National Chamber Choir of Ireland

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The characters are not assigned specific voices or guises, but are represented by a persistently changing combination of voices and guitar. The one exception is Caílte Corcoran, the angel who is at once the most human of the characters and the one who is most closely embedded, throughout this setting, in the solo, into the circles for guitar.

The music itself is not ethnographically inclined; that is, I have not attempted to reconstruct theories on music of the period from which Acallam stems. However, the score generally, and especially in the guitar sections, reflects Middle Irish and Persian influence. The dulcimer, which Caílte plays, is thought to have been similar to the Irish violin and to be the potential antecedent of the bodhrán (Irish frame drum), for which I have written two parts in this work, is the North African bendir.

The conversation between the saint and Caílte (who takes a significantly larger role in the dialogue than Oisin), as they journey around Ireland, provides space for Acallam’s embedded 200 shorter narratives describing incidents in the era of St. Patrick. The narrative map of the entire island: the peaceful and enriching shaking of two great hands.

At the start of Part Two (10), we learn that a great number of stories and verses have been represented by an interlude for guitar (11), have been received by Caílte to Patrick. These culminate in the sorrowful tale of Clad and Críde (13). This prompts Caílte to ask Patrick of his own mortality (14) and Patrick answers, giving his 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 Caílte are important and should be preserved. After a paternoster is sung (18), Caílte decides to leave for Tara, which Patrick has advised him not to be the warior’s final resting place.

The setting closes with the pairing of Patrick and Caílte (19).

--T. O'Regan, May 2011

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 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 Illinois, Indiana University, and in New York City, as principal conductor of the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir (2001-2007) and 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 Part and Steve Reich, together with numerous anthologies of choral music, are published by Oxford University Press.

Stewart French, Guitar

Stewart French is a classical guitarist focusing on performance and recording projects involving contemporary repertoire. An experienced performer, arranger, producer, and editor, French is particularly interested in how contemporary composers interpret the music of earlier masters.

French holds a DipRAM from the Royal Academy of Music—London, where he was the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra’s most prestigious performance award— as well as a master’s degree in mathematics from the University of Cambridge and a PhD 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 Finnin and has participated worldwide in festivals around Europe, University, Classical, Draft, and now harmonia mundi. French has been broadcast live on BBC Radio 3’s RNCM Radio and 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 Welde’s Selected Woodwind Music for Guitar, based on research into the manuscripts held on the Walton Archive. 

National Chamber Choir of Ireland

The National Chamber Choir of Ireland is the country’s flagship choral ensemble. Under the artistic leadership of internationally celebrated and multi-award-winning choral conductor Paul Hillier, the choir is known for its present century approach to choral singing 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 early to contemporary music, regularly commissions pioneering vocal work by composers such as Gerald Barry, Andrew Hamilton, Mark Clear, 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 throughout 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 contemporary composers on new work, the choir also provides opportunities for and fosters the talents of young Irish conductors. It maintains a vibrant series of workshops for 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 Chamber Orchestra, and the Irish Chamber Orchestra. The ensemble enjoys a unique relationship with Cork International Choral Festival, which with 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 Sionrach on the Harmonia Mundi label (fall 2011).

COMPANY ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Major funding for the National Chamber Choir of Ireland comes from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and major in-kind support from the Arts Council of the Republic of Ireland. The Arts Council of Northern Ireland and major in-kind support from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and major in-kind support from the Arts Council of the Republic of Ireland. The Arts Council of Northern Ireland and major in-kind support from the Arts Council of the Republic of Ireland.

The choir acknowledges the support of Culture Ireland, the state agency for the promotion of Irish arts worldwide, working with the offices of the Minister for Arts, Culture and Sport. Culture Ireland creates and supports opportunities for Irish artists and promotes Irish culture internationally through strategic 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 festival 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
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 mein Herzgedanken” Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

“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 Chomhaoil Ealaion.

This tour of the National Chamber Choir of Ireland is funded under Imagine 2011/12 by the Arts Council/An Chomhaíl Ealaíon.

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

“Thisophilus 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 Chomhaíl Ealaion.

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.