 2) and is clearly indebted to Shostakovich. According to Bodley, he experimented here with combining the diatonic modality characteristic of Irish melody with dissonant elements, with results that struck many contemporary listeners as rather daring.<sup>16</sup> A senior colleague, the Irish composer Frederick May (1911–85) noted that these harmonies, 'while frequently bold and daring, are never perverse and the texture is always clear with a strong feeling for counterpoint'.<sup>17</sup> This movement has a number of imaginative touches, such as the countermelody on a second solo violin which accompanies the principal thematic material on its return. It ends serenely in D with oscillating B flats and As which recall the opening of the movement before dying away. The final two movements, a *Scherzo (Allegro molto)* and *Rondo (Allegro vivo)*, continue the use of similarly shaped melodic material and are well crafted, with good use of violin solos over sustained chords at the end of both movements.

13 'B' [Walter Beckett], *Irish Times*, 11 December 1952

14 'R. J.' [Robert Johnson], *Irish Press*, 11 December 1952

15 *Evening Herald*, 11 December 1952

16 Acton, 'Interview', 120

17 Radio Éireann programme booklet, 15 January 1956

Ex. 2 Music for Strings, II, 1-9

Adagio non troppo (♩=78)

The musical score is for measures 1 through 9 of a piece. The tempo is Adagio non troppo, with a quarter note equal to 78 beats per minute. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/4. The instruments are Violin solo, Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The Violin solo part begins with a rest in measure 1, then plays a melodic line starting in measure 2 with a dynamic of *mp, espressivo*. The Violin 1 and Violin 2 parts play a rhythmic accompaniment of quarter notes, starting in measure 1 with a dynamic of *p*. The Viola part plays a melodic line with some slurs, also starting in measure 1 with a dynamic of *p*. The Violoncello and Double Bass parts play a steady bass line of quarter notes, also starting in measure 1 with a dynamic of *p*. The score concludes in measure 9 with a dynamic change from *p* to *mp*.

*Music for Strings* remains one of Bodley's most popular works and has been played frequently since its premiere.<sup>18</sup> It was included in programmes performed by the Douglas Cameron String Orchestra during its Irish tour in 1956 and was subsequently taken up by other ensembles such as the New Irish Chamber Orchestra who included it on an American tour. The work was also recorded for commercial release in 1958 by the RÉSÓ under Milan Horvat on the Decca long-playing record *New Music from Old Erin*.

Bodley was taught his subjects at school for many years through Irish, becoming proficient in the language in his teenage years. He often took his holidays in various areas of the Gaeltacht (the Irish-speaking districts of Ireland) and was involved in musical activities as accompanist and conductor in the Keating Branch of the Gaelic League; he rehearsed in its headquarters in Parnell Square. In 1952, his enthusiasm for the Irish language led him to adopt the Irish version of his Christian name, Seóirse, and he changed his name officially on his birth certificate. Quite apart from an early aspiration to establish an Irish identity for himself for artistic reasons, it might have been difficult for him to make his way as an Irish composer with the Christian name of the patron saint of England. He had already signed himself 'Seóirse Bodlaí' in some of his early pieces (with 'Seóirse Bodley' in brackets) and in quite a few manuscripts of the early 1950s he subsequently overwrote 'George' with 'Seóirse'. Bodley's competence in the language was such that in January 1954, while still an undergraduate, he was asked to present 'Broadcast Music of the Week' in Irish on Radio Éireann every third week. He also wrote short articles for Irish language periodicals such as *Comhar* (contributing a monthly feature entitled 'Nótaí Ceoil' [Music Notes]).

His interest in his native language naturally led him to set texts in Irish. An early choral work from this period, *Trí h-Amhráin Grá* [Three Love Songs] for SATB, sets three poems by seventeenth-century poets: 'Taisig agad féin do Phóg' ['Moist is your kiss'], 'Dar liom is galar é an Gradh' ['Love, in my opinion, is a disease'], and 'An Macalla' ['The Echo']. This set was first performed on 7 January 1953, directed by Rosen, in an Irish Musical Arts Society concert. It was performed subsequently in Germany after a German conductor, Hermann Wagner, heard the songs while on holiday in Ireland.<sup>19</sup> Wagner conducted the songs in a concert of new music by Der Junge Chor of Schleswig-Holstein on 21 October 1953 at the Volkshochschule in Oldenburg in Holstein. Wagner and Rosen translated the texts of the songs and they were published privately as *Drei altirische Liebeslieder* [Three Old Irish Love Songs] in an attractive booklet with a picture of Bray Head and the Sugarloaf Mountain in Co. Wicklow on the cover. All three songs have the same opening character as the sopranos and altos descend first in thirds, then sixths and in the last song in a mixture of intervals, each opening imitated a bar later by the tenors and basses. In the songs Bodley handles some unresolved dissonance within a tonal-modal setting.

<sup>18</sup> See Richard Pine, *Music and Broadcasting in Ireland* (Dublin, 2005), 144, 456.

<sup>19</sup> Irish Press, 18 September 1954

In 1953 Bodley composed nine solo songs for baritone and piano. He set texts by Shakespeare and by three highly regarded contemporary poets who wrote in Irish, Séamus Ó Néill (1910–86), Seán Ó Ríordáin (1916–77) and Liam S. Gógan (1891–1979). All of these early songs are quite individual and varied in mood and tempo, ranging from the humorous to the reflective. As such they do not constitute a collection or cycle, although the three settings of texts by Ó Néill, the Co. Down writer, could possibly be grouped together. Almost 30 years later, Charles Acton, the senior music critic with the *Irish Times* from 1955 to 1987, was to bemoan the fact that Bodley in his teens was writing songs to Irish words ‘that deserve far better of our singers than the neglect they have suffered’.<sup>20</sup> None of the eleven songs carries a key signature and they display a mixture of extended tonality, modality, some quite dense and dissonant chromaticism, and also, in places, a certain deliberate simplicity. They are through-composed and the piano part is often quite independent of the vocal line, with little word painting.

It was clear that Bodley’s talent was beginning to be recognized by his more established colleagues. On 14 November 1953 a recording of his ‘Four songs for voice and piano’ (a selection of the above-mentioned songs) was played and introduced by the composer himself at the quarterly meeting of the Music Association of Ireland (MAI) held at Brian Boydell’s house at 85 Anglesea Road in Ballsbridge, Dublin. Boydell had been one of four (with Edgar Deale, Olive Smith and Frederick May) who had founded the MAI five years previously to promote music and music education in Ireland. Other composers who played recordings of their works that Saturday night were Boydell himself (*In Memoriam Mahatma Gandhi*), Deale (*A Pageant of Human Lyfe*), A. J. Potter (*Concerto da chiesa*), and May (*Songs from Prison*). The circular advertising this recital also stated that ‘the formation of an Irish Composers’ Centre will be discussed after the recital’.<sup>21</sup> James Wilson recalls hearing recordings at Brian Boydell’s house at that time and ‘being impressed by some songs by a young man, considered promising, named Bodley’.<sup>22</sup>

Eight of these songs were also performed at a public concert the following year on 26 November 1954 by Tomás Ó Súilleabháin, accompanied by Bodley, in the Graduates’ Memorial Building in Trinity College Dublin. The programme consisted entirely of Bodley’s own music. Before the performance of the songs, the poems were recited by the journalist and broadcaster Seán Mac Réamoinn (1921–2007). This concert was the third in a series of music by Irish composers organized by The Composers’ Group of the Music Association of Ireland and it was well attended.<sup>23</sup> Although these attractive early songs have been for the most part forgotten, some of the short piano pieces which Bodley wrote around this time have stayed in the repertoire as children’s pieces. At this concert Bodley

<sup>20</sup> *Irish Times*, 9 January 1981

<sup>21</sup> Copy in Bodley Private Collection

<sup>22</sup> *Soundpost*, 1 (1981), 30

<sup>23</sup> *Evening Mail*, 27 November 1954



also performed *Scherzo* (c. 1953), *Movement in B* (c. 1954)<sup>24</sup> and *Ceithre Píosaí Beaga* [Four Little Pieces] (1954) — the latter were published separately in four issues of *Feasta* in 1960<sup>25</sup> and again by the Dublin firm of Walton's in 1985. He also accompanied Ruth Ticher in his two *Capriccios* for violin and piano. Bodley's *Ceithre Píosaí Beaga* resulted from experimenting with writing some short melodies and deciding that four of them could be used as the basis of piano pieces.<sup>26</sup> The *Irish Times* critic reported that this recital

was certainly the most impressive contribution so far to the series ... . Here is a young Irish composer who is neither another late plodder in the footsteps of the folk-song enthusiasts, suffering from chromatic fever, nor a creaking imitator of fashionable models. From his music it is clear that he has learnt from Hindemith and Bartók, but what he has learned has served merely to feed and cultivate his own musical thinking. There was a fluency, coherence and sense of purpose in most of the pieces which were offered which suggest that we now have a young musical talent which has something original to say.<sup>27</sup>

In the same issue, 'Quidnunc' (Patrick Campbell) in 'An Irishman's Diary' reported that Bodley was 'generally thought to be the most hopeful recent arrival on the contemporary musical scene in Ireland'.<sup>28</sup>

In 1954, Bodley set another text by Seán Ó Ríordáin for SATB chorus, *Cúl an Tí* [The Back of the House], which was first performed by the Radio Éireann Singers conducted by Rosen in a radio broadcast on 9 July 1955. The poem describes the fairy-tale wonderland which, in Louis de Paor's phrase, can be conjured up out of 'the orderly chaos of a back garden'<sup>29</sup>, as the imagination transforms ordinary everyday objects such as a kettle, an old hat and familiar domestic animals into a fantastic scene. In the poet's mind, these objects and animals appear to communicate in a mysterious language, which only Aesop would have understood. Bodley sets its six short stanzas as sections of about a dozen bars in length, which are to be sung without a break in a jaunty *Allegro moderato*. The piece is structured in ternary form, each component section of which combines two verses. It commences in E minor with a dotted rhythm figure in the sopranos over a sustained vowel

24 Listed on the programme as 'Sonata in B (First Movement)'. The review in the *Irish Times* of 27 November 1954 referred to it as 'an unfinished Piano Sonata'. A few years later Bodley played the piano pieces again on an RÉ programme, *The Piano Music of Seóirse Bodley*, broadcast on 4 January 1957. A recording of this performance has been preserved in the RTÉ Recording Library.

25 *Feasta*, January, March, June, and September 1960

26 See Pádraic Ó Cuinneagáin, *The Piano Music of Seóirse Bodley*, unpublished dissertation, National University of Ireland, Maynooth (1992).

27 *Irish Times*, 27 November 1954. Earlier this year there had also been a profile of 'Seóirse Bodlaí' in *Indiu*, 18 June 1954.

28 *Irish Times*, 27 November 1954

29 Louis de Paor, 'Contemporary Poetry in Irish: 1940–2000', in Margaret Kelleher and Philip O'Leary, eds., *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature*, 2, 1890–2000 (Cambridge, 2006), 329

Ó on the pitch E in the basses, which subsequently shifts onto the open fifth, F sharp–C sharp. In the second verse, the soprano and alto lines proceed in parallel fourths over repeated Bs in the bass before the dotted rhythm comes to a halt on the line ‘Is tá sé siúd sa chré anois’ [‘And he is now in the earth’], referring to Aesop, who, unfortunately is long dead and hence unable to interpret the backyard’s magical language for the poet. This line is set as a short *doloroso* passage, in which the phrase ‘sa chré’ is coloured dramatically with a dissonant soprano D against an alto D sharp in bar 23. The central section of the ternary structure, comprising stanzas 3 and 4, sets both openings imitatively. The setting of the fifth stanza is an exact repeat of the opening and while the sixth commences in the same way as the second (both verses allude to Aesop), it ends differently. Here, the poet describes his pleasure in being ‘ar chúl an tí’ in the darkness late at night when he can see the spirit of Aesop, who is described as being ‘ina phúca léannta’ — a ‘learned pooka’ (hobgoblin or puck). At this line, the music moves to E major, and Bodley adds a final flourish on the syllable *Ha!*

Bodley spent a few months in late 1954 working on his *Sonatina for Five Wind Instruments*, which he finished in early January of the following year. Under its original Irish title, *Sonáidín do Chúig Gaothúirlisí*, this score was first recorded on 14 December 1955 by the wind ensemble Les Amis de la Musique for Radio Éireann. It is an attractive and very melodious four-movement work, scored for flute, oboe, clarinet, horn and bassoon. It displays conventional formal techniques such as sonata form, fugato, and ostinato accompaniments within a tonal-modal harmonic framework using similar thematic material across the piece.

Bodley graduated from UCD in the summer of 1955 with a first class honours B. Mus. By this stage his music was so well-known in Dublin that the music critic for the *Irish Times*, Denis Donoghue, in a much-quoted article ‘The Future of Irish Music’ (1955), suggested that the name of Seóirse Bodley could now be added to the list of established Irish composers given in Aloys Fleischmann’s 1952 book, *Music in Ireland*.<sup>30</sup> However, in 1956 after a Radio Éireann performance of *Music for Strings*, Charles Acton, whilst forecasting great things for Bodley, stressed that he had much to learn ‘before he becomes, as he certainly should, Ireland’s equivalent of Sibelius or Bartók’.<sup>31</sup> Clearly there was sufficient confidence in his professional competence at this early stage of his career for Radio Éireann to continue offering him work arranging Irish folk music for its various ensembles. During the 1950s he arranged a considerable quantity of Irish airs, mostly for the RĚ Singers, but also some for orchestra (see Appendix I), which were broadcast on various programmes that featured

30 Donoghue, ‘The Future of Irish Music’, 109. Fleischmann had restricted his list of composers to the period 1935–51. Aloys Fleischmann, ed., *Music in Ireland: A Symposium* (Cork, 1952). See also Séamas de Barra, *Aloys Fleischmann* (Dublin, 2006), 112.

31 *Irish Times*, 16 January 1956

this repertory.<sup>32</sup> One orchestral arrangement, ‘The Palatine’s Daughter’ (1956/57), became particularly well-known when it was subsequently used as the signature tune for a popular Irish television soap opera, *The Riordans*, which was screened during the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>33</sup>

In April 1955 Bodley had commenced work on a short piece, *Movement for Orchestra* (to which he gave the Irish title *Gluaiseacht do’n gCeolfhoireann*). This was first broadcast in March 1956 and was subsequently performed in public a few months later on 21 July 1956 by the RÉ Symphony Orchestra under Milan Horvat in the Phoenix Hall, Dublin, in a programme that included Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 7* and Brahms’s *Violin Concerto*. Following a repeat performance on 4 November 1956, Acton wrote in the *Irish Times* that

Bodley is an Irish composer who is not afraid to write a memorable tune. His *Movement for Orchestra* is a serious and lyrical work of great beauty and a very individual quality ... the harmonic resources are restrained, and in parts surprisingly unmodern. ... [T]he one real fault is that Mr. Bodley has not yet the craftsmanship to join his sections quite as well as I would like.<sup>34</sup>

This one-movement work is in ternary form with the gentler and more pastoral *Adagio* outer sections framing (from letter H) a faster and more dramatic *agitato* central part which is underpinned by long timpani rolls and punctuated by *fff* climaxes. Canonic and motivic techniques are used to develop the thematic material and effective use is made of quartal and quintal gestures and sonorities. The handling of the medium foreshadows many features of Bodley’s later orchestral writing, particularly in the symphonies, in its employment of chorale-like passages for the brass, the use of a solo violin, as well as prominent passages for the piccolo and timpani. Understandably one looks for influences in the music of a young composer, and it is hardly surprising to hear many echoes of

- 32 See Richard Pine’s extensive research into the Radio Éireann programming of the time when arrangers such as Bodley ‘were busily involved, in mining the wealth of folk song in order to translate it into “art-music”’. Pine, *Music and Broadcasting in Ireland*, 382. These arrangements were broadcast on such popular radio shows as ‘Round the Counties’, ‘Music at Eleven’, ‘On Wings of Song’ and ‘A Musical Bouquet’. Pine also mentions various songs and arrangements by Bodley which were sung by the RÉ Singers both in Ireland and on tour abroad. See Pine, 382–89.
- 33 This arrangement was recorded on a long-playing record made by the RÉ Light Orchestra of folk-music arrangements by various Irish composers entitled ‘Ceol na h-Éireann/Music of Ireland’, which was released by the Irish-language organization Gael Linn (1958).
- 34 *Irish Times*, 5 November 1956. This new composition from the young composer commanded attention and the work was widely reviewed. ‘The music is episodic and rather short-breathed, but advancing years will enable Mr. Bodlai [sic.] to strengthen his already surprisingly sure grip of his medium’ (*Evening Press*, 5 November 1956). The *Irish Press* felt that it ‘commands instant attention, and sustains it mainly because of its intellectual character [using] a full orchestra expertly’ (5 November 1956), while the *Irish Independent* noted the ‘intellectual rather than emotional’ character of the piece. The Irish-language journal, *Comhar*, considered it to be one of the most important works to be composed for orchestra in the country until then and noted its maturity of ideas, despite some formal weaknesses, and concluded by forecasting great things for the composer (December 1956, 30).

Vaughan Williams in the harmonic idiom and melodic writing, as well as in the scoring for strings (Ex. 3). And one suspects that Bodley was also susceptible, unconsciously or otherwise, to the characteristic effects of the Mantovani orchestra, as he employs an occasional cascading string passage. *Movement for Orchestra* proved justifiably popular and was programmed by Radio Éireann a number of times subsequently.

In 1956 Bodley wrote what can be regarded as his first major choral work, *An Bhliain Lán* [‘The Full Year’] for tenor solo and SATB chorus. It is a setting of a text by Tomás Ó Floinn (1910–97) based on an eleventh-century Irish poem. The opening section of the piece is entitled ‘Preludio: Turas Athairne’ [Athairne’s Journey]. This *Andante mosso* is a vocalized four-part fugue on the vowels Ó, Á and Ú which depicts the wanderings of the legendary poet Athairne on his way to visit his pupil and foster-son, the equally renowned poet Aimheirgin. Athairne only intended to stay for one night, but when the time came for him to depart, Aimheirgin composed a compelling poem on the beauty of autumn (*Allegro con spirito*) which persuaded his foster father to stay until winter. But when he made a second attempt to leave, Aimheirgin recited another poem, this time on the melancholy nature of winter (*Adagio*) (Ex. 4).

In the black season of deep Winter a storm of waves is roused along the expanse of the world. Sad are the birds of every meadow plain, except the ravens, who feed on crimson blood, at the clamour of harsh winter: rough, black, dark, smoky. Dogs are vicious in cracking bones; the iron pot is put on the fire after the dark black day.<sup>35</sup>

Aimheirgin resorts to the same strategy when winter comes to an end, reciting a poem on the chilly springtime weather (*Allegro*) which successfully discourages Athairne from leaving. He is finally allowed to depart at the end of the summer, a peaceful season, according to the poet, which brings warmth to the earth. This section features a reprise of the fugal material which opened the work. In the end, therefore, Athairne finds that he has stayed for ‘the full year’ of the title. The solo tenor, who acts as a narrator and links the various sections throughout the piece, brings the work to a close with a short recitative describing Athairne’s eventual departure — *Do ceadaíodh dó ina dhiaidh sin imeacht sa Samradh* [After that, he was permitted to leave in the summer] — which is accompanied by a rich F major seventh chord. The choir resolves this onto an A major triad, which dies away in a serene *ppp*.

35 Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson, *A Celtic Miscellany: Translations from the Celtic Literatures* (London, 1967 [1951]), 69

Ex. 3 Movement for Orchestra, 98–107, strings only

Poco più mosso (♩=88)

Violin I arco *mf, espressivo* stringendo cresc. *div.*

Violin II arco *mf, espressivo* cresc. *div.*

Viola arco *mf, espressivo* cresc.

Violoncello arco *mf, espressivo* cresc.

Contrabass arco *mf, espressivo* cresc.



**Rall.** **Tempo I**

Vln. I *ff, incalzando*

Vln. I *ff, incalzando*

Vln. I *ff, incalzando*

Vln. II *ff, incalzando unis.*

Vln. II *ff, incalzando unis.*

Vln. II *ff, incalzando*

Vla. *ff, incalzando*

Vc. *ff, incalzando*

Cb. *ff, incalzando*

The image shows a page of a musical score for 'An Bhlíain Lán'. The score is arranged in a system with eight staves. The top three staves are for Violins I, Violins II, and Viola. The bottom three staves are for Violoncello and Contrabass. The music is in 2/4 time and features various dynamics and articulations such as 'loco', 'dim.', and 'calando'. A first ending bracket is marked with '(8)' and 'loco'.

An Bhlíain Lán was first heard in a broadcast performance by the RÉ Singers under Hans Waldemar Rosen on 1 February 1957. The work was subsequently published by the Irish state publisher, An Gúm, and was awarded a prize in a competition organized by An t-Oireachtas, a national festival of Gaelic culture similar to the Eisteddfod in Wales. It received its first public performance at a concert given jointly by the RÉ Singers and the RÉ Symphony Orchestra on 9 May 1958, on which occasion Brian Boydell's orchestral work *In Memoriam Mahatma Gandhi* was also featured in the programme.

Bodley has often recalled that he was well aware at the time of the need to develop his control of larger scale works. It was time to study abroad, and Bodley had to consider where to go and with whom to study. He first considered approaching Paul Hindemith — an unsurprising choice, as he had written in *Comhar* that he had studied Hindemith's pedagogical volumes *Unterweisung im Tonsatz* (published as *The Craft of Musical Composition*) in great detail and that they had influenced his recent compositions.<sup>36</sup> Hindemith's former composition student at Yale, the distinguished Irish musicologist, Frank Llewelyn Harrison (1905–87) was very supportive of Bodley's plans and showed Hindemith some of Bodley's

<sup>36</sup> See Bodley, 'Cúrsaí Ceoil in Éirinn', *Comhar*, 13 (1954), 8. In Bodley's view, Hindemith's books also gave by far the best understanding of contemporary music and should, he felt, be used as textbooks in music schools. He mentioned Hindemith's teaching again in 'Fadhb an Chumadórsa Éireannaigh', *Feasta* (March, 1957), 4.

scores in person — at the time, Harrison lectured at Oxford University and acted as external examiner in UCD during Bodley's final year. Bodley duly wrote to Hindemith, who sent a gracious reply in English on 23 April 1955, but declined to accept him as a student:

Dear Mr Bodley,

When I was in London, Prof. Harrison gave me your manuscripts. I read them with interest and was pleased with your talent and good intentions. Unfortunately I must disappoint you. I am giving up teaching altogether and thus there would not be any opportunity of your studying with me. I am sure you will find another — and probably even better — teacher somewhere who will give you the advice you need and want.

With best regards, yours sincerely,  
Paul Hindemith<sup>37</sup>

Disappointing as this must have been, such a response from one of the most important living twentieth-century composers must have been nonetheless extremely encouraging. Rosen then suggested that he should apply to study in Stuttgart with the Austrian composer, Johann Nepomuk David (1895–1977), whom he knew personally. David had been professor of composition at the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik in Stuttgart since 1948 and had established a considerable reputation by this stage in his career. Bodley was delighted to receive an extremely positive reply from David a month later accepting him as a student:

Dear Mr Bodley

Thank you for kindly sending me your compositions. I have studied them very closely and am pleased with the progress that I detect in them. I would be delighted of course to accept you as a student and I look forward to helping you further such a fine talent. The pieces which you sent me are almost all well structured and are in their own way technically quite satisfactory. They demonstrate the result of a solid and talented output which will become more secure with further studies. I would be grateful if you could let me know before the end of July whether you are able to come to me. I am returning your compositions with thanks and I wish you luck and every success in your ventures.

With best wishes,  
Yours  
Joh. Nep. David.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Bodley Private Collection

<sup>38</sup> David to Bodley, 24 May 1955, Bodley Private Collection (author's translation)

Ex. 4 An Bhliain Lán, 168-84

**Adagio** **poco rubato**

*p espress.* *cresc.* *mf* *dim.*

SOPRANO  
I ndubh - lár an ró \_\_\_\_\_ gheimh-ridh rabhar-ta tonn\_\_\_\_\_ ard-aith-ear le

ALTO  
I ndubh - lár an ró \_\_\_\_\_ gheimh-ridh rabhar-ta tonn\_\_\_\_\_ ard-aith-ear le

TENOR  
I ndubh - lár an ró \_\_\_\_\_ gheim - ridh rabhar-ta tonn\_\_\_\_\_

BASS  
I ndubh - lár an ró \_\_\_\_\_ gheim - ridh rabhar-ta\_\_\_\_\_ tonn

**Tempo I**

*(p)* *pp* *cresc.*

im \_\_\_\_\_ eall domhan - chláir. Bró - nach éin gach réidh - mhíó - dúin ach

im \_\_\_\_\_ eall domhan - chláir. Á \_\_\_\_\_ ach

ard-aith-ear le im - eall domhan - chláir. Bró - nach éin gach réidh - mhíó - dúin\_\_\_\_\_ ach

ard-aith-ear le im - eall domhan - chláir. Á \_\_\_\_\_ ach

*f* *dim.* *PPP*

fí - ach fo - la foir-dheir-ge ó ghlór geimh-ridh ghaire. Dor-(a)-cha, dubh-gharbh,

fí - ach fo - la foir-dheir-ge ó ghlór geimh-ridh ghaire. Dor-(a)-cha, dubh-gharbh,

fí - ach fo - la foir-dheir-ge ó ghlór geimh-ridh ghaire. Dor-(a)-cha, dubh-gharbh,

fí - ach fo - la foir-dheir-ge ó ghlór geimh-ridh ghaire. Dor-(a)-cha, dubh-gharbh,



deat-aith-each, dran tach coin ag cnámhch rei-meadh, Á

deat-aith-each, dran tach coin ag cnámhch rei-meadh, Á

deat-aith-each, dran tach coin ag cnámhch rei-meadh, Á

deat-aith-each, dran tach coin ag cnámhch rei-meadh, Á

coi - re ós ti - ne ar sír - bheir-bhiú iar - nóin dor - cha dubh.

coi - re ós ti - ne ar sír - bheir-bhiú iar - nóin dor - cha dubh.

coi-re ós ti - ne ar sír - bheir-bhiú iar - nóin dor - cha dubh.

coi - re ós ti - ne ar sír - bheir-bhiú iar - nóin dor - cha dubh.

In order to finance this prospective period of study abroad, Bodley applied successfully in 1956 for a National University of Ireland (NUI) Travelling Studentship awarded for graduate study outside of Ireland. This, together with an Arts Council Prize for young composers which he also received, enabled him to go to Stuttgart in early March 1957 to study for two years with David. When he arrived first, Bodley lived briefly in Sielmingen on the southern outskirts of the city, before moving to the north-eastern district of Bad Cannstatt. His initial experiences of living in Germany were somewhat disconcerting:

[You] were speaking a different language, with no real opportunity to speak English. And not alone was it a different language, but it was a 'different' language from German: Swabian, the dialect from the Stuttgart area. Second, if you came from Ireland you might as well have come from Mars as far as a lot of local people

were concerned, it was so far away. “Where are you from?” “I’m from Ireland.” “Ah, Holland.” “No. Ireland.” “Oh! Iceland?” “No. Ireland.” “Oh! Ireland. Isn’t that somewhere in England?”<sup>39</sup>

Bodley also recalls that Ireland seemed very remote. The cost of phoning or travelling home to Dublin was prohibitively expensive. He immersed himself in the concert life of the city, attending concerts given by the Sinfonieorchester des Süddeutschen Rundfunks and various series devoted entirely to contemporary music, such as ‘Musik unserer Zeit’ and ‘Tage Zeitgenössischer Musik’. He also made some public appearances as an accompanist and chamber musician. In addition to his compositional studies, he availed of the opportunity to enrol for classes in conducting with Hans Müller-Kray and Karl-Maria Zwißler and in piano with Alfred Kreutz.

Many commentators have noted that the compositional style of Bodley’s new teacher defied easy categorization. Josef Häusler notes his frequent use of monothematicism, quartal harmony, pervasive polyphony, and extended tonality, and summed up his achievement as being ‘a highly individual blend of inherited tradition and the musical thinking of his own generation’.<sup>40</sup> Hans Stuckenschmidt remarked that, although David had been labelled a representative of the Neo-Gothic, the Neo-Baroque, or as a synthesis of Bach and Bruckner, he did not belong to any school as such.<sup>41</sup> In the year that Bodley came to study with him, David completed two major works, his Symphony No. 7 and Violin Concerto No. 2. The latter is a serial work in which, as Häusler points out, David ‘did not succumb to the Schoenbergian orthodoxy, in that the series are built around tonal centres of gravity and function as principal motifs, although they lead to an extension of harmonic resources’.<sup>42</sup>

According to Bodley, David ‘did not try to recreate himself in his pupils’ — something he came to feel that Hindemith might have done<sup>43</sup> — it is nevertheless not surprising that David’s influence is discernible in some of his works from this period. Bodley knew David’s recent orchestral compositions quite well but David did not use or discuss his own works in class. He based his analytical teaching on works such as Mozart’s Jupiter Symphony and Bach’s Inventions, Sinfonias and the *Well-Tempered Clavier*.

39 ‘Seóirse Bodley: Michael Dungan talks to the composer’, *New Music News* (September 1996), 9

40 Josef Häusler, ‘Johann Nepomuk David’, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd edition, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 2001), vol. 7, 52

41 Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt, *Johann Nepomuk David: Betrachtungen zu seinem Werk* (Wiesbaden, 1965), 57. See also Rudolf Klein, *Johann Nepomuk David: Eine Studie* (Vienna, 1964).

42 Häusler, ‘Johann Nepomuk David’, 52

43 Axel Klein, ‘Irish Composers and Foreign Education: A Study of Influences’, in *Irish Musical Studies IV: The Maynooth International Musicological Conference 1995, Selected Proceedings Part I*, Patrick F. Devine and Harry White, eds. (Dublin, 1996), 278. See also Peter Hölzl, *Der Lehrer Johann Nepomuk David: Aus dem Unterricht bei Johann Nepomuk David an der Stuttgarter Musikhochschule* (Vienna, 1992) vii, where the author states unequivocally that David did not try to teach his pupils to imitate his own style.