

Promoting Ireland's rich cultural heritage with contemporary choral music

Dr Desmond Earley
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ACADEMIC



CULTURAL



SOCIAL

SUMMARY

Dr Earley's research looks at Irish traditional song, Irish choral music, and the relationship between the two. As a result of this research – and the subsequent composition and performance of new collections of Irish choral music by Dr Earley and the Choral Scholars of UCD – there has been significant worldwide engagement with the music and poetry of Ireland.

The ensemble's records (*Invisible Stars* and *Perpetual Twilight*) have performed exceptionally well, with 3 million listeners on streaming services, album sales in over 80 countries, and over 16 million views of performances on social media. They have outperformed all other professional choral ensembles on Signum Records from 2016 to 2018.

Dr Earley's research, creative practice and output – as demonstrated by published score sales – is influencing how choral directors around the world are programming concerts.

"For sheer beauty of sound and contemplative luxuriousness, this debut by the mixed-voice Choral Scholars of University College Dublin is an altogether captivating experience."

– *Classical Ear*

RESEARCH DESCRIPTION

In 2012, Dr Desmond Earley began his research into Irish traditional song, Irish choral music, and the relationship between the two. Groundwork included unearthing material at the Irish Traditional Music Archive, interviewing Irish-language scholar Professor Máire Ní Chíosáin, consulting with Professor Ron Pen of the University of Kentucky, and conducting field recordings of traditional singer Brian Ó Domhnaill.

Dr Earley found that traditional Irish song lends itself to adaptation for vocal ensembles, and that modern collaboration around historical music and texts of Ireland would promote the country's rich cultural heritage worldwide. However, his research confirmed that Irish choral music emerging from the 19th century took very little influence from Irish traditional melody or the Irish language.

Over the past five decades there have been pioneering developments in harmony, composition and arrangement on which this project builds. Dr Earley selected composers from Ireland and abroad (who contributed to these developments) to create new choral works based on his research. These works prominently featured Irish texts by Eva Gore Booth, William Butler Yeats, Frank McGuinness and James Joyce.



The Choral Scholars receiving a standing ovation at Carnegie Hall in 2019.

The final stage of the project centred around rehearsal and performance of these new choral works. Recordings were made in 2014 and 2015 at Castleknock College, and at All Hallow's Chapel in 2018. The production team included Nigel Short (producer) and Andrew Mellor (recording engineer). Post-production editing occurred at Floating Earth Studios in London. Two professionally recorded collections associated with this project comprise eleven world-premiere recordings, twelve arrangements of traditional songs for choir, eight new works by Irish composers, and seven new works by international composers. Related concert performances were presented at Carnegie Hall, New York; and the National Concert Hall, Dublin.

RESEARCH IMPACT

Evidence of the reach of impact

Sales figures of the digital and physical recordings made in association with this ongoing project are an indicator of impact and success: 3,000,000 streams on Spotify and Apple Music; 10,000 downloads of individual tracks; and 16,000 album sales in 80 countries worldwide. *Invisible Stars* (the ensemble's first album) continues to be a best-selling disc on Signum Records (BBC Music Magazine 'Label of the Year') since 2016. The Choral Scholars' recording of *Mo Ghille Mear* remains the label's most streamed song to date. Views of music videos associated with this creative output on social-media platforms have exceeded 16,000,000 worldwide.

Social and cultural impact

The social and cultural impact of this performance project is evident through direct feedback from listeners. Individuals from around the world have contacted Dr Earley to share their personal response to recordings and videos (see References for additional quotations):

"When describing Irish music, John O'Donohue spoke of the way 'the line of the landscape' and the 'memory of the people' finds its way into the music. It seems to express both the greatest joy and the deepest sorrow [...] with a kind of healing force. This has certainly been my experience while listening to *Invisible Stars*."

– Matt Chapman, Auckland, New Zealand.

Performances and media appearances

The success of the project has resulted in multiple interviews and performances on television and radio, concerts at prestigious venues, and other special appearances:

- (2019) Television performance. *CBS Sunday Morning*. USA. (6,500,000 viewers)
- (2019) *Imagine Ireland: Songs of Home*. Concert performance. Carnegie Hall, New York, USA.
- (2019) *Rivers of Light*. Concert performance. National Concert Hall, Dublin.
- (2019) Television performance and contribution. *Winning Streak*. (350,000 viewers)
- (2017) RTE Culture Night. Live radio broadcast. Arena. Dublin Castle.
- (2016) Television performance. RTE's *The Late Late Show*. (450,000 viewers)
- (2016) Performance for the President of Ireland at Áras an Uachtaráin.
- (2016) Television performance. RTE's 1916 Centenary. (500,000 viewers)

Impact on research

Dr Earley's creative output is changing how choral directors are programming material. This is indicated by the sale of printed music scores published by Seolta Music (Ireland): sales of sheet music from *Invisible Stars* have exceeded 10,000 copies. Press reviews of *Invisible Stars* have commented on the essence of this project:

"Blending 'folk' voices with choral precision and tight harmony isn't easy but Desmond Earley has a passionate stake in both and doesn't put a foot wrong here. Too many highlights to list, but Ivo Antognini's 'War' and 'Peace' stand out, as do a lovely arrangement for tenor of 'Black is the Colour' and Earley's own 'He wishes for the cloths of Heaven' (after Yeats)." ****

– Choir & Organ Magazine UK

Seven years of research and creative output – as represented by this project – has reshaped Irish choral music and has exceeded the expectations of impact. In presenting a collection of traditional song mixed with newer choral compositions, Dr Earley's work is impacting audiences, creators, performers, programmers and scholars across the globe.



signum CLASSICS

PERPETUAL TWILIGHT
THE CHORAL SCHOLARS OF UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN
DESMOND EARLEY

"WHATEVER THEIR DIRECTOR AND VOICE COACH ARE DOING, EVERY OTHER CHORAL DIRECTOR SHOULD BE KNOCKING DOWN THEIR DOOR TO DISCOVER".

GRAMOPHONE
THE WORLD'S BEST CLASSICAL MUSIC REVIEWS

REFERENCES

External links

- *Invisible Stars*, Signum Classics, [SIGCD436](#)
- *Perpetual Twilight*, Signum Classics, [SIGCD558](#)
- Seolta Music [College Choral Series Sales](#)
- Alliance Music, Antognini, I., [War and Peace](#)
- Video, *Mo Ghille Mear*, [YouTube](#)
- Video, *The Parting Glass*, [YouTube](#)
- An online cover book of press coverage of *Perpetual Twilight* for 2019 impact can be accessed [here](#).
- Carnegie Hall, New York, USA. [Concert Programme](#).
- Final Note Magazine, [Article](#)
- MPR New [Classical Tracks](#) 2019
- MPR New [Classical Tracks](#) 2016
- [Culture Night](#) 2017
- [Centenary Concert](#) RTE 2016
- Gramophone Magazine [Review](#) of *Perpetual Twilight*, 2019
- Hot Press [Review](#) of *Perpetual Twilight*, 2019
- Naxos America [Promotion](#) of *Perpetual Twilight*, 2019
- Amazon, [Customer Reviews](#)

“Whatever Artistic Director Desmond Earley and voice coach Síle McCarthy-Cannon are doing with The Choral Scholars of University College Dublin, it’s something every other choral director should be knocking down their door to discover.”
– Gramophone Magazine

“Blending ‘folk’ voices with choral precision and tight harmony isn’t easy, but Desmond Earley has a passionate stake in both and doesn’t put a foot wrong here.”
– Choir and Organ Magazine

“The Choral Scholars of University College Dublin is one of the finest choirs I have ever heard on my travels: such fabulous intonation, blend and musicality.”
– Nigel Short, Artistic Director, Tenebrae

“...a fascinating and continually changing landscape of sounds and imagery that instantly pleases the musical taste buds.”
– Sunday Business Post

INVISIBLE STARS

IN 2016 THE CHORAL SCHOLARS RELEASED *INVISIBLE STARS*, THE CHOIR’S DEBUT ALBUM ON A MAJOR RECORD LABEL, SHOWCASING THE CHORAL MUSIC OF IRELAND AND SCOTLAND.

3 Million
STREAMS

ON SPOTIFY & APPLE MUSIC

16,000

PHYSICAL AND DIGITAL ALBUM SALES

10,000 INDIVIDUAL TRACK DOWNLOADS

ALBUM REACHING 80 COUNTRIES WORLDWIDE

BEST-SELLING CHORAL ALBUM ON SIGNUM CLASSICS IN 2016 2017

INTERNATIONAL PRESS

- Gramophone Magazine, UK
- All Classical Portland, USA
- American Public Media, USA
- NPR, USA
- RTE Radio, IRL
- CBS Sunday Morning
- BBG Music Magazine, UK

GLOBAL DISTRIBUTION

COLLEGE CHORAL SERIES published with Seolta Music Ltd (IRL)

10,000

COPIES OF DESMOND EARLEY’S SCORES DISTRIBUTED TO CHOIRS WORLDWIDE

SOCIAL MEDIA SENSATION

12 Million

COMBINED VIDEO VIEWS

22,000 SUBSCRIBERS ON YOUTUBE

FEATURED VIDEO PARTNER OF

2 CLASSIC FM million followers

THOUSANDS OF FOLLOWERS, FANS AND SUBSCRIBERS

FACEBOOK
TWITTER
INSTAGRAM

“For sheer beauty of sound and contemplative luxuriousness, this debut by the mixed-voice Choral Scholars of University College Dublin is an altogether captivating experience.”
– Classical Ear

“Since their inception, the Choral Scholars of University College Dublin have been a cultural flagship for the university to which they belong. As their reputation has soared, the Scholars have handsomely enriched the choral landscape in Ireland, and their wonderfully polished performances and recordings attest the value of serious music as an educational as well as an artistic resource in UCD.”

– Professor Harry White, Chair of Music, UCD School of Music