

Review of Carina Drury, Irlandiani

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CARINA DRURY: *IRLANDIANI*, CARINA DRURY, EIMEAR MCGEOWN, NATHANIEL MANDER, AILEEN HENRY, POPPY WALSHAW, Penny Fiddle Records (2020), (CD and Digital Album) PFR2005CD.

Irlandiani is the debut album from Irish cellist Carina Drury, here supported by a stellar cast: Eimear McGeown (Irish flute, Irish whistle), Nathaniel Mander (harpsichord), Aileen Henry (Italian baroque harp), Poppy Walshaw (continuo cello). Over the course of its twenty-four tracks, *Irlandiani* takes the listener on a musical journey, which Drury describes in the liner notes as ‘exploring the interaction between Italian composers who lived in Dublin and Irish traditional musicians of the day’. The music of the recording was written in the first half of the eighteenth century. Dublin in the eighteenth century was the second city of Britain and attracted many of the foremost composers and musicians of the era. By the turn of the century there was an ever-growing demand in London for fashionable Italian music and musicians, often to the chagrin of native ones; in Dublin, the situation was no different, though in many ways more complex especially when viewed through the (fashionable) lens of postcolonialism. Reflecting some of this tension Drury casts her programme in two complementary halves: Italian and Irish. The CD offers a range of pieces by several composer-performers; with the exception of Turlough Carolan most of them will likely be unfamiliar to many listeners today.

At the heart of the CD is a selection of pieces taken from *A Colection [sic] of the most Celebrated Irish Tunes proper for the Violin German Flute or Hautboy* (1724); an important publication which includes the earliest printed copies of music by Carolan.¹ Indeed, it is the earliest printed collection of Irish tunes, signalling something of that often uncomfortable marriage of convenience between notated and non-notated musical cultures. Drury gives us a window into the tastes of the music-buying and listening public of eighteenth-century Dublin (for whom there was more on offer than Handel). The recording also highlights the emerging taste for vernacular music among the music-buying public, though the native repertoire had to be rendered more palatable

¹ *A Colection of the most Celebrated Irish Tunes proper for the Violin German Flute or Hautboy* (Dublin: John and William Neal, [1724]). The solo surviving copy is housed at the National Library of Ireland. Facsimile edition: edited by Nicholas Carolan (Dublin: Irish Traditional Music Archive, 2/2010). John Neal was active in Dublin from c1714, selling imported instruments and music; by 1723 he was organising weekly concerts at his music room in Christ Church Yard. Over the next decade he and William published eighteen music collections, claiming (with justification) to be the first to do so in Ireland.

by being couched in the fashionable Italian style. This is interlinked with the fact that purchasing printed music was a luxury that was largely restricted to the upper classes. Such reshaping of indigenous repertoires might today be problematized through the postcolonial gaze of oppressive cultural appropriation, but the collection nevertheless stands as a foundational repository of Irish music and its then socio-political context. Bookending the pieces from the Neale collection are works by two Italians who spent time in Dublin, Lorenzo Bocchi and Francesco Geminiani, and pieces by the Irish composers Burk Thumoth and Carolan. The music itself spans the second quarter or so of the eighteenth century and accurately represents the ubiquitous nature of the Italianate style popular in the British Isles at that point.

The disc opens with two sonatas by the little-known Lorenzo Bocchi.² Bocchi is first heard of in Edinburgh in 1720, where he was described as ‘the second Master of the Violin Chello in Europe’,³ moving to Dublin by 1723 and remaining there for at least the next couple of years. He is last heard of in 1729. During his sojourn in the Irish capital, Bocchi became a prominent figure in musical circles and his subscription concerts remain the first-known public concerts in Ireland. He contributed to two collections (one of Irish tunes, the other Scotch tunes) issued by John and William Neale in 1724. Around this time Neale also published Bocchi’s own collection, *A Musically [sic] Entertainment for a Chamber*,⁴ which includes two sonatas for violoncello (and continuo); both works are recorded here. Immediately, one is struck by the clarity and precision of Drury’s playing. The sonatas (each in three movements) demonstrate the fluency in Bocchi’s writing, influenced by both Corelli and Vivaldi; together they suggest something of his highly virtuosic style with rapid division-writing, wonderfully captured by Drury. The Sonata in D major (no. X of the collection; tracks 4–6) is especially impressive, with its boisterous opening Allegro and rapid divisions.

The modern reputation of Geminiani (1687–1762) is more secure than that of Bocchi, but a shadow of the esteem in which he was held in his own day. He arrived in London in 1714, quickly attracting a wealth of interest and patronage. He spent two

² The most complete account of Bocchi is to be found in Peter Holman, ‘A little light on Lorenzo Bocchi: An Italian in Edinburgh and Dublin’, in Rachel Cowgill and Peter Holman (eds), *Music in the British Provinces 1680–1914* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 61–86.

³ The perhaps hyperbolic quotation (given in Drury’s notes) is from an advertisement in the *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 11–12 July 1720, which is quoted in full in Holman, ‘A little light on Lorenzo Bocchi’, 62.

⁴ Lorenzo Bocchi, *A Musically Entertainment for a Chamber* (Dublin: John and William Neale, 1725). He seems to have reused the plates for a second print run in Edinburgh in 1726: see Holman, ‘A little light on Lorenzo Bocchi’, 68–74.

periods in Dublin: 1733–40 and 1758–62. Drury offers two sonatas from his opus 5 collection for violoncello (no. 3 in C major and no. 6 in A minor), published in Paris in 1746.⁵ While his earlier sonatas are clearly indebted to Corelli, the opus 5 sonatas are highly original works, full of interesting harmonic twists and turns, and deserve to be much better known. We can hear influences of French gamba music intermixed with Geminiani's Italianate Corellian style, with plenty of rapid passagework and implied contrapuntal lines. The Sonata in A minor is the better of the two works. The slow movements especially allow Drury to bring out the highly expressive lines.

From Italy (and France) we move back to Ireland and to the Neale collection. It is Bocchi who bridges the gap. As became fashionable after him, Bocchi developed an interest in the vernacular music of Scotland and Ireland. His Italianate arrangement of 'Plea Rarkeh na Rourkough or y^e Irish weding [sic]' ('Pléaráca na Ruarcach', generally attributed to Carolan) was included in Neale's *A Colection [sic] of the most Celebrated Irish Tunes*, wherein it was described 'As performed at the Subscription Consort'. In the collection, the simple tune (flute) is supplied with a bass and followed by a series of his frozen improvisations or in Bocchi's words (as printed on page 6 in the collection) the tune is 'improved with diferent divitions after y^e Italian maner with A bass and Chorus'.⁶ Only the tune (without the divisions) is recorded here (flute and cello). It runs into Aileen Henry's impressive rendition of Carolan's own famous Italianate 'concerto' (solo harp). Drury returns for the following number, the tune 'Thomas Burke', a pithy and unremarkable tune. The Irish tunes continue with two slow laments from the Neale collection. 'Limbrick's Lamentation' is evocatively rendered with the ethereal flute answered by Drury's languishing cello lines. 'Ye Clarge's Lamentation' (cello and continuo) continues in the same vein, as do the next three tracks taken from the Neale collection, each of which has been attributed to Carolan: 'Captain O'Kane' (harp, whistle, cello), 'Capten Magan' (cello), and 'Sí Bheag, Sí Mhor' (flute, continuo, cello).

⁵ *Sonates pour le Violoncelle et Basse Continue* (Paris: Le Clerc and Boivin, 1746). The collection was also issued by Philips in London in 1747. Geminiani's own transcriptions for violin were also published in Paris and at The Hague in 1746, and in London in 1747.

⁶ The tune is printed in score with a bass; the divisions are then given (without a bass); a separate 'CHORUS' part largely doubling the bass an octave higher is also given, which corresponds to 'Chorus' indications in the tune. Holman suggests that the piece may have been 'performed as a simple form of concerto, with Bocchi playing the solo part down the octave on the violoncello or viola da gamba, ripieno violins (playing the "Chorus"), and bass instruments'; see 'A little light on Lorenzo Bocchi', 72.

Particularly interesting are the two airs arranged by Burk Thumoth, published in London in his undated *Twelve Scotch and Twelve Irish Airs with Variations Set for the German Flute, Violin or Harpsichord*.⁷ With his collection of twelve English and Irish airs,⁸ this is one of the earliest printed collections of Irish tunes; both appear to have been published in the early 1740s.⁹ Thumoth is first heard of in Dublin in the late 1730s playing flute and trumpet in concertos and his name appears in several concert advertisements in Dublin, London and Bristol over the next decade. We know little else of Thumoth, though in the liner notes Drury concludes that his ‘irregular performance schedule suggests that he was not working as a professional musician, but was a soldier who only performed when his schedule allowed’. Indeed, one advertisement for a benefit concert in Bristol in 1747 describes him as ‘Belonging to his Majesty’s First Regiment of Foot Guards’.¹⁰ His two collections were evidently popular and reprinted in the 1760s and again in the 1780s. The first air included on the CD is the slow minor mode air ‘Slaunt Ri Plulib’ (no. V of the collection) and it is followed by the contrasting lively jig ‘The Major’ (no. VI): both are faultlessly rendered by McGeown. I don’t know of any other recording of these pieces; in them we can hear the same style as that of the Irish pieces in the Neale collection. The CD concludes with one of the more instantly recognisable tunes, ‘Carolan’s Farewell to Music’, the tune attributed to Carolan as he felt his death nearing in 1738. The minor-mode air ends the disc in a rather haunting manner.

This is a wonderful recording by five outstanding musicians. The CD is handsomely produced with programme notes supplied by Drury. The Neale collection is a fascinating resource revealing how vernacular music was being repackaged and reimagined. The repertoire may not be entirely familiar but it is well worth exploring. Drury is a highly impressive musician, both in terms of technical accomplishment and interpretation (one can hear the tracks online at her Bandcamp.com page though, of

⁷ Burk Thumoth, *Twelve Scotch and Twelve Irish Airs with Variations Set for the German Flute, Violin or Harpsichord* (London: John Cox, [n.d.]).

⁸ Burk Thumoth, *Twelve English and Twelve Irish Airs with Variations, Set for the German Flute, Violin or Harpsichord ... Book the Second* (London: J. Simpson, [n.d.]). His above-cited collection of Scotch and Irish tunes is described on the title-page as ‘The first Book’.

⁹ Facsimiles of both collections can be accessed on the International Music Score Library Project (IMSLP): https://imslp.org/wiki/Category:Thumoth,_Burke.

¹⁰ Quoted in ‘Thumoth, Burk, stage name of Burke of Thumond’, in Philip H. Highfill, Kalman A. Burnim and Edward A. Langhans (eds), *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers and other Stage Personnel in London, 1660–1800* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), vol. 14, 428–9: 429.

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course, we really should be supporting the artists by purchasing the release).¹¹ I hope it will not be long before she returns with a follow-up recording, and indeed that we will get to hear her play the music live in the near future.

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¹¹ <https://carindrury.bandcamp.com/album/irlandiani>.