

**THE MUSIC OF GERALD BARRY AS AN
INTRODUCTION TO CONTEMPORARY
IRISH ART-MUSIC: TWENTIETH-
CENTURY MUSIC IN THE NEW LEAVING
CERTIFICATE SYLLABUS (1999-2001).**

GARETH COX

In 1996 the Department of Education published a new syllabus for music in the Leaving Certificate at both higher and ordinary level and selected Gerald Barry's *Piano Quartet no. 1* (1992) as the prescribed twentieth-century work for the period from 1999-2001 for both levels. As one of the most prominent Irish composers working today, Gerald Barry (b. 1952) has already achieved international recognition with such operas as *The Intelligence Park* (1982-89) and *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit* (1991-92) and his music remains perhaps the most widely-disseminated of all twentieth-century Irish composers through numerous international performances and a publishing contract with Oxford University Press. This paper reflects firstly on the Department of Education's objective in selecting Barry's quartet as a prescribed work and then examines some aspects of the compositional style of Barry's music, in particular his selection and employment of pitch material, certain

**THE MUSIC OF GERALD BARRY AS AN
INTRODUCTION TO CONTEMPORARY
IRISH ART-MUSIC: TWENTIETH-
CENTURY MUSIC IN THE NEW LEAVING
CERTIFICATE SYLLABUS (1999-2001).**

GARETH COX

In 1996 the Department of Education published a new syllabus for music in the Leaving Certificate at both higher and ordinary level and selected Gerald Barry's *Piano Quartet no. 1* (1992) as the prescribed twentieth-century work for the period from 1999-2001 for both levels. As one of the most prominent Irish composers working today, Gerald Barry (b. 1952) has already achieved international recognition with such operas as *The Intelligence Park* (1982-89) and *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit* (1991-92) and his music remains perhaps the most widely-disseminated of all twentieth-century Irish composers through numerous international performances and a publishing contract with Oxford University Press. This paper reflects firstly on the Department of Education's objective in selecting Barry's quartet as a prescribed work and then examines some aspects of the compositional style of Barry's music, in particular his selection and employment of pitch material, certain

structural, linear, dynamic and agogic features of his music, whilst dealing specifically with the *Piano Quartet no. 1*.

Since 1976, the Leaving Certificate syllabus has included pieces by twentieth-century composers amongst its list of prescribed set-works: Igor Stravinsky's *Firebird Suite* (1911) and "Dumbarton Oaks" *Concerto* (1938), Manuel de Falla's *The Three-Cornered Hat* (1919), Aaron Copland's *El Salón Mexico* (1936), and Benjamin Britten's *Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings* (1943) have all provided a couple of generations of Irish post-primary students with their first taste of art-music from the present century. In 1988 the Department began introducing works by contemporary Irish composers into the syllabus, John Buckley's *Sonata for Unaccompanied Violin*, for the period 1988-1998 (appearing alongside Copland's *El Salón Mexico*), followed recently by Gerald Barry's *Piano Quartet no. 1* for 1999-2001 and Raymond Deane's *Seachanges* planned for 2002-2004. There is very good musical (not to mention domestic) justification for prescribing a work by an Irish composer in the national syllabus but one could question why major twentieth-century composers such as Berg, Schoenberg, Webern, Hindemith, Ives, Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Sibelius, Boulez, Cage, Glass, Ligeti, Messiaen, Xenakis, Stockhausen, Berio, and Bartók (to name a few and in no particular order) have never been included. However, since Barry's *Piano Quartet no. 1* is ranked alongside three other representative works of the Baroque and Romantic eras and Popular Music - J. S. Bach's cantata, *Jesu, der du meine Seele* (BWV 78), Tchaikovsky's overture, *Romeo and Juliet*, and Freddie Mercury and Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody* respectively¹ - it can therefore be assumed that it is considered to be correspondingly representative of the Twentieth-century or "Modern" era, and more specifically, indicative of the pluralist and multicultural nature of contemporary music nationally and internationally. On the question of the implied hierarchy and equality of status inherent in this list of prescribed works, Harry White deplores "the canonic status (the canonization) conferred upon a vulgar, third-rate pastiche of Italian opera intermixed with the desolations of rock music which is *Bohemian Rhapsody*" and the fact that it is "solemnly presented for scrutiny

alongside
repertoir
main obj
a wide v
the past
for teach
from this
century
affordabl
Hall's b
Conduct
based on
students
the musi
listening,
areas of
such a to
about⁶)
contempo
Boydell (b. 1933)
Sweeney
1951), R.
Johnston
short sele
Ireland in
topic.
Gerald
graduated
and an M
Piet Kee
1981 he
with Karl
between
Friedrich
lectureshi
for four y

alongside the pitifully reduced presence of the classical repertoire".² The new syllabus specifically states that one of the main objectives is "to encourage students to listen purposefully to a wide variety of musical styles and genres, including music from the past and the present".³ In order to achieve this, it is imperative for teachers to introduce a representative cross-section of music from this century (given the prohibitive cost of many twentieth-century scores and recordings, this could be achieved in an affordable way by purchasing a compilation, for instance Michael Hall's book (with accompanying CDs), *Leaving Home: A Conducted Tour of Twentieth-Century Music with Simon Rattle* based on the successful Channel Four series.⁴) The higher-level students could also study the context of Barry's work by choosing the music of contemporary Irish composers as their elective in listening, as is suggested in a list of suitable study topics from all areas of music in appendix G of the syllabus.⁵ Students selecting such a topic would be required to *listen* to (as opposed to read about⁶) available recordings⁷ of such diverse post-war and contemporary composers as Frederick May (1911-1985), Brian Boydell (b. 1917), Gerard Victory (1921-1995), Seóirse Bodley (b. 1933), Frank Corcoran (b. 1944), Jane O'Leary (b. 1946), Eric Sweeney (b. 1948), Roger Doyle (b. 1949), John Buckley (b. 1951), Raymond Deane (b. 1953), Eibhlís Farrell (b. 1953), Fergus Johnston (b. 1959), and Marion Ingoldsby (b. 1965) to name just a short selective list. The very active Contemporary Music Centre, Ireland in Dublin can assist in procuring material for any such topic.

Gerald Barry was born in Clarecastle in Co. Clare in 1952. He graduated from University College Dublin with the B.Mus. in 1973 and an M.A two years later and also studied in Amsterdam with Piet Kee (organ) and Peter Schat (composition). From 1975 to 1981 he lived and worked in Cologne and studied composition with Karlheinz Stockhausen and Mauricio Kagel (with a year in between in 1977/78 when he went to Vienna to study with Friedrich Cerha). He returned to Ireland in 1982 to take up a lectureship in music at University College Cork where he stayed for four years. In 1986 he was elected to the Irish state-sponsored

academy of creative artists, *Aosdána* which gave him a certain amount of financial independence and he has since worked as a free-lance composer. He now enjoys an enviable reputation and recognition abroad and his music has been critically acclaimed with some major performances in London in the late 1980s. The orchestral piece, *Chevaux-de-frise* was commissioned for the Promenade Concerts in London's Albert Hall in 1988 and his opera *The Intelligence Park* was staged at the Almeida Festival in 1990. Another opera, *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit* was performed on Channel Four TV in 1995 and is currently being recorded on CD. His recent successful appearance as one of the featured composers at the 1996 Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival where his *Piano Quartet no. 2* was premièred is an indication of his growing reputation. Also in 1995 a CD of his chamber music earned him much favourable criticism in the press and was nominated by *Classic CD Magazine* as the best CD of music by a living composer issued in 1995.⁸

Barry's output is relatively small and he has withdrawn all his works before 1977.⁹ He now composes mostly to commission although he has said that the danger is that "with more and more commissions [...] you lose that sense of direct contact with whatever it is that you do and sometimes a sense of weariness sets in".¹⁰ Perhaps this is why he has drawn so liberally on existing works, as in the case of *Chorales*, *Water Parted*, *What the Frog Said*, *Sweet Cork*, *Swinging Tripes and Trillibubkins*, and *Of Queen's Gardens*, all of which are derived from *The Intelligence Park*. Perhaps this is also why his style has settled down to being such a recognisably personal one, a style which could be described as being energetic, melodic, heterophonic, multi-sectional, and unpredictable. More on these adjectives later. Vincent Deane describes this style most succinctly when he writes:

Gerald Barry's music is a music of brittle extremes, which it makes no attempt to bridge or reconcile. It favours stark contrasts above graded transitions; jumping from one section to the next, its discontinuities clearly marked by widely diverging tempi and dynamics. If his titles often suggest comparisons with painting, this is more than a simple analogy. For here sound is a

tangible physical material, to be manipulated like paint or clay. American Abstract Expressionism has been a strong inspiration, and concentrated assaults on the same or similar basic materials over several pieces have resulted in sets of works that illuminate one another collectively, like painterly studies.¹¹

He was influenced to a certain extent by his main teacher in Cologne, Mauricio Kagel, particularly in his use of quotation techniques and his preference for the genre of music theatre (quite apart from his operas, many works display elements of theatre and histrionics such as his *Piano Concerto* of 1977, for instance, in which the soloist gesticulates but the sound appears from another pianist.¹²) Baroque influences are featured in his operatic works, *The Intelligence Park* and *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit*. Here much of his compositional material is derived from 17th and 18th century sources, in particular Bach and Handel. Barry clearly enjoys borrowing material and changing it, by, as he says "shedding light on it in some unexpected way or by showing it in a new light".¹³ Barry has also derived his pitch material aleatorically from such abstract sources as the words of the BBC Radio 4 shipping forecast or a chart showing the locations of manuscripts by John Jenkins (as in the graphically entitled ('_____'), or dissonant harmonies formed by selective use of passing notes in Bach chorales as in *The Intelligence Park*. Barry states that he has:

always been interested in things formed in the cracks - those pauses, say, which occur in Purcell, where he has symmetrical periods in the music, and at the end of a phrase there's an infinitesimal moment, which has to do with the power of the music and the rhythmic energy it generates.¹⁴

The *Piano Quartet no. 1*¹⁵ was first performed at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London in 1992 and was recorded by Nua Nós and Noriko Kawai (piano) on an NMC Recordings label (NMC D022) in 1993.¹⁶ Barry wrote this quartet following on within a long tradition of the genre of piano quartet which includes important works by Mozart, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Dvorák, Fauré and Brahms.¹⁷ He has supplied an excellent and detailed

MUSIC OF GERALD BARRY

analysis of the piece himself in the "Composer's Notes on the Piano Quartet no. 1" for the Department of Education's Resource Material Pack, and all students and teachers will receive this information. He explains that the piece "does not fit any standard form" but that "the only guide was intuition".¹⁸ He concedes, however, that "it is possible (in retrospect) to trace a clear map of the journey it has taken" and suggests that it "could be regarded as an unusual rondo form".¹⁹ Barry's sequence reads as follows:

*A/B1/C1/C2/B2/C3/D1/D2+B3/E1/C4/C5/E2+D3/C6/C7/+C8/C9/G/H*²⁰.

However, students might be well-advised initially to identify and recognise aurally the following two salient melodic ideas from which so much of the piece's material is derived, namely examples X & Y²¹.

MUSIC EXAMPLE 1:

Gerald Barry, *Piano Quartet no. 1*, bars 53-57: X

53 ♩ = 72
Vln. *f* roughly, *senza vibrato* *sim.*

MUSIC EXAMPLE 2:

Gerald Barry, *Piano Quartet no. 1*, bars 108-111: Y

108 ♩ = 138
Vln. *mf* *senza vibrato* < *f* *sfz*

Given the
be studie
the range
describe
students
technique
diminutio
which Ba
& Y. The
provided

The Q
structure
agogic, c
material.
syncopate
signature
ranging
indicatio
pauses. I
are acco
himself c
cuts, tha
are safe
you wan
do with
painting,
colour n
with an
moment
is derive
Mayo's
national
unusual,
idiosyncr
his work
after the
as, in th

Given that the new syllabus states that the prescribed works must be studied in detail in order "to understand, identify and describe the range of musical features used" and to be able to "analyse and describe patterns of repetition and change within the music",²² students should then have little difficulty in identifying the classical techniques of repetition, transposition, inversion, augmentation, diminution, imitation, use of different registrations and dynamics, which Barry employs to vary (rather than develop) his material X & Y. They can then proceed fruitfully to the more detailed analysis provided by Barry.²³

The Quartet is a typical example of Barry's multi-sectional structures, each section being clearly defined either by an abrupt agogic, dynamic, or instrumental change or by the use of different material. The rhythmic excitement and energy is generated by syncopation, polymetric techniques (superimposition of time signatures, e.g. bars 502-510, and 330 changes of time signature ranging from 1/8 to 4/2 within its 571 bars²⁴), changing tempo indications (20 in all), and the sudden punctuation of unexpected pauses. Episodic sections within the piece shift unpredictably and are accompanied by abrupt dynamic and tempo changes. Barry himself calls these "Moments of Changes": "Where it [his music] cuts, that is what I call the moment of change. As a composer you are safe once you proceed along the same path musically, but when you want to change to another musical world that has nothing to do with what precedes it, that is a moment of truth". [As in a painting, where an object meets another object, or one area of colour meets another], "the moment where an object intersects with another is a moment of great mystery, an intangible moment"²⁵. The pitch material of the opening and closing sections is derived from two Irish folk songs, *Sí Bheag, Sí Mhór* and *Lord Mayo's Delight* respectively. For Barry this recourse to his national resource of traditional Irish music for pitch material is not unusual, but as always, his source is obscured by the selective and idiosyncratic treatment it receives: other examples of Irishness in his works include the jig in *Bob* (1989), *Hard D* (1992) named after the drone on an Irish bagpipe, and less obvious allusions such as, in the case of "*Ø*" (1979), the addition and employment of

inessential contiguous pitches from the Irish melody "Bonny Kate"²⁶, and "Irish" features such as the use of instrumental heterophony. Certainly one of the salient features of the Quartet (and in many other works such as the *Sextet* (1992/93) for clarinet (bass clarinet), trumpet, piano, double bass, and two marimbas) is his obsession with linearity and in his own word, the importance of melody.²⁷ For Barry, the instrumental line is more important than instrumental colour; many of his pieces can be played by any instruments: '_____ ' for chamber ensemble appears as *Au Milieu* (1981) for piano solo and "Ø" (1979) for two pianos was arranged for piano, harpsichord, organ, and instrumental ensemble as *Sur les Pointes*²⁸. His melodic material undergoes much contrapuntal treatment: in the Resource Material, Barry notes the many examples of canons in his quartet, for example, in the opening section (bars 1-52).²⁹ But perhaps "canon" is not the most suitable term and students might well consider it more apt to describe this contrapuntal feature as being heterophonic or perhaps even as displaced monophony, particularly in this quartet where **most canons are simply at the octave**.³⁰

The N.C.C.A. Music Senior Cycle Course Committee has prepared draft sample questions for distribution by the Curriculum Support Team (Music) at cluster meetings. The extract given from the Barry quartet was the opening eighteen bars of the violin part with questions requiring the student to name the work, the genre, the period, and to identify two musical features that they heard in this extract to justify the period stated. I would suggest the following tasks to augment such questions for relevant class work:

1. Identify and play themes X & Y.
2. Identify examples of repetition, imitation, inversion, transposition, augmentation, diminution, syncopation, and different registrations.
3. Explain and locate the following terms: Tone-clusters, *flautando*, *détaché*, tritones.
4. Play bars 89-106 with piano clusters and treble instruments playing the cello line (written in treble clef).

5. Write out eight bars of crotchets in 8 different time signatures and clap as an example of syncopation generated by changing time-signatures.

6. Listen to a recording of the Chopin *Étude*, op. 25 no.10 for an example of double octaves. Or any suitable Polonaise such as op. 44 or op. 53.

7. Listen to Barry's *Sextet* (1992/93) for many similar features to the *Piano Quartet no 1*.

Finally, it is interesting to examine the excursive nature of his music as exemplified in the quartet and other works.³¹ Michael Blake writes that:

one of the most important aspects of his style is the fact that his music is not necessarily going anywhere; it does not need to: The listener derives satisfaction from what he/she experiences on the way and the composer's treatment of the material, rather than feeling the onward thrust of a goal and the inevitable arrival. Therefore in the musical argument we find an elaboration rather than the conventional development of ideas...³²

Volans and Bracefield trace this aspect of his style back to the 18th century Hiberno-English literature of Laurence Sterne in which "*A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* [...] never gets to Italy and *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* which tells us little of the life and nothing of the opinions of the hero". They note that "the pleasure lies in the conversation on the way, the artistry in handling the language".³³ A comprehensive study of this feature could draw on the hermeneutical deliberations of Hans-Georg Gadamer in *Truth and Method* in which he discusses the art of experience and the work of art, the *Erlebniskunst*. Gadamer states that "an adventure [...] interrupts the customary course of events, but is positively and significantly related to the context which it interrupts. [It] ventures out into the uncertain [...] but at the same time it knows that, as an adventure, it has an exceptional character and thus remains related to the return of the everyday, into which the adventure cannot be taken. Thus the adventure is "passed through", like a test, from which one emerges enriched and more

mature".³⁴ There is no doubt that, like many twentieth-century pieces, Barry's *Piano Quartet no 1* is not teleological and students must be encouraged to also just *experience* the piece and consider the notion of a musical adventure in sound which could well continue indefinitely. As Barry writes: "Here [...] we have a piece ending with completely new possibilities pointing in different directions".³⁵

NOTES

¹ The other prescribed works for 2002-2004 are Mozart's *Piano Concerto no. 23* in A major, K. 488, the second and fourth movements of Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*, and a Beatles selection.

² Harry White, "A Book of Manners in the Wilderness": The Model of University Music Education and its Relevance as Enabler in General Education in Ireland", paper read to the Music Education National Debate, Dublin, November 1996. To be published in *College Music Symposium* (U.S.A.) with responses by David Elliott and Bennett Reimer.

³ Department of Education, *The Leaving Certificate: Music Syllabus*, Dublin, 1996, p. 2.

⁴ London, 1996; Cds featuring music from the series: Vols. 1&2, EMI CDM 5-66136/7-2. Another brief and affordable overview of the music of this century is, Paul Griffiths, *Modern Music: A Concise History*, London, 1978.

⁵ *The Leaving Certificate: Music Syllabus*, p. 25

⁶ A limited amount of published material is however available. Apart from Axel Klein's excellent and comprehensive *Die Musik Irlands im 20. Jahrhundert*, Hildesheim, 1996 for which a translation is in preparation [non-German readers should see review by Gareth Cox in *Music and Letters* 78 (4) pp. 624-5].

⁷ Some of the readily available recordings include *Ceathrar, Irish String Quartets* (CHAN 9295), *Brian Boydell: Orchestral Music* (Marco Polo 8.223887), and *Celtic Connections* (CPS 8640). The Contemporary Music Centre in 95 Lower Baggot Street, Dublin 2 publishes a relevant CD Catalogue of Irish art-music.

⁸ NMC D022. In the same year *BBC Music Magazine* voted it one of the top 50 Cds of 1995.

⁹ The first work that he acknowledges is *Things That Gain By Being Painted* (1977), a piece of music theatre set to *The Pillow Book* of the tenth-century Japanese Sei Shonagon.

10 In in
Barry f
writing
that the
writing
wanted
11 Vinc
3. For
"Introd
and Ar
Septem
12 Cf. V
13 Clar
produc
14 Adria
15 The
*Quarte
Materi
1997*)
16 Othe
8.2250
17 Cert
ation: V
Time (1
also sub
18 *Curri
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Stud
partly c
heard a
the prec
22 *The
23 One
noting
a sectio
"a sign
commen
quality"
*Resourc
24 The S
25 John***

¹⁰ In interview with Jocelyn Clarke, *New Music News*, February, 1995, p. 9. Barry further: "The great thing about the early days, when you were first writing music and when commissions didn't play any part in anything, was that there was a great passion and spontaneity, and you never thought about writing something because you were being paid for it. You wrote because you wanted to write."

¹¹ Vincent Deane, Sleeve Notes for Gerald Barry CD, (NMC D022), 1994, p. 3. For further general information on Barry's music see Adrian Jack, "Introducing Gerald Barry", *Musical Times* (cxxix), August, 1988, 229-237 and Antony Bye, "Gay Days Spent in Gladness", *Musical Times* (cxxiv), September, 1993, 496-500.

¹² Cf. Vincent Deane, "The Music of Gerald Barry", *Soundpost* (2), 1981, p. 15.

¹³ Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 11: he states further that "you have an absolute duty to produce something which is as vivid in its own way as the original".

¹⁴ Adrian Jack, "Unspeakable Practices", *Music Ireland* (5/7), 1990, p. 8.

¹⁵ The author has submitted some of the following material on the *Piano Quartet no. 1* for inclusion in: *Curriculum Support Team (Music) Resource Materials for Leaving Certificate Music*, Department of Education (Dublin, 1997) (at press).

¹⁶ Other CDs of Barry's music include his orchestral music (Marco Polo 8.225006) and *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit* (Largo 5136).

¹⁷ Certain piano quartets in the twentieth-century use different instrumentation: Webern's *Quartet op. 22* (1930) and Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time* (1941) both substitute the viola with a clarinet, and in Webern's case also substitutes the cello with a tenor saxophone.

¹⁸ *Curriculum Support Team (Music) Resource Materials*, p. 6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Students should recognise, for example, that Barry's D1 at bars 318-344 is partly derived from the tritone interval of X but that E1, as Barry states, "is heard as new material" even though bars 357-372 are based on a retrograde of the preceding material. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²² *The Leaving Certificate: Music Syllabus*, p. 10.

²³ One could, however, question the appropriateness of the composer himself noting that the opening and closing sections are "structurally satisfying", that a section merges "seamlessly" with another, and describing a further section as "a significant and dramatic moment on the music's journey". Other specific comments refer to "the music's sense of abandon", its "ecstatic and hysterical quality", and its "exhilaration and power". *Curriculum Support Team (Music) Resource Materials*, pp. 6-12.

²⁴ *The Sextet* (1992/93) has nearly 300 changes of time signature.

²⁵ John S. Doyle, *Sunday Tribune*. 5th March, 1995.

²⁶ Cf. *inter alia*, Hilary Bracefield & Kevin Volans, "A Constant State of Surprise: Gerald Barry and *The Intelligence Park*", *Contact* (31), 1987, pp 9-19.

²⁷ Cf. Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

²⁸ In 1986 in an interview with Michael Dervan, Barry stated that "in recent years, one of my aims was to find a music which would be independent of tone colour, which could be played on any instruments with the appropriate registers. [...] I think I achieved a certain purity of sound in pieces like *Sur les Pointes*, which has been played, sung and danced in innumerable versions. I find the temptation of letting people hear these pieces from different angles irresistible". Michael Dervan, "Bowers of Bliss, of Blood...", *An Droichead* (1986) Summer, pp. 4-6, quoted in Klein, *op. cit.*, p. 354.

²⁹ *Curriculum Support Team (Music) Resource Materials*, p. 6. Regarding his *Sextet*, Barry specifically notes that "the main mode of expression is canonic". *Contemporary Music from Ireland* (CMC CD01), Gareth Cox, Sleeve Notes, p. 5.

³⁰ In an article in 1991, Harry White noted that "'canonic texture' is a meaningless phrase unless it applies to tonal counterpoint" and suggests that "when deprived of a tonal context, this intrinsic property of craftsmanship disappears [and that] some other term is therefore necessary to describe literal imitation in non-tonal music". Harry White, "The Holy Commandments of Tonality", *Journal of Musicology*, 1991, p. 256.

³¹ Cf. Gareth Cox, "Journey or Jaunt? Gerald Barry's *Sextet* (1992-93)". Paper read at Royal Musical Association Irish Chapter Meeting, Limerick May 1997.

³² Michael Blake, "Barry", *Contemporary Composers*, ed. Brian Morton and Pamela Collins, Chicago and London, 1992, p. 54.

³³ Bracefield & Volans, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

³⁴ Hans Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. William Glen-Doepel (London, 1975), p. 62.

³⁵ *Curriculum Support Team (Music) Resource Materials*, p. 6.

**THE MUSIC OF GERALD BARRY AS AN
INTRODUCTION TO CONTEMPORARY
IRISH ART-MUSIC: TWENTIETH-
CENTURY MUSIC IN THE NEW LEAVING
CERTIFICATE SYLLABUS (1999-2001).**

GARETH COX

In 1996 the Department of Education published a new syllabus for music in the Leaving Certificate at both higher and ordinary level and selected Gerald Barry's *Piano Quartet no. 1* (1992) as the prescribed twentieth-century work for the period from 1999-2001 for both levels. As one of the most prominent Irish composers working today, Gerald Barry (b. 1952) has already achieved international recognition with such operas as *The Intelligence Park* (1982-89) and *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit* (1991-92) and his music remains perhaps the most widely-disseminated of all twentieth-century Irish composers through numerous international performances and a publishing contract with Oxford University Press. This paper reflects firstly on the Department of Education's objective in selecting Barry's quartet as a prescribed work and then examines some aspects of the compositional style of Barry's music, in particular his selection and employment of pitch material, certain

structural, linear, dynamic and agogic features of his music, whilst dealing specifically with the *Piano Quartet no. 1*.

Since 1976, the Leaving Certificate syllabus has included pieces by twentieth-century composers amongst its list of prescribed set-works: Igor Stravinsky's *Firebird Suite* (1911) and "Dumbarton Oaks" *Concerto* (1938), Manuel de Falla's *The Three-Cornered Hat* (1919), Aaron Copland's *El Salón Mexico* (1936), and Benjamin Britten's *Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings* (1943) have all provided a couple of generations of Irish post-primary students with their first taste of art-music from the present century. In 1988 the Department began introducing works by contemporary Irish composers into the syllabus, John Buckley's *Sonata for Unaccompanied Violin*, for the period 1988-1998 (appearing alongside Copland's *El Salón Mexico*), followed recently by Gerald Barry's *Piano Quartet no. 1* for 1999-2001 and Raymond Deane's *Seachanges* planned for 2002-2004. There is very good musical (not to mention domestic) justification for prescribing a work by an Irish composer in the national syllabus but one could question why major twentieth-century composers such as Berg, Schoenberg, Webern, Hindemith, Ives, Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Sibelius, Boulez, Cage, Glass, Ligeti, Messiaen, Xenakis, Stockhausen, Berio, and Bartók (to name a few and in no particular order) have never been included. However, since Barry's *Piano Quartet no. 1* is ranked alongside three other representative works of the Baroque and Romantic eras and Popular Music - J. S. Bach's cantata, *Jesu, der du meine Seele* (BWV 78), Tchaikovsky's overture, *Romeo and Juliet*, and Freddie Mercury and Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody* respectively¹ - it can therefore be assumed that it is considered to be correspondingly representative of the Twentieth-century or "Modern" era, and more specifically, indicative of the pluralist and multicultural nature of contemporary music nationally and internationally. On the question of the implied hierarchy and equality of status inherent in this list of prescribed works, Harry White deplores "the canonic status (the canonization) conferred upon a vulgar, third-rate pastiche of Italian opera intermixed with the desolations of rock music which is *Bohemian Rhapsody*" and the fact that it is "solemnly presented for scrutiny

alongside
repertoir
main obj
a wide v
the past
for teach
from this
century
affordabl
Hall's b
Conduct
based on
students
the musi
listening,
areas of
such a to
about⁶)
contempo
Boydell (b. 1933)
Sweeney
1951), R.
Johnston
short sele
Ireland in
topic.
Gerald
graduated
and an M
Piet Kee
1981 he
with Karl
between
Friedrich
lectureshi
for four y

alongside the pitifully reduced presence of the classical repertoire".² The new syllabus specifically states that one of the main objectives is "to encourage students to listen purposefully to a wide variety of musical styles and genres, including music from the past and the present".³ In order to achieve this, it is imperative for teachers to introduce a representative cross-section of music from this century (given the prohibitive cost of many twentieth-century scores and recordings, this could be achieved in an affordable way by purchasing a compilation, for instance Michael Hall's book (with accompanying CDs), *Leaving Home: A Conducted Tour of Twentieth-Century Music with Simon Rattle* based on the successful Channel Four series.⁴) The higher-level students could also study the context of Barry's work by choosing the music of contemporary Irish composers as their elective in listening, as is suggested in a list of suitable study topics from all areas of music in appendix G of the syllabus.⁵ Students selecting such a topic would be required to *listen* to (as opposed to read about⁶) available recordings⁷ of such diverse post-war and contemporary composers as Frederick May (1911-1985), Brian Boydell (b. 1917), Gerard Victory (1921-1995), Seóirse Bodley (b. 1933), Frank Corcoran (b. 1944), Jane O'Leary (b. 1946), Eric Sweeney (b. 1948), Roger Doyle (b. 1949), John Buckley (b. 1951), Raymond Deane (b. 1953), Eibhlís Farrell (b. 1953), Fergus Johnston (b. 1959), and Marion Ingoldsby (b. 1965) to name just a short selective list. The very active Contemporary Music Centre, Ireland in Dublin can assist in procuring material for any such topic.

Gerald Barry was born in Clarecastle in Co. Clare in 1952. He graduated from University College Dublin with the B.Mus. in 1973 and an M.A two years later and also studied in Amsterdam with Piet Kee (organ) and Peter Schat (composition). From 1975 to 1981 he lived and worked in Cologne and studied composition with Karlheinz Stockhausen and Mauricio Kagel (with a year in between in 1977/78 when he went to Vienna to study with Friedrich Cerha). He returned to Ireland in 1982 to take up a lectureship in music at University College Cork where he stayed for four years. In 1986 he was elected to the Irish state-sponsored

academy of creative artists, *Aosdána* which gave him a certain amount of financial independence and he has since worked as a free-lance composer. He now enjoys an enviable reputation and recognition abroad and his music has been critically acclaimed with some major performances in London in the late 1980s. The orchestral piece, *Chevaux-de-frise* was commissioned for the Promenade Concerts in London's Albert Hall in 1988 and his opera *The Intelligence Park* was staged at the Almeida Festival in 1990. Another opera, *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit* was performed on Channel Four TV in 1995 and is currently being recorded on CD. His recent successful appearance as one of the featured composers at the 1996 Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival where his *Piano Quartet no. 2* was premièred is an indication of his growing reputation. Also in 1995 a CD of his chamber music earned him much favourable criticism in the press and was nominated by *Classic CD Magazine* as the best CD of music by a living composer issued in 1995.⁸

Barry's output is relatively small and he has withdrawn all his works before 1977.⁹ He now composes mostly to commission although he has said that the danger is that "with more and more commissions [...] you lose that sense of direct contact with whatever it is that you do and sometimes a sense of weariness sets in".¹⁰ Perhaps this is why he has drawn so liberally on existing works, as in the case of *Chorales*, *Water Parted*, *What the Frog Said*, *Sweet Cork*, *Swinging Tripes and Trillibubkins*, and *Of Queen's Gardens*, all of which are derived from *The Intelligence Park*. Perhaps this is also why his style has settled down to being such a recognisably personal one, a style which could be described as being energetic, melodic, heterophonic, multi-sectional, and unpredictable. More on these adjectives later. Vincent Deane describes this style most succinctly when he writes:

Gerald Barry's music is a music of brittle extremes, which it makes no attempt to bridge or reconcile. It favours stark contrasts above graded transitions; jumping from one section to the next, its discontinuities clearly marked by widely diverging tempi and dynamics. If his titles often suggest comparisons with painting, this is more than a simple analogy. For here sound is a

tangible physical material, to be manipulated like paint or clay. American Abstract Expressionism has been a strong inspiration, and concentrated assaults on the same or similar basic materials over several pieces have resulted in sets of works that illuminate one another collectively, like painterly studies.¹¹

He was influenced to a certain extent by his main teacher in Cologne, Mauricio Kagel, particularly in his use of quotation techniques and his preference for the genre of music theatre (quite apart from his operas, many works display elements of theatre and histrionics such as his *Piano Concerto* of 1977, for instance, in which the soloist gesticulates but the sound appears from another pianist.¹²) Baroque influences are featured in his operatic works, *The Intelligence Park* and *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit*. Here much of his compositional material is derived from 17th and 18th century sources, in particular Bach and Handel. Barry clearly enjoys borrowing material and changing it, by, as he says "shedding light on it in some unexpected way or by showing it in a new light".¹³ Barry has also derived his pitch material aleatorically from such abstract sources as the words of the BBC Radio 4 shipping forecast or a chart showing the locations of manuscripts by John Jenkins (as in the graphically entitled ('_____'), or dissonant harmonies formed by selective use of passing notes in Bach chorales as in *The Intelligence Park*. Barry states that he has:

always been interested in things formed in the cracks - those pauses, say, which occur in Purcell, where he has symmetrical periods in the music, and at the end of a phrase there's an infinitesimal moment, which has to do with the power of the music and the rhythmic energy it generates.¹⁴

The *Piano Quartet no. 1*¹⁵ was first performed at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London in 1992 and was recorded by Nua Nós and Noriko Kawai (piano) on an NMC Recordings label (NMC D022) in 1993.¹⁶ Barry wrote this quartet following on within a long tradition of the genre of piano quartet which includes important works by Mozart, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Dvorák, Fauré and Brahms.¹⁷ He has supplied an excellent and detailed

MUSIC OF GERALD BARRY

analysis of the piece himself in the "Composer's Notes on the Piano Quartet no. 1" for the Department of Education's Resource Material Pack, and all students and teachers will receive this information. He explains that the piece "does not fit any standard form" but that "the only guide was intuition".¹⁸ He concedes, however, that "it is possible (in retrospect) to trace a clear map of the journey it has taken" and suggests that it "could be regarded as an unusual rondo form".¹⁹ Barry's sequence reads as follows:

A/B1/C1/C2/B2/C3/D1/D2+B3/E1/C4/C5/E2+D3/C6/C7/+C8/C9/G/H²⁰.

However, students might be well-advised initially to identify and recognise aurally the following two salient melodic ideas from which so much of the piece's material is derived, namely examples X & Y²¹.

MUSIC EXAMPLE 1:

Gerald Barry, *Piano Quartet no. 1*, bars 53-57: X

53 ♩ = 72

Vln. *f* roughly, *senza vibrato* *sim.*

MUSIC EXAMPLE 2:

Gerald Barry, *Piano Quartet no. 1*, bars 108-111: Y

108 ♩ = 138

Vln. *mf* *senza vibrato* < *f* *sfz*

Given the
be studie
the range
describe
students
technique
diminutio
which Ba
& Y. The
provided
The Q
structure
agogic, c
material.
syncopate
signature
ranging
indicatio
pauses. I
are acco
himself c
cuts, tha
are safe
you wan
do with
painting,
colour n
with an
moment
is derive
Mayo's
national
unusual,
idiosyncr
his work
after the
as, in th

Given that the new syllabus states that the prescribed works must be studied in detail in order "to understand, identify and describe the range of musical features used" and to be able to "analyse and describe patterns of repetition and change within the music",²² students should then have little difficulty in identifying the classical techniques of repetition, transposition, inversion, augmentation, diminution, imitation, use of different registrations and dynamics, which Barry employs to vary (rather than develop) his material X & Y. They can then proceed fruitfully to the more detailed analysis provided by Barry.²³

The Quartet is a typical example of Barry's multi-sectional structures, each section being clearly defined either by an abrupt agogic, dynamic, or instrumental change or by the use of different material. The rhythmic excitement and energy is generated by syncopation, polymetric techniques (superimposition of time signatures, e.g. bars 502-510, and 330 changes of time signature ranging from 1/8 to 4/2 within its 571 bars²⁴), changing tempo indications (20 in all), and the sudden punctuation of unexpected pauses. Episodic sections within the piece shift unpredictably and are accompanied by abrupt dynamic and tempo changes. Barry himself calls these "Moments of Changes": "Where it [his music] cuts, that is what I call the moment of change. As a composer you are safe once you proceed along the same path musically, but when you want to change to another musical world that has nothing to do with what precedes it, that is a moment of truth". [As in a painting, where an object meets another object, or one area of colour meets another], "the moment where an object intersects with another is a moment of great mystery, an intangible moment"²⁵. The pitch material of the opening and closing sections is derived from two Irish folk songs, *Sí Bheag, Sí Mhór* and *Lord Mayo's Delight* respectively. For Barry this recourse to his national resource of traditional Irish music for pitch material is not unusual, but as always, his source is obscured by the selective and idiosyncratic treatment it receives: other examples of Irishness in his works include the jig in *Bob* (1989), *Hard D* (1992) named after the drone on an Irish bagpipe, and less obvious allusions such as, in the case of "*Ø*" (1979), the addition and employment of

inessential contiguous pitches from the Irish melody "Bonny Kate"²⁶, and "Irish" features such as the use of instrumental heterophony. Certainly one of the salient features of the Quartet (and in many other works such as the *Sextet* (1992/93) for clarinet (bass clarinet), trumpet, piano, double bass, and two marimbas) is his obsession with linearity and in his own word, the importance of melody.²⁷ For Barry, the instrumental line is more important than instrumental colour; many of his pieces can be played by any instruments: '_____ ' for chamber ensemble appears as *Au Milieu* (1981) for piano solo and "Ø" (1979) for two pianos was arranged for piano, harpsichord, organ, and instrumental ensemble as *Sur les Pointes*²⁸. His melodic material undergoes much contrapuntal treatment: in the Resource Material, Barry notes the many examples of canons in his quartet, for example, in the opening section (bars 1-52).²⁹ But perhaps "canon" is not the most suitable term and students might well consider it more apt to describe this contrapuntal feature as being heterophonic or perhaps even as displaced monophony, particularly in this quartet where **most canons are simply at the octave**.³⁰

The N.C.C.A. Music Senior Cycle Course Committee has prepared draft sample questions for distribution by the Curriculum Support Team (Music) at cluster meetings. The extract given from the Barry quartet was the opening eighteen bars of the violin part with questions requiring the student to name the work, the genre, the period, and to identify two musical features that they heard in this extract to justify the period stated. I would suggest the following tasks to augment such questions for relevant class work:

1. Identify and play themes X & Y.
2. Identify examples of repetition, imitation, inversion, transposition, augmentation, diminution, syncopation, and different registrations.
3. Explain and locate the following terms: Tone-clusters, *flautando*, *détaché*, tritones.
4. Play bars 89-106 with piano clusters and treble instruments playing the cello line (written in treble clef).

5. Write out eight bars of crotchets in 8 different time signatures and clap as an example of syncopation generated by changing time-signatures.

6. Listen to a recording of the Chopin *Étude*, op. 25 no.10 for an example of double octaves. Or any suitable Polonaise such as op. 44 or op. 53.

7. Listen to Barry's *Sextet* (1992/93) for many similar features to the *Piano Quartet no 1*.

Finally, it is interesting to examine the excursive nature of his music as exemplified in the quartet and other works.³¹ Michael Blake writes that:

one of the most important aspects of his style is the fact that his music is not necessarily going anywhere; it does not need to: The listener derives satisfaction from what he/she experiences on the way and the composer's treatment of the material, rather than feeling the onward thrust of a goal and the inevitable arrival. Therefore in the musical argument we find an elaboration rather than the conventional development of ideas...³²

Volans and Bracefield trace this aspect of his style back to the 18th century Hiberno-English literature of Laurence Sterne in which "*A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* [...] never gets to Italy and *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* which tells us little of the life and nothing of the opinions of the hero". They note that "the pleasure lies in the conversation on the way, the artistry in handling the language".³³ A comprehensive study of this feature could draw on the hermeneutical deliberations of Hans-Georg Gadamer in *Truth and Method* in which he discusses the art of experience and the work of art, the *Erlebniskunst*. Gadamer states that "an adventure [...] interrupts the customary course of events, but is positively and significantly related to the context which it interrupts. [It] ventures out into the uncertain [...] but at the same time it knows that, as an adventure, it has an exceptional character and thus remains related to the return of the everyday, into which the adventure cannot be taken. Thus the adventure is "passed through", like a test, from which one emerges enriched and more

mature".³⁴ There is no doubt that, like many twentieth-century pieces, Barry's *Piano Quartet no 1* is not teleological and students must be encouraged to also just *experience* the piece and consider the notion of a musical adventure in sound which could well continue indefinitely. As Barry writes: "Here [...] we have a piece ending with completely new possibilities pointing in different directions".³⁵

NOTES

¹ The other prescribed works for 2002-2004 are Mozart's *Piano Concerto no. 23* in A major, K. 488, the second and fourth movements of Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*, and a Beatles selection.

² Harry White, "A Book of Manners in the Wilderness": The Model of University Music Education and its Relevance as Enabler in General Education in Ireland", paper read to the Music Education National Debate, Dublin, November 1996. To be published in *College Music Symposium* (U.S.A.) with responses by David Elliott and Bennett Reimer.

³ Department of Education, *The Leaving Certificate: Music Syllabus*, Dublin, 1996, p. 2.

⁴ London, 1996; Cds featuring music from the series: Vols. 1&2, EMI CDM 5-66136/7-2. Another brief and affordable overview of the music of this century is, Paul Griffiths, *Modern Music: A Concise History*, London, 1978.

⁵ *The Leaving Certificate: Music Syllabus*, p. 25

⁶ A limited amount of published material is however available. Apart from Axel Klein's excellent and comprehensive *Die Musik Irlands im 20. Jahrhundert*, Hildesheim, 1996 for which a translation is in preparation [non-German readers should see review by Gareth Cox in *Music and Letters* 78 (4) pp. 624-5].

⁷ Some of the readily available recordings include *Ceathrar, Irish String Quartets* (CHAN 9295), *Brian Boydell: Orchestral Music* (Marco Polo 8.223887), and *Celtic Connections* (CPS 8640). The Contemporary Music Centre in 95 Lower Baggot Street, Dublin 2 publishes a relevant CD Catalogue of Irish art-music.

⁸ NMC D022. In the same year *BBC Music Magazine* voted it one of the top 50 Cds of 1995.

⁹ The first work that he acknowledges is *Things That Gain By Being Painted* (1977), a piece of music theatre set to *The Pillow Book* of the tenth-century Japanese Sei Shonagon.

10 In in
Barry f
writing
that the
writing
wanted
11 Vinc
3. For
"Introd
and Ar
Septem
12 Cf. V
13 Clar
produc
14 Adria
15 The
*Quarte
Materi
1997*)
16 Othe
8.2250
17 Cert
ation: V
Time (1
also sub
18 *Curri
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Stud
partly c
heard a
the prec
22 *The
23 One
noting
a sectio
"a sign
commen
quality"
*Resourc
24 The S
25 John***

¹⁰ In interview with Jocelyn Clarke, *New Music News*, February, 1995, p. 9. Barry further: "The great thing about the early days, when you were first writing music and when commissions didn't play any part in anything, was that there was a great passion and spontaneity, and you never thought about writing something because you were being paid for it. You wrote because you wanted to write."

¹¹ Vincent Deane, Sleeve Notes for Gerald Barry CD, (NMC D022), 1994, p. 3. For further general information on Barry's music see Adrian Jack, "Introducing Gerald Barry", *Musical Times* (cxxix), August, 1988, 229-237 and Antony Bye, "Gay Days Spent in Gladness", *Musical Times* (cxxiv), September, 1993, 496-500.

¹² Cf. Vincent Deane, "The Music of Gerald Barry", *Soundpost* (2), 1981, p. 15.

¹³ Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 11: he states further that "you have an absolute duty to produce something which is as vivid in its own way as the original".

¹⁴ Adrian Jack, "Unspeakable Practices", *Music Ireland* (5/7), 1990, p. 8.

¹⁵ The author has submitted some of the following material on the *Piano Quartet no. 1* for inclusion in: *Curriculum Support Team (Music) Resource Materials for Leaving Certificate Music*, Department of Education (Dublin, 1997) (at press).

¹⁶ Other CDs of Barry's music include his orchestral music (Marco Polo 8.225006) and *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit* (Largo 5136).

¹⁷ Certain piano quartets in the twentieth-century use different instrumentation: Webern's *Quartet op. 22* (1930) and Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time* (1941) both substitute the viola with a clarinet, and in Webern's case also substitutes the cello with a tenor saxophone.

¹⁸ *Curriculum Support Team (Music) Resource Materials*, p. 6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Students should recognise, for example, that Barry's D1 at bars 318-344 is partly derived from the tritone interval of X but that E1, as Barry states, "is heard as new material" even though bars 357-372 are based on a retrograde of the preceding material. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²² *The Leaving Certificate: Music Syllabus*, p. 10.

²³ One could, however, question the appropriateness of the composer himself noting that the opening and closing sections are "structurally satisfying", that a section merges "seamlessly" with another, and describing a further section as "a significant and dramatic moment on the music's journey". Other specific comments refer to "the music's sense of abandon", its "ecstatic and hysterical quality", and its "exhilaration and power". *Curriculum Support Team (Music) Resource Materials*, pp. 6-12.

²⁴ *The Sextet* (1992/93) has nearly 300 changes of time signature.

²⁵ John S. Doyle, *Sunday Tribune*. 5th March, 1995.

²⁶ Cf. *inter alia*, Hilary Bracefield & Kevin Volans, "A Constant State of Surprise: Gerald Barry and *The Intelligence Park*", *Contact* (31), 1987, pp 9-19.

²⁷ Cf. Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

²⁸ In 1986 in an interview with Michael Dervan, Barry stated that "in recent years, one of my aims was to find a music which would be independent of tone colour, which could be played on any instruments with the appropriate registers. [...] I think I achieved a certain purity of sound in pieces like *Sur les Pointes*, which has been played, sung and danced in innumerable versions. I find the temptation of letting people hear these pieces from different angles irresistible". Michael Dervan, "Bowers of Bliss, of Blood...", *An Droichead* (1986) Summer, pp. 4-6, quoted in Klein, *op. cit.*, p. 354.

²⁹ *Curriculum Support Team (Music) Resource Materials*, p. 6. Regarding his *Sextet*, Barry specifically notes that "the main mode of expression is canonic". *Contemporary Music from Ireland* (CMC CD01), Gareth Cox, Sleeve Notes, p. 5.

³⁰ In an article in 1991, Harry White noted that "'canonic texture' is a meaningless phrase unless it applies to tonal counterpoint" and suggests that "when deprived of a tonal context, this intrinsic property of craftsmanship disappears [and that] some other term is therefore necessary to describe literal imitation in non-tonal music". Harry White, "The Holy Commandments of Tonality", *Journal of Musicology*, 1991, p. 256.

³¹ Cf. Gareth Cox, "Journey or Jaunt? Gerald Barry's *Sextet* (1992-93)". Paper read at Royal Musical Association Irish Chapter Meeting, Limerick May 1997.

³² Michael Blake, "Barry", *Contemporary Composers*, ed. Brian Morton and Pamela Collins, Chicago and London, 1992, p. 54.

³³ Bracefield & Volans, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

³⁴ Hans Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. William Glen-Doepel (London, 1975), p. 62.

³⁵ *Curriculum Support Team (Music) Resource Materials*, p. 6.