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PROGRAM NOTES

TARIK O’REGAN (b. 1978)
Acallam na Senórach:
“*An Irish Colloquy*”

The Text

Acallam na Senórach, a Middle Irish narrative dating to the late 12th or early 13th century, translates to English as “The Colloquy of the Ancients” or “Dialogue of the Elders.” It is one of the most important texts to survive from that period and is one of the longest surviving works of original medieval Irish literature.

The original text tells the story of St. Patrick’s interactions with two of the last surviving members of a *fián* (band of warriors) once led by Finn mac Cumail: Cailte and Oisín. They are still alive centuries after the famed battles in which they fought (traditionally assigned to the third century), and no explanation is given as to why they are still roaming Ireland, with their followers, at the time of St. Patrick’s arrival in the fifth century.

The conversation between the saint and Cailte (who takes a significantly larger role in the dialogue than Oisín), as they journey around Ireland, provides a frame in which are embedded approximately 200 shorter narratives describing incidents in the era of Finn and his *fián*.

Acallam na Senórach survives in five manuscripts, which date from the 15th and 16th centuries: two in the Franciscan Collection at University College Dublin, two in the University of Oxford, and one in Chatsworth House in Derbyshire, England.

The Music

In writing this musical setting of *Acallam na Senórach*, I was drawn to the evenness of the dialogue. Instead of St. Patrick simply converting the pagan warriors, he is encouraged to listen to Cailte’s stories and poems of an earlier time, in which the saint delights.

This secular/sacred osmosis is maintained unwaveringly throughout the entire text. By the end of the narrative, one has witnessed not only the arrival of a new religion in Ireland, but also a richly recounted secular narrative map of the entire island: the peaceful and enriching shaking of two great hands.

In preparing the libretto (the sung text), I have focused on only a few of the shorter constituent tales. This decision was born of the practical constraints of duration. I have, however, kept the skeleton, albeit smaller, of the overall frame in place. Finally, for the sake of simplicity, Oisín is removed from the primary narrative.

The characters are not assigned specific voices. The narrative as a whole is carried by a persistently changing combination of voices and guitar. The one exception is Cas Corach, the musician of the *sid* (underworld) who is most closely embodied, throughout this setting, in the solo interludes for guitar.

The music itself is not ethnographically inclined; that is, I have not attempted to reconstruct theories on Irish music of the period from which *Acallam* stems. However, the score generally, and especially in the guitar writing, is imbued with an air of Arab and Persian influence. The dulcimer, which Cas Corach plays, is thought to have been similar to the Iranian santur. A potential antecedent of the *bodhráin* (Irish frame drum), for which I have written two parts in this work, is the North African *bendir*.

Considering that the surviving manuscripts of the *Acallam* stem from a period in which Ireland maintained sporadic contact with North Africa and the Near East, both of a friendly (trade) and hostile (piracy, notably the Barbary corsairs) nature, it is not unreasonable to consider that some variety of cultural exchange (not dissimilar to that described in the *Acallam* between St. Patrick and Cailte) influenced the extant transcriptions. Indeed, singer-songwriters, such as Bert Jansch and Davey Graham, explored this idea in their own music during the 1960s, forming part of the British folk revival.

Acallam, after all, tells us that, following his baptism by the saint, Cailte repays Patrick with a block of gold from the “Land of Arabia.” This is, no doubt, a reference to the Holy Land (from a different era altogether). For me, however, this precise moment, where continents, cultures, material goods, and spiritual blessing intersect evenly, is the kernel of the entire work.

Synopsis

Part One begins with a prologue (1), after which we witness Patrick, newly arrived in Ireland, meeting Cailte, an ancient warrior, and his retinue for the first time (2). Cailte is baptised by Patrick and repays the saint first by reciting a poem (3) and then with a large block of gold. We are told that it is from this gold that the subsequent decoration of the psalters and missals of Ireland was crafted.

Cailte then introduces Cas Corach (5), a fine musician of the *sid* (underworld), who plays for Patrick (6), lulling the saint to sleep. He awakes to a fierce storm in the morning (7). After the storm has subsided, Patrick asks Cailte about a nearby spring, which prompts the warrior to tell the tale of Níam and Oisín (9).

At the start of Part Two (10), we learn that a great number of stories and verses, here represented by an interlude for guitar (11), have been recited by Cailte to Patrick. These culminate in the sorrowful tale of Cael and Créde (13). This prompts Cailte to ask Patrick of his own mortality (14) and Patrick answers, giving the warrior the number of years he has left to live.

After some time (15), Patrick worries that he has been neglecting his duties (16). However, he is reassured by his two guardian angels that the stories of Cailte are important and should be preserved. After a paternoster is sung (18), Cailte decides to leave for Tara, which Patrick has already foretold to be the warrior’s final resting place.

The setting closes with the parting of Patrick and Cailte (19).

—*Tarik O’Regan*, May 2011

Libretto and additional notes available at www.peakperfs.org/performances/National_Chamber_Choir_Ireland.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Paul Hillier, Artistic Director and Conductor

Paul Hillier is from Dorset in England and studied at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London. His career has embraced singing, conducting, and writing about music. Earlier in his career, he was founding director of the Hilliard Ensemble and subsequently founded Theatre of Voices.

He has taught in the United States at the University of California campuses at Santa Cruz and Davis and from 1996 to 2003 was director of the Early Music Institute at Indiana University. He was principal conductor of the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir (2001–2007) and has been chief conductor of Ars Nova Copenhagen since 2003.

His recordings, over a hundred CDs including seven solo recitals, have earned worldwide acclaim and won numerous prizes. His books about Arvo Pärt and Steve Reich, together with numerous anthologies of choral music, are published by Oxford University Press.

In 2006 Hillier was awarded an Order of the British Empire for services to choral music. In 2007 he received the Order of the White Star of Estonia and was awarded a Grammy for Best Choral Recording. In 2008 he took up the position of artistic director and chief conductor of the National Chamber Choir of Ireland and in 2009 was invited to form

the new Coro Casa da Musica in Porto, Portugal. In 2010 he won a second Grammy (this time in the small ensemble category), for Theatre of Voices’ recording of David Lang’s *The Little Match Girl Passion* (which also won a Pulitzer Prize), together with a selection of choral works by Lang, sung by Ars Nova Copenhagen. www.paulhillier.net

Tarik O’ Regan, composer

Born in London in 1978, Tarik O’Regan was educated at Oxford University and subsequently at Cambridge. Recently his work has garnered two 2009 Grammy nominations (including Best Classical Album), two British Composer Awards, and an NEA Artistic Excellence grant. He has held the Fulbright-Chester Schirmer Fellowship at Columbia University and a Radcliffe Institute Fellowship at Harvard. Other appointments include positions at Trinity and Corpus Christi Colleges in Cambridge, the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, and Yale University.

The year 2010 marked the premiere of O’Regan’s BBC Proms commission, *Latent Manifest*, by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and the broadcast of a self-penned documentary, *Composing New York*, which he presented for BBC Radio. *Heart of Darkness*, his opera based on Joseph Conrad’s novel of the same name, opens at the Royal Opera House Linbury Theatre in November 2011. www.tarikoregan.com

Stewart French, Guitar

Stewart French is a classical guitarist focusing on performance and recording projects involving the development of new repertoire. An experienced performer, arranger, producer, and editor, French is particularly interested in how creativity is distributed among composers, performers, and sound professionals. He holds a DipRAM from the Royal Academy of Music—the institution’s most prestigious performance award—as well as a master’s degree in mathematics from the University of Cambridge and an ARCM from the Royal College of Music, London. As a guitarist he has been involved in major collaborations with John Rutter, Tarik O’Regan, Jeremy Huw Williams, Tim Brown, Paul Hillier, the Choir of Clare College, and Joseph Finlay and has recorded world premieres for Naxos, Universal, Collegium, Draft, and now harmonia mundi. French has been broadcast live on BBC Radio 3 and RTE Radio 1, has edited works for Oxford University Press and Novello, has commissioned over an hour of new guitar music, and has himself authored three volumes of 19th-century guitar arrangements. He is

also the author of a new edition of William Walton’s *Five Bagatelles for Guitar*, based on research into the manuscripts held by the Walton Archive. www.stewartfrench.com

National Chamber Choir of Ireland

The National Chamber Choir of Ireland is the country’s flagship choral ensemble. Under the artistic directorship of internationally celebrated and multi-award-winning choral conductor Paul Hillier, the choir is known for its unique approach to programming and has gained a reputation for the high artistic quality of its performances. The choir remains a thriving force on a very active choral scene both at home and abroad.

Since its inception, the National Chamber Choir of Ireland has made a significant contribution to the growth of the choral music repertoire repository in Ireland through its commitment to commissioning new work. The choir, whose repertoire extends from early to contemporary music, regularly commissions pioneering vocal work by composers such as Gerald Barry, Andrew Hamilton, Siobhán Cleary, Kevin Volans, and Tarik O’Regan.

Given its strong commitment to touring in Ireland, the choir is keen to keep developing its touring network in order to present high-quality choral concerts to audiences all around the country. Internationally, the choir has toured extensively in Europe, Asia, and South America. The choir performed at the White House on St. Patrick’s Day 2011 and is on tour in the United States during fall 2011 with conductor Paul Hillier.

In addition to collaborating with numerous international guest conductors, the choir also provides opportunities for and fosters the talents of young Irish conductors. It maintains welcome relationships with Irish conductors and continues to support emerging talent on the conducting scene. The choir also fosters relationships with other distinguished Irish performing ensembles and has collaborated successfully with the Crash Ensemble, Irish Baroque Orchestra, and the Irish Chamber Orchestra. The ensemble enjoys a unique relationship with Cork International Choral Festival, with which it collaborates on an annual basis.

Recording projects include the recently released and highly acclaimed *One Day Fine* on the Lyric fm label and *Acallam na Senórach* on the Harmonia Mundi label (fall 2011).

Sopranos **Sarah Busfield, Elizabeth Hilliard, Deirdre Moynihan, Abbi Temple, Susannah Vango**

Altos **Mark Chambers, Mihaela-Loredana Chirvase, Stephanie Seeney, Christina Whyte**

Tenors **Warwick Harte, Alan Leech, Michael Solomon Williams, Jacek Wisłocki**

Basses **Tristan Caldwell, Jeff Ledwidge, Paul McGough, Andrew Thompson**

Majella Hollywood: Chief Executive Officer, The National Chamber Choir, DCU, Glasnevin, Dublin 9, Ireland. www.nationalchamberchoir.com

The National Chamber Choir of Ireland is represented by Alliance Artist Management, www.allianceartistmanagement.com.

COMPANY ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Major funding for the National Chamber Choir of Ireland comes from the Arts Council/an Chomhairle Ealaíon, Culture Ireland, The Arts Council of Northern Ireland and major in-kind support from Dublin City University, where the ensemble has been in residence since 1996.

The choir acknowledges the support of Culture Ireland, the state agency for the promotion of Irish arts worldwide, working under the aegis of the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport. Culture Ireland creates and supports opportunities for Irish artists to present their work at strategic international festivals, venues, showcases, and arts markets. The agency comprises a board appointed by the Minister and an executive staff led by the Chief Executive. www.cultureireland.gov.ie

Imagine Ireland is a year-long season of Irish arts in America in 2011, an initiative of Culture Ireland, with funding from the Department of Tourism, Culture and Sport. www.imagineireland.ie



Music

Music

Music

Dr. Susan A. Cole, President
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 Jedediah Wheeler, Executive Director, Arts & Cultural Programming

Peak Performances presents:

National Chamber Choir of Ireland

Paul Hillier, Artistic Director and Conductor

with guest artist
Stewart French, guitar

PROGRAM

“Jauchzet dem Herrn” Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

“O süßer Mai” Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)
“All meine Herzgedanken”
“Dein Herzlein mild”
“Waldesnacht”

“Theophilus Thistle & the Myth of Miss Muffet”
 Siobhán Cleary (b. 1970)

~~Intermission~~

Regional Premiere!
Acallam na Senórach: “An Irish Colloquy”
 Tarik O'Regan (b. 1978)

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Prologue to Part One | 10. Prologue to Part Two |
| 2. The <i>Fian</i> | 11. Guitar Interlude II |
| 3. The Spring | 12. Recitative |
| 4. Recitative | 13. C  el And Cr  de |
| 5. Cas Corach | 14. C  ilte |
| 6. Guitar Interlude I | 15. Guitar Interlude III |
| 7. The <i>Sid</i> | 16. Patrick |
| 8. Recitative | 17. Recitative |
| 9. N  am | 18. <i>Fian</i> Paternoster |
| | 19. Epilogue |

Acallam na Sen  rach: “An Irish Colloquy” was co-commissioned by the National Chamber Choir of Ireland with funds from the Arts Council/An Comhairle Eala  n, the University of Notre Dame’s DeBartolo Performing Arts Center (IN), and Peak Performances @ Montclair State (NJ).

“Theophilus Thistle & the Myth of Miss Muffet” was commissioned by the Cork International Choral Festival for the seminar on new choral music with funds made available by the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Eala  n.

This tour of the National Chamber Choir of Ireland is funded under Imagine Ireland, a year of Irish Arts in America 2011, an initiative of Culture Ireland.

Duration: 1 hour 45 minutes, including one 15-minute intermission.

In consideration of both audience and performers, please turn off all electronic devices. The taking of photographs or videos and the use of recording equipment are not permitted. No food or drink is permitted inside the theater.

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Peak Performances

SEASON
11/12



Credit: Alan Roche

National Chamber Choir of Ireland

with Stewart French, Guitar

October 16, 2011 • 3:00pm

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Montclair State University