

# A CELEBRATION OF CELTIC MUSIC

## TEXTS, TRANSLATION and PROGRAM NOTES

### LAMENT FOR MARY MACLEOD

**Pibroch** is an unusual type of music, native to the Scottish Highlands. They are performed on a bagpipe and were adapted to excite passion, particularly to rouse the spirits of fighting men before a battle. In Scots Gaelic, the original form for the name of this type of music is *piobaireachd*, and the Anglicised word *pibroch* is derived from the Gaelic pronunciation. The word is derived from the Gaelic *piobair* which simply means piper, and so *piobaireachd* can be taken as meaning pipe music. For this reason many pipers prefer the Gaelic name *Ceol Mor* which is Scots Gaelic for Big Music, to distinguish it from other kinds of pipe music which are called *Ceol Beag* or Little Music. The subjects of pibroch music are quite varied. The popular misconception is that all pibrochs are laments for someone who died, perhaps a soldier in battle or a beloved spouse, child, parent, or clan chief. Although a great many pibrochs are laments, other common subjects are salutes in honour of a person or event, and gathering tunes for the assembly of a clan.

An influential Gaelic bard born in Rodal, South Harris, Mary MacLeod (Mairi nighean Alasdair Ruaidh c.1615 - 1705) came to Dunvegan Castle (Skye) to nurse the MacLeod of MacLeod family. As was the tradition, she wrote songs and poetic verses in honour and praise of her employer and other clan chiefs of the region, such as the MacDonalds of Sleat, Mackenzies of Applecross and MacLeods of Raasay. Only sixteen of her songs survive. It is said that MacLeod committed some offence which resulted in her being banished for a time to the Isle of Mull.

**JOHN FIELD** was born in Dublin in 1782 and apprenticed under Clementi in London. He also worked for Clementi, showing off pianos to customers. He was described as a "pale, melancholy youth, awkward and shy; but he had only to place his hands on the keys for all such drawbacks to be forgotten." He settled in Moscow but was in delicate health and died there in 1837. He is remembered chiefly for his Nocturnes, which form a link in the history of pianoforte-playing between Clementi and Chopin. Not only the name but also the whole style and matter of these pieces were strikingly new and original. To these Nocturnes ("night-pieces"), Chopin and the pianists following him owe - more or less directly - much of their inspiration. - Theodore Baker

### AN AMERICAN ODYSSEY (The Triumph of the Irish Immigrant) Mary McAuliffe

*An American Odyssey* is framed by two "giants" of American essence and culture, *The Great Colossus*, and *America the Beautiful*. These two pieces embody the *raison d'être* of America, its hopes, its ideals, its stature in the world of free nations. They personify the spirit that lured millions of "tempest tossed" pilgrims from so many parts of the embattled and the impoverished world to its shores in search of a better life. It was this very ideal that drew John Armstrong from Ireland to Canada in 1869 to work on deepening the entrance to the Midland Canal at Point Colborne on Lake Erie and to work as a demolition expert crossing the country from Toronto to Vancouver with the Canadian Pacific Railroad, to see this vast North American continent as few had ever seen it, and to finally settle in De Smet, South Dakota.

Inspired by their uncle's experiences and his opportunities in this New World, and at his urging, two of John Armstrong's nephews followed in his footsteps and took the brave step of emigrating to America. The younger of these, Edward G. Mackay, father of Betty Mackay Asbury, left Belfast, Ireland in 1904 and sailed to America, and eventually settled in Georgia, where he served as Minister of the United Methodist Church both at Oxford, GA, and at Glenn Memorial, Emory University, Atlanta.

This piece attempts, in some small way, to reflect the feelings of absolute loneliness, of despair, of dejection felt by such Irish immigrants; but most importantly the hope, the great excitement, the stoicism in the face of what was for many, great adversity, bigotry and rejection. John Armstrong and Edward Mackay were luckier than most in that they did not personally experience the bigotry suffered by so many. Nonetheless their lives were utterly changed by their decision to come to America, their leaving, an "American wake", their every experience tinged with sadness and loneliness for family lost forever at home in Ireland. They also felt "the bitter tears among the alien corn", (Keats). It is indeed a triumph that so many millions of Irish like them grasped the challenge with both hands and finally attained the acceptance and great respect of the American Nation. It is this triumph that I wish to capture, these immigrants in time becoming true "Americans", joining immigrants from so many other nations in the great melting pot of this brave new world.

*An American Odyssey* has been, for me, a huge and lengthy voyage of discovery, a true odyssey, a most fulfilling and exciting project which has been greatly assisted by many friends throughout the US and here in Ireland. Since my first visit to the US in 1997, I was fascinated by the music I discovered, the vast range of idioms and cultures, and particularly the early folksongs brought by the first immigrants and assimilated into what was to become a new "American" culture. From that first visit, and increasing with each subsequent visit, I felt a great desire to work some of this music into my writings.

This commission for the Columbia Pro Cantare has become the most appropriate method of achieving my aim as I can imagine, this voyage of discovery of what it was like to be an Irish immigrant in this great continent of North America, drawing on some of the most beautiful and colourful music, texts, and folksongs of this great nation. I have attempted to stand in the shoes of John Armstrong as he viewed the mountains and the great vistas of the New World, as he watched with wonder and awe the amazing scenes unfolding before his eyes, as he viewed North America in all its beautiful and untouched glory of 1885. I have also attempted to stand in the shoes of Edward George Mackay as his ship pulled out of Belfast en route to Chicago in 1904.

With Betty Mackay Asbury's permission, I have quoted lines from her mother, Beulah Mason Mackay's, poem, written for her son James in 1940 on the eve of the Second World War. These lines have been truly inspirational in the writing of this piece.

"The temple of your dream still stands, 'Though dark the night".

In these lines I see the hope, the forward looking optimism, this light in the face of oppression which characterises the Irish immigrant in his struggle to find peace and acceptance in his new homeland.