

## Inaugural Foreword

In 1988, I published a survey of musicology in Ireland in the journal of the International Musicological Society, *Acta Musicologica*. In my concluding remarks, having announced the forthcoming publication of the first volume of *Irish Musical Studies* (Dublin, 1990), I suggested that ‘a journal of musicology in Ireland would not be justified by the size and present scope of the field’. Seventeen years on, it is a pleasure to revise that judgement by noting the difference between how modest our beginnings were then and the flourishing condition which musicology in Ireland now enjoys. The appearance of the *Journal of the Society for Musicology in Ireland* is a prime marker of that progress. Seventeen years ago, the Irish Chapter of the Royal Musical Association was barely a year old; an international musicological conference had yet to take place in Ireland and the first volume of *Irish Musical Studies (Musicology in Ireland)* was two years away from publication. By contrast, as I write this foreword, international conferences are now a regular feature of the Irish musicological landscape (two of them taking place in the summer of 2005 are formally in association with this Society); *Irish Musical Studies* has produced eight books to date, with a ninth and tenth volumes in preparation, and the rich complexion of graduate studies in musicology throughout the country has changed almost unrecognizably from its pale appearance twenty years ago. The Society for Musicology in Ireland, now entering its third year and building upon the cumulative growth of musicology attested by its predecessor, represents a remarkably wide range of scholarly interests, as a forthcoming survey of musicology from 1988–2005 (once again in *Acta Musicologica*) will testify. In its own conferences, in the publications of its members and in the spread of research interests which it promotes, the SMI enjoys the unmistakable status of a learned society in Europe.

These agreeable facts do not justify (or amount to) complacency: on the contrary, many of its members share my own conviction that the Society requires a degree of vigilance in the matter of nourishing membership (especially in the encouragement of graduate students); it must also ensure that the actual scholarly interests of its members find a voice in its proceedings. The annual conference is pre-eminent in both of these enterprises, but this journal is a vital step forward in consolidating the best research which the Society can attract and make available for public scrutiny.

The editorial guidelines and directives which inform the *Journal of the Society for Musicology in Ireland* are distinctively those of a learned publication, principally in the

matters of peer review and house style. Periodical commentary on music in Ireland has a long (and often jaundiced) history, but the initiative which JSMI represents is entirely new. To create an Irish periodical venue for serious research in musicology that depends on those criteria of assessment and presentation which inform professional journals of musicology throughout Europe and North America could scarcely have been envisaged even a decade ago. The advisory board of JSMI, however, bears witness to the scholarly seriousness of this new enterprise: musicologists as internationally distinguished as Michael Beckerman, Martin Stokes, Reinhard Strohm, Christoph Wolff and Susan Youens individually and collectively bring to this journal not only a critical mass of scholarly achievement and editorial experience, but also a very definite sense of what we should expect of the journal itself. Only by applying the highest standards of scholarly assessment and representation can JSMI hope to become a ranking venue for musicologists in Ireland and throughout the wider domains of musicology. Likewise, in welcoming submissions which radically endorse the widest possible spectrum of scholarly research in music, it shows much better hopes than otherwise of obtaining sufficient material to warrant its existence. By contrast with *Irish Musical Studies*, which never aspired to periodical status but which from the start proposed a series of self-standing books devoted to individual topics, JSMI is expressive of a much wider engagement across the whole spectrum of cultural history, analysis, theory, philosophy, ethnomusicology and historical musicology which currently preoccupies the discipline of musicology in the twenty-first century. Its hopes are strategically plural.

Speaking for myself, one thing I hope for is a slow-burning fuse rather than a sudden explosion of enthusiasm. To alter the metaphor: as the yearly volumes accumulate, it is preferable to nourish and then harvest a small crop of excellence rather than collect a mediocre, if larger, yield. Scholarly journals come and go, but when one considers the longevity, quality and prestige of publications such as the *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, *Music and Letters*, the *Journal of Musicology*, *The Musical Quarterly* and the *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, one is struck not only by the plural condition of their content (as against other venues which cultivate a single discipline within the folds of musicological discourse), but also by their restrictive access of entry. The main restriction in such cases is the quality of research which these publications can afford to demand. This journal, under the expert guidance of its first editors, shows every sign of achieving a similar degree of finesse and professional discrimination in its table of contents. The simple avowal that the *Journal of the Society for Musicology in Ireland* 'exists to promote Irish musicological scholarship' sufficiently expresses, I think, a governing aspiration worthy of the highest standards which obtain in research in the humanities today.

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The online publication of this journal unmistakably follows the precedent established by such periodicals as *Music Theory Online* (Journal of the Society for Music Theory, 1994–), *Ethnomusicology OnLine* (1995–) and the *Frankfurter Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft* (1998–). In doing so, it realizes an important ambition to foster the greater global exchange of knowledge, an ambition far less likely to succeed in traditional publications because of the increasing costs of printing and distribution. In this respect, too, we all owe a great deal to the custodial and technical expertise of the editors, whose work on the Society's behalf is so widely admired by those who practise musicology in Ireland.

Harry White

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