

LAUNCH OF 'CEOL NA GCAIRDE' – PUGIN HALL – October 2, 2022

Ar an ócáid ceiliúrtha seo, ar mo shon féin agus ar son ár nUachtarán, an t-Ollamh Michael Mullaney, ba mhaith liom 'fáilte Mháigh Nuaid' a chuir roimh gach éinne. In addition to Cór Naomh Mhichíl and friends, I welcome Maynooth staff and students both past and present, including students who have just commenced their Church Music Studies. We are delighted to have amongst us representatives of the Irish Church Music Association, who hosted a memorable Aifreann as Gaeilge here/ just a couple of months back, the Coiste Comhairleach um an Liotúirge I nGaeilge, who continue to do such sterling work in the area of liturgical translation/ and representatives of the Bishops' Advisory Committee on Church Music, producers of the last major compendium of Irish-language church music,/ Canaimís.

One of the things that makes so many of us proud to be associated with Maynooth/ is the quality of the welcome that it provides to its guests. We are extremely grateful to President Mullaney/ not just for the generous hospitality that has been provided here today,/ but indeed for his personal support for this project since the very beginning. This was one of the projects selected for inclusion in Maynooth 225's calendar of events, linking in as it did so well/ with Maynooth's noble traditions of service to the Irish language,/ to liturgy and to music. Buíochas freisin d'ár Reachtóir/ an Dochtúir Tomás Surlis,/ mar is faoina ionspioráid agus a cheannaireacht féin/ a théann staidéir agus cleachtadh na Gaeilge ó neart go neart sa Chliarcholáiste/ le blianta beaga anuas. Fr Tomás's leadership and personal example/ ensure that the Irish language maintains a strong profile here at the National Seminary. Tá Eugene agus Póilín Uí Argáin faoi bhun na hócáide seo, agus táim an-bhuíoch díobh as ucht an cuireadh a thug siad dom cúpla focal a rá inniu.

Some thoughts on today's event

One of the things creative artists have difficulty with, is finding/ and then maintaining a context in which to create. Artists-in-Residence tend not to reside for very long/ and many performance-based works commissioned for specific events/ struggle to receive a second/ let alone a third performance. If only there was a stable yet dynamic community-based structure available to the artist/ which held within itself/ a constant imperative towards creativity for the good of that community. The liturgy of the Christian tradition and of the Roman Rite in particular,/ represents such a structure, /a majestic and intricate framework/ designed to plumb the heights and depths of an inexhaustible mystery,/ for the sake of those who gather for worship. Because it celebrates a living mystery/ always particularised in the here and now/ any artist who commits to it/ sooner or later hears the insistent call which lies at the heart of Christian liturgy: 'Cantate Domino canticum novum'/Canaigí amhrán nua don Tiarna/Sing to the Lord a new song.

This afternoon's launch presents the fruits of an ongoing response to that call/ from the members of Cór Naomh Mhichíl of the parish of Dún Laoghaire, under their ceannaire Póilín Uí Argáin. Founded in response to the liturgical developments of Vatican II,/ the choir made its own of the call/ to a greater inculturation of the liturgy/ and the adaptation of worship to the native musical genius of the world's various tribes and tongues. This treasuring and cultivating of local cultures/ has been a consistent theme in the writings of Pope Francis,/ from *Evangelii Gaudium* to his most recent encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*. Ag tús a phointeafachta, scríobh sé/ 'Tá orainn ár bhfréamhacha a chur fúinn in áit ár ndúchais,/ mar is bronntanas ó Dhia an fód torthúil sin.' 'We must establish our roots in the ground of our own place, /because that place is itself a gift from God'. (*Evangelii Gaudium* #235)

We associate the name of Seán Ó Riada and the parish of Cúil Aodha with the beginnings of the vernacular project here in Ireland/ and I am delighted to see Peadar Ó Riada's majestic hymn to St Patrick included at the end of the book, /mar chlabhsúr ar an mbailiúchán seo,/ transcribed by Pauline herself and published here for the first time. Tá saibhreas ollmhór fós le baint as thraidisiúin Chúil Aodha/ agus le cúnamh Dé, ní fada ón lá go mbeimid ar ais/ i gcuideachta a chéile arís anseo i Halla Phugin/ ag seoladh bailiúchán maorga sailm Pheadair Uí Riada é féin. Ó Riada's forthcoming psalm collection will mark another important milestone for Irish church music.

On an occasion such as this, /other names spring to mind in connection with the development of liturgical music as Gaeilge,/ names such as Tomás Ó Canainn, Fionntáin Ó Cearbhaill, Máire Ní Dhuibhir, An tAth Pat Ahern, An tSiúir Veronica Ní Chinnéide, An tAth Liam Lawton, Bernard Sexton and Ronan McDonagh, who has published most recently in the Irish language. *Ceol na gCairde* represents a timely and significant chapter in this ongoing project/ and its contents take us down some interesting pathways. Though clearly and solidly grounded in our native culture and language the first phrase of the opening hymn 'Féachaigí soir' /signals an outlook that goes beyond national borders,/ drawing on the musical and cultural heritage of Christian Europe, and/ as evidence of this, the impressive linguistic expertise of Cór Naomh Mhíchíl have produced finely-wrought Irish translations directly from German, French, Welsh and Norwegian sources. Those of us familiar with largely unsatisfying English-language adaptations of Bach's noble chorales/ will have been surprised earlier on by the richness of his 'Jesu, meine Freude' rendered as Gaeilge as Grá mo chroí thú, 'Íosa, /underlining the inherent sonority, beauty and singability of the Irish language/ and reminding us that words are not just carriers of content – in the liturgy it helps enormously if they sound beautiful as well. Chun

tagairt le Eoin Chrysostom sa cheathrú haois/ mar gheall ar véarsa éigin tarraingthe as salm na Cásca: ‘D’ordaigh Aithreacha na hEaglaise/ gur ceart do phobal Dé an bhéarsa seo a chanadh - toisc go bhfuil sé chomh domhain binnghlórach sin/ agus go bhfógraíonn sé uaisleacht teagasc Críostaí.’ Chrysostom’s principle of sublime doctrine encased within sonorous words/ as an effective means of liturgical engagement and evangelisation/ is something we have come to appreciate here more and more in the National Seminary as we gather to worship as Gaeilge each Friday morning. We thank the Irish Bishops for holding us to that discipline/ and for giving us,/ to use the words of Gelineau,/ ‘a different way to be before the mystery’,/ one which forces us to sink down deeper roots into our own native culture. This has necessitated a solid commitment of time, energy and creativity over a number of years, /but the results that are emerging point to a rich spiritual harvest, one that cannot be ignored after five decades of almost total reliance on the English vernacular.

Returning to the continental links evident in *Ceol na gCairde*,/ a celebrated 12th century Parisian chant/ *Jerusalem et Sion filiae* /resounds convincingly in the hymn ‘Pobal Dé’,/ and Sibelius’ classic melody ‘Finlandia’ lies very sweetly on its new Irish words. This linking with Europe however/ goes beyond the cultural appropriation of historical repertoire: the collection’s subtitle / *Fiche Iomann as Gaeilge do Chór ceithre pháirt* signals an intentional commitment to the integration of Irish music within a European choral tradition. A perusal of the new compositions which form the bulk of the publication/ reveals a musicianship familiar with the art of classical harmony/ yet skilled enough to make it serve rather than overwhelm a more subtle Irish musical aesthetic. These new settings, /born of the church musician’s answerability to the constantly changing feasts and seasons of the liturgical year,/ and the sense that these mysteries are to be contemplated and interpreted in this time and place, / surely

represent what lies at the heart of the psalmist's call /'Cantate Domino canticum novum'.

While the music presented in *Ceol na gCairde* is quite obviously Irish in origin,/ there are melodic formulations and harmonic shades in there that give rise to wonder of the most positive kind. The accompanying recording is a pleasure to listen to/ and gives a real insight into the Irish-language tradition of sung prayer and celebration/ that has been faithfully maintained and developed at St Michael's over the past fifty years. The handsomely-produced CD and book are available for purchase here today/ and I heartily recommend both. *Tréaslaím le Póilín Uí Argáin agus a cairde in gCór Naomh Mhichíl /ar bhailiúchán saibhir luachmhar/ a bhfuil ábhar macnaimh ann do gach duine,/ idir cheoltóir agus cléir, /agus guím rath Dé ar saothair uasal leanúnach a gceol eaglasta.* A publication such as this should inspire all of us involved in the work of liturgical renewal/ to explore new and imaginative ways to ensure that the 'voice of the Irish' resounds more consistently and fruitfully within our celebrations. We owe it to ourselves and those to whom we minister, /and if that ministry encompasses those recently arrived to our shores,/ we should make every effort to include them/ not by hiding but by sharing a unique heritage,/ keeping in mind Pope Francis' recent observation that 'there can be no genuine openness between peoples except on the basis of love for one's own land,/ one's own people, one's own cultural roots.' (*Fratelli Tutti* #143) We give thanks to God today for the twin inheritance of faith and culture that has given rise to this new collection/ and in that spirit it gives me great pleasure now to formally launch, /*Ceol na gCairde*.

Dr John O'Keeffe

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