

harp  
IRELAND



CRUIT  
ÉIREANN

MARCH 2023

# HARP PERSPECTIVES

COMPETING IDEOLOGIES:  
THE FEIS CEOIL AND THE PROMOTION  
OF IRISH HARPING 1897-1917

RACHEL DUFFY

the arts  
council  
s chomhairle  
ealaíon

funding  
traditional arts

Welcome to *Harp Perspectives*, Cruit Éireann, Harp Ireland's online journal. One of our strategic aims is to establish thought leadership across the harp sector by building up a body of thinking about the harp and harping through a historical and contemporary lens.

*Harp Perspectives* is a conversation about harping and features key informants, harpers and non-harpers, sharing their authentic views and ideas. We believe that this combination of scholarly research and personal insights will highlight the harping legacy inherited from our tradition bearers and help forge a contemporary harping identity, secure in its understanding of its origin and how it wishes to evolve.

As young harpers prepare for the 2023 Feis Ceoil, Rachel Duffy explores harp competitions there between 1807 and 1917. She positions the festival within its social and cultural milieu to examine the factors, often competing, which influenced the Irish harp landscape of the early twentieth century.

Our thanks to each of our contributors for their willingness to add their voices. Their contributions will no doubt enrich and inform our thinking.

Aibhlín McCrann and Eithne Benson

Editors

March 2023

*Harp Perspectives* is the Cruit Éireann, Harp Ireland online journal. Views expressed in any article published belong to the author only. Cruit Éireann, Harp Ireland accepts no liability or responsibility for the validity or accuracy of the information provided.

# COMPETING IDEOLOGIES: THE FEIS CEOIL AND THE PROMOTION OF IRISH HARPING 1897-1917

Rachel Duffy

This article explores harping in the Feis Ceoil between 1897 and 1917. It considers harp competitions and performances connected to the festival with reference to entry numbers and trends, syllabi and repertoire, press commentary and annual reports. It also positions the festival within the wider social and cultural milieu of the period in order to examine factors, often competing, which influenced the Irish harp landscape of the early twentieth century.

An Irish cultural revival in the late nineteenth century saw the formation of several organisations, among them the Gaelic Athletic Association (1884), the National Literary Society (1892), the Irish Literary Theatre (1899), and pertinently in this context, the Gaelic League (1893). The latter organisation played a leading role in a movement to reconstruct an Irish identity in the face of a perceived threat from Anglo-Irish values. It was this ideology, combined with public debate surrounding the neglect of Irish music, which prompted Annie Patterson<sup>1</sup> to approach the Gaelic League in 1894, proposing a revival of ‘ancient Irish Feiseanna’.<sup>2</sup> Following a meeting at Patterson’s home in February 1895, the Feis Ceoil Association was established and a committee was formed which featured representatives of literary and cultural organisations and the Dublin Press.<sup>3</sup> The aims of the Association were as follows:

to promote the study and cultivation of Irish music, to cultivate music in general in Ireland, to hold an annual Feis Ceoil consisting of competitions and concerts, and to collect and preserve, by publication, the old airs of Ireland.<sup>4</sup>

---

1 Annie Wilson Patterson (1868-1934) was a musician, author and pedagogue, and the driving force behind the establishment of the Feis Ceoil Association.

2 Jennifer O’Connor-Madsen, ‘The Development of the Female Musician in Nineteenth-Century Dublin’, in Jennifer O’Connor-Madsen, Laura Watson and Ita Beausang eds., *Women and Music in Ireland* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2022), 52.

3 Martin Dowling, *Traditional Music and Irish Society: Historical Perspectives* (Surrey and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 160-161; Annie Patterson, ‘The Feis Ceoil Festival’, *Irish Times*, May 18, 1901.

4 Marie McCarthy, ‘The Transmission of Music and the Formation of National Identity in Early Twentieth-Century Ireland’, in Patrick F. Devine and Harry White, eds., *Irish Musical Studies: The Maynooth International Musicological Conference 1995, Selected Proceedings: Part Two* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996), 148.

While concentrating on national interests, the Feis Ceoil was part of a wider international movement. Initially envisioned as an Irish music festival, a dual approach was adopted which saw the inclusion of competitions for both Irish music and European art music, largely due to the influence of Edith Oldham.<sup>5</sup> Links were also established with the festival's Welsh counterpart, the Eisteddfod, which sent a delegation to the first Feis Ceoil.<sup>6</sup>

## The First Festival

The inaugural festival, held in Dublin from 18-21 May 1897, featured a competition for 'modern double-action' harp<sup>7</sup> in which Mrs. Kenny from Dublin was awarded first prize.<sup>8</sup> While this competition was listed in a category entitled 'Instrumental Competitions', a second harp competition for 'Irish Wire-strung Harp, any size' was included among the 'Competitions of Archaeological Interest'. The use of language is significant here. Whereas the double-action harp is prefaced with the term 'modern,' the wire-strung harp is positioned as an instrument of antiquarian interest. As was the case with the 'Irish Pipes,' also included in this section, candidates in the wire-strung harp competition were free to choose their own repertoire, provided it was 'Irish in character'.<sup>9</sup> Despite this open approach, and the incentive of monetary prizes, it appears that there were no entrants. Two other competitions are noteworthy from a harping perspective: a special prize presented by Owen Lloyd<sup>10</sup> for the performance of 'old Irish Airs', awarded to Miss May O'Keeffe from Clonmel,<sup>11</sup> and a prize for 'the best harp solo composition'.<sup>12</sup>

---

5 O'Connor-Madsen, 'The Development of the Female Musician in Nineteenth-Century Dublin', 52. Edith Oldham (1865-1950) was a pianist and a teacher at the Royal Irish Academy of Music. She was involved in establishing the Feis Ceoil Association and served as Honorary Secretary (1896-1905) and as Vice President (1905-1950).

6 *Irish Times*, May 11, 1897

7 The double-action harp is referred to as the 'modern double-action harp' in Feis Ceoil syllabi throughout the period under discussion.

8 'Feis Ceoil Irish Musical Festival, Belfast May 2-7 1898: Syllabus of Prize Competitions', National Library of Ireland (NLI), Feis Ceoil Association Papers (FCAP), F276; An *Irish Times* article lists several competitions pending review by the Executive Committee following objections, among them the modern double-action harp competition in which Mrs. Kenny was initially awarded second prize. *Irish Times*, June 05, 1897.

9 'Feis Ceoil Irish Musical Festival, Dublin 18-21 May 1897: Prize Competitions and Concert Arrangements', NLI, FCAP.

10 As an exponent of the pedal harp and the Irish harp, a pedagogue, composer and arranger, harpist Owen Lloyd (c. 1852-1929) was highly involved in Irish cultural life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

11 'Feis Ceoil Irish Musical Festival, Belfast May 2-7 1898: Syllabus of Prize Competitions', NLI, FCAP.

12 'Feis Ceoil Irish Musical Festival, Dublin 18-21 May 1897: Prize Competitions and Concert Arrangements', NLI, FCAP.

In addition to competitions, a series of concerts accompanied the festival. At a meeting of the programme subcommittee on 9 January 1897, the inclusion of the harp was the first item discussed, as follows:

The question of the possibility of having the Irish wire strung harp in the first part of the first concert was under consideration. Dr Annie Patterson said that Mr Morley of London, was prepared to manufacture models of the Old Irish harp at a cost of about five pounds. The names of a possible band of harpers were mentioned, and the Hon. Sec. was instructed to write to Sister Attracta, Loreto Abbey, Rathfarnham with a view of getting the names of other performers.<sup>13</sup>

Reference to the wire-strung harp and to Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham, a school where pedal and later Irish harp were taught, indicate that from the outset the committee planned to engage with several facets of the harping tradition. Also of note are the connections evidenced with the harping community, both in Dublin<sup>14</sup> and London.<sup>15</sup> However, despite the offer of wire-strung harps from Morley, finding a harper proved challenging. At a meeting on 3 April 1897 the committee was informed of a recent performance on the ‘ancient Irish harp’ which had taken place in Cork,<sup>16</sup> but the search was still ongoing when the concert programme was drafted on 13 April 1897 and was ultimately unsuccessful.<sup>17</sup>

The harp nevertheless played a significant role in the inaugural concert, held on 18 May 1897 in the Royal University Buildings, Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin. Press commentary in advance of the event describes the inclusion of a band of harpers as ‘[a] striking feature’ of the programming.<sup>18</sup>

---

13 Minute book of Programme / Musical Committee 1896 Dec.-1903 Nov., NLI, FCAP, MS 34,916.

14 A member of the Loreto Order, Mother Attracta Coffey (1849-1920) was musical directress at Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham. She published arrangements and educational materials for harp and Sheila Larchet Cuthbert maintains that she played a key role in the inclusion of the harp in the Feis Ceoil. Sheila Larchet Cuthbert, *The Irish Harp Book: a tutor and companion* (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2004), 241. Clare McCague, *The Pedal Harp Tradition in Ireland (c.1790-1900): Practitioners, Pedagogy, Trade and Repertoire* (PhD Thesis, Technological University Dublin, 2021), 135.

15 J. G Morley (1847-1921) was a London-based harp maker. Nancy Hurrell suggests that his interactions with the Feis Ceoil may have influenced his foray into Irish harp making. Nancy Hurrell, *The Egan Irish Harps: Tradition, patrons and players* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2019), 237.

16 Reverend Brother Patrick of St. Mary’s College informed Edith Oldham of the performance, which appears to have been by a female harper. Minute book of Programme / Musical Committee 1896 Dec.-1903 Nov., NLI, FCAP.

17 Reference is made to the inclusion of ‘Ancient Irish Harp (if possible)’. Minute book of Programme / Musical Committee 1896 Dec.-1903 Nov., NLI, FCAP.

18 *Irish Times*, May 15, 1897.



Figure 1: Feis Ceoil Programme 1897. Image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.

The band featured six female harpers and performed in the first half of the concert which explored ‘Antient Irish Music’.<sup>19</sup> They accompanied the opening item, ‘The Gol and Irish Caoine or Lament’ from Bunting’s 1840 volume, sung by Mrs. Scarff-Goodman with a chorus, and played three Irish airs arranged for harp by Dr. J. C. Culwick: the ‘Londonderry Air,’ ‘An Londubh’ (The Blackbird), and ‘Munster Jig.’ A review in the *Irish Times* observes that ‘[t]hough not strong numerically the band gave an effective rendering of the three airs very different in character and motive.’<sup>20</sup> The second half of the concert focused on ‘Modern Irish Music.’ Harpist Owen Lloyd

19 1897 Concert Programmes, ‘First Concert, Tuesday, May 18th’, NLI, FCAP, MS 34,916. In addition to the harp performances discussed, the concert programme highlights connections between several other items in the first half and the harp tradition. Examples include the songs ‘*Tighearna Mhaigheo*’ (Lord Mayo) and ‘*Fainne geal an lae*’ (The Dawning of the Day), which were performed at the 1792 Belfast Harpers’ Assembly.

20 *Irish Times*, May 19, 1897.

played a selection of Irish airs, concluding with his ‘masterly arrangement’ of ‘Brian Boru’s March’.<sup>21</sup> This was followed by an encore of Welsh airs ‘in response to a vigorous outburst of cheering’.<sup>22</sup> Covered in the national press, the concert provided a platform for the high-profile promotion of the harp and inspired further performances. Lloyd and fellow harpist Annie Fagan were among the performers at two such concerts organised by baritone William Ludwig in the Round Room of the Rotunda in June 1897<sup>23</sup>

A second festival was held in Belfast in 1898. In addition to the double-action harp competition and the prize for harp solo composition, the Carl Oberthür prize was introduced which called for compositions scored for a small orchestra of strings, woodwind, and harp.<sup>24</sup> A notable change is the reworking of the Irish harp competition, no longer catering for the wire-strung harp but instead for ‘small Irish harp’,<sup>25</sup> and now included in the category ‘Competitions for National Irish Instruments,’ alongside the ‘Irish Pipes.’ The absence of an entry fee in both competitions suggests a commitment to promoting the harp and the uilleann pipes, while the change in focus shows a willingness to adapt to the Irish harp landscape. However, despite these efforts, no winners are listed in relation to either the practical or composition competitions for harp, suggesting that engagement was low.<sup>26</sup>

Similar competitions for harp were included in the 1899 festival.<sup>27</sup> While there was an overall increase in entries in 1899, there were just two competitors in the harp competitions, both from Dublin and both participating in the double-action harp competition.<sup>28</sup> A unique feature of this festival was an accompanying Musical Loan exhibition in the National Library and the National Museum, Kildare Street, which provided an opportunity for the public to interact with the harp and its history. Of

---

21 *Irish Times*, May 19, 1897. This piece was initially considered as a final item in the first half of the concert, to be performed by the Band of Harps. Meeting of the programme subcommittee, April 13, 1897. Minute book of Programme / Musical Committee 1896 Dec.-1903 Nov., NLI, FCAP.

22 *Irish Times*, May 19, 1897.

23 ‘Mr. William Ludwig’s Concert’, *Irish Times*, June 10, 1897. Further concerts were held in the same venue in September 1897. ‘Three Grand Irish Concerts’, *Evening Herald*, September 16, 1897.

24 ‘Feis Ceoil Irish Musical Festival, Belfast May 2-7 1898: Syllabus of Prize Competitions’, NLI, FCAP. This prize was funded by three pedal harpists, Edith Davis, Louisa Cane and Lottie Coates, in memory of their former teacher. McCague, *The Pedal Harp Tradition in Ireland (c.1790-1900)*, 191-192.

25 This term is used in syllabi throughout this period. This type of harp will be referred to as the ‘Irish harp’ throughout this paper.

26 ‘Feis Ceoil Irish Musical Festival, Dublin 15-20 May 1899: Syllabus of Prize Competitions’, NLI, FCAP.

27 ‘Feis Ceoil Irish Musical Festival, Dublin 15-20 May 1899: Syllabus of Prize Competitions’, NLI, FCAP.

28 *Irish Times*, March 27, 1899.

particular note are materials relating to the Belfast Harpers' Assembly of 1792, and historical harps purported to belong to two performers at the Assembly, O'Neill and Hempson.<sup>29</sup>

## A New Century

Helen Lawlor notes that entering the twentieth century the Irish harp 'carried musical, symbolic and ideological implications'.<sup>30</sup> These associations provided fertile grounds for the sustenance of the harp tradition, albeit through the lens of an antiquarian or romantic viewpoint which often characterised performances of this era.<sup>31</sup> The Feis Ceoil initially adopted this approach, positioning the Irish harp both in competition and concert programming as an 'ancient instrument.' However, the festival's approach to the instrument in the early twentieth century was characterised by attempts to engage with the living tradition of Irish harping.

By 1900 the Feis Ceoil was an annual fixture, and the harp competitions began to follow an established format. There were two notable adjustments in the first decade of the century. Firstly, the double-action harp competition was divided into junior and senior categories from 1900 onwards.<sup>32</sup> Secondly, test pieces were introduced in the Irish harp competition from 1903, aligning this competition with the same literate approach adopted for the double-action harp competitions. However, while the focus of this competition changed, the adjudicators' comments continued to reflect the former antiquarian approach. Graham P. Moore adjudicated the pianoforte, chamber music and Irish harp competitions at the 1908 festival. In commenting on the pianoforte competitions, Moore discusses the need for training and institutional support for rising talent. His report on the harp competitions is sentimental in comparison:

There was some good playing on the Irish harp, an instrument with a romantic history, and one that should not be neglected by those desirous of fostering the

---

29 D.J. O'Donoghue, *Feis Ceoil, 1899: Catalogue of the Musical Loan Exhibition* (Dublin: Feis Ceoil Association, 1899).

30 Helen Lawlor, *Irish Harping 1900-2010* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2012), 20.

31 Helen Lawlor, *Irish Harping 1900-2010* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2012), 18.

32 The new categories catered for competitors under and over 18 years of age respectively. At a meeting of the musical subcommittee on September 13, 1897, it was agreed that two grades should be introduced in the harp competitions, however this change was not implemented until 1900. Minute book of Programme / Musical Committee 1896 Dec.-1903 Nov., NLI, FCAP.



love of native music in a country where national feeling runs so strong.<sup>33</sup>

Practical steps were taken to support the development of harping within the Feis Ceoil, including the Joseph Seymour Prize, initiated in 1909. The syllabus reads:

An Irish Harp has been presented by Mr. Joseph Seymour to be competed for annually, to become the absolute property of the winner of three consecutive years. Test Pieces – Candidate’s own selection – Any two Pieces for Irish Harp.<sup>34</sup>

Interestingly, the 1910 syllabus specifies that the prize is a ‘large Irish harp’.<sup>35</sup> The syllabus was further amended in 1911 to note that competitors could perform ‘on either the large or small Irish Harp’, thus expanding the scope of the competition, perhaps due to low entry numbers.<sup>36</sup> Aggie Sherry was the only entrant in 1909, and having already won the Irish harp competition, she was excused from playing and awarded the prize.<sup>37</sup> Sherry retained the title in 1910 and 1911, thereby winning the harp outright.<sup>38</sup> The challenge of winning the competition on three successive occasions encouraged sustained engagement with the tradition, a proposition supported by adjudication comments in 1911 regarding Sherry’s improvement since the previous year.<sup>39</sup> She continued to play thereafter, receiving a commendation in the junior double-action competition in 1912.<sup>40</sup>

The format of the harp competitions remained consistent into the second decade of the twentieth century. In 1916 the festival was rescheduled as a result of political turmoil, taking place in July in the Central Model Schools, Marlborough Street, Dublin.<sup>41</sup> The following year the festival was reinstated in May, completing its twentieth year in two new locations: the Mansion House, and 6 St. Stephen’s Green, Dublin.<sup>42</sup>

---

33 *Irish Times*, October 13, 1908.

34 ‘Feis Ceoil Irish Musical Festival Dublin, May 1909: Syllabus of Prize Competitions’, NLI, FCAP. Seymour, who served on the Executive Committee and musical subcommittee of the Feis Ceoil, also sponsored the prize for the modern double-action harp competition at the inaugural festival.

35 ‘Feis Ceoil Irish Musical Festival, Dublin May 9th to 14th, 1910: Syllabus of Prize Competitions’, NLI, FCAP.

36 ‘Feis Ceoil Irish Musical Festival, Dublin May 8th to 13th, 1911: Syllabus of Prize Competitions’, NLI, FCAP.

37 *Irish Times*, May 29, 1909; Lawlor, *Irish Harping, 1900–2010*, 23.

38 *Irish Times*, May 21, 1910; *Irish Times*, May 10, 1911.

39 *Irish Times*, May 10, 1911.

40 *Irish Times*, May 11, 1912.

41 *Irish Times*, July 18, 1916. The festival was affected by the aftermath of the Easter Rising, an armed insurrection against British rule in Ireland which took place in Dublin in April 1916.

42 *Irish Times*, May 04, 1917.

## Entry Numbers, Prize-winners, and Harpists

Entry numbers in the double-action harp competitions were generally low throughout the first twenty years of the festival. There were seemingly no entries for the senior competition in 1898 and 1908. A brief increase followed thereafter with six entries in the senior division in 1909 and three in the junior division.<sup>43</sup> However, the period 1911 to 1916 saw a drop in participation with no junior winners listed between 1911 and 1914 with the exception of one commendation in 1912,<sup>44</sup> and no prizes awarded in the senior competition between 1912 and 1916. Entry numbers in the Irish harp competitions show greater variance. While the first three festivals yielded no winners, there were eleven entries for the 1900 festival, held in Belfast. This popularity was short-lived, with numbers remaining low but consistent until 1910 when there was a decrease in activity. No prizes were awarded in 1910 or in the years 1912 to 1916. Test pieces were repeated in the double-action harp competitions in 1899, in the Irish harp competition in 1910 and 1912, and in all harp competitions between 1914 and 1916, corroborating the idea that engagement was limited in the second decade of the twentieth century.

In surveying the list of prize-winners, the role of convent schools in promoting the harp is clear. Many prize-winners during this period were students of Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham.<sup>45</sup> However, harping was by no means limited to this centre, as illustrated in Table 1 which details the areas and institutions referenced in press coverage of the harp competitions. Excepting 1898 and 1900, when the festival was held in Belfast, the Feis Ceoil was held exclusively in Dublin venues. It is therefore unsurprising that most of the prize-winners are from Dublin and neighbouring areas. However, references to winners from Antrim, Armagh, Louth, Tipperary and Waterford confirm that harping activity was taking place throughout the country. Notably, the winners of the 1900 festival, held in Belfast, were largely drawn from County Antrim.

**TABLE 1: WINNERS OF THE FEIS CEOIL HARP COMPETITIONS 1897-1917**

Year	Junior Double-Action	Senior Double-Action	Irish Harp
1897 <sup>46</sup>	N/A	1 <sup>st</sup> J. E. Kenny, Dublin 2 <sup>nd</sup> Jane Fry, Sandycove	--
1898	N/A	N/A	--

43 *Irish Times*, May 29, 1909.

44 *Irish Times*, May 11, 1912.

45 For a discussion of harp tuition in Loreto Schools see McCague, *The Pedal Harp Tradition in Ireland (c.1790-1900)*, 133-139.

46 'Feis Ceoil Irish Musical Festival, Dublin May 8th to 13th, 1916: Syllabus of Prize Competitions', NLI, FCAP.

1899 <sup>47</sup>	N/A	1 <sup>st</sup> Jane Fry, Sandycove Very Highly Commended Phylis Paul, Drumcondra	--
1900 <sup>48</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup> Laura G. J. Doran, Belfast 2 <sup>nd</sup> Kathleen Kerr, Lisburn	1 <sup>st</sup> Florrie Kernin, Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham 2 <sup>nd</sup> Jennie Smith, Dublin or Lisburn <sup>49</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup> Jane Fry, Kingstown 2 <sup>nd</sup> Louise Bailey, Belfast 3 <sup>rd</sup> Gertrude Carroll, Belfast 3 <sup>rd</sup> Kathleen Kerr, Lisburn
1901 <sup>50</sup>	--	1 <sup>st</sup> Carmen Alperiz, Rathfarnham 2 <sup>nd</sup> Josephine M. Glynn, Bray	1 <sup>st</sup> Ellie Brown, Blackrock
1902 <sup>51</sup>	Certificate May Andrews, Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham	1 <sup>st</sup> Birdie McKenna, Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham	2 <sup>nd</sup> Nora Dowling, Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham
1903 <sup>52</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup> May Andrews, Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham	1 <sup>st</sup> Frances Halligan, Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham	1 <sup>st</sup> Birdie McKenna, Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham 2 <sup>nd</sup> Eileen Meehan
1904 <sup>53</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup> Eileen Meehan, Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham 2 <sup>nd</sup> Josie Conlan, Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham Commended Eileen O'Neill, Ursuline Convent, Waterford	1 <sup>st</sup> Gertrude Doran, Rosebush, Windsor Avenue, Belfast 2 <sup>nd</sup> Janie Donnelly, Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham Highly Commended Annie Fegan, Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham	1 <sup>st</sup> May Andrews, Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham 2 <sup>nd</sup> Frances Halligan, Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham
1905 <sup>54</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup> Josie Conlan	1 <sup>st</sup> Eileen Meehan <sup>55</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup> Mollie Cronan 2 <sup>nd</sup> Josie Conlan 3 <sup>rd</sup> Malachi McFall
1906 <sup>56</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup> Rosie Toman, Loreto Abbey Dalkey 2 <sup>nd</sup> Janie M. D. Caldwell, Wodlawn, Strandtown, Belfast 3 <sup>rd</sup> and Highly Commended May Lennox, Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham 4 <sup>th</sup> Mary Scully, Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham	1 <sup>st</sup> May Andrews, Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham Highly Commended Annie Short, Abbey Street, Armagh	1 <sup>st</sup> Beda Dunne, Loreto Convent, Stephen's Green 2 <sup>nd</sup> Elsie McGuinness, Dominican Convent, Eccles Street, Dublin 3 <sup>rd</sup> Mary C. Murray, Convent of Mercy, Dundalk

47 'Feis Ceoil Irish Musical Festival, Belfast 14-19 May 1900: Syllabus of Prize Competitions', NLI, FCAP.

48 *Irish Times*, May 19, 1900; *Irish Times*, May 26, 1900; 'Feis Ceoil Irish Musical Festival, Dublin May 8th to 13th, 1916: Syllabus of Prize Competitions', NLI, FCAP.

49 'Education: Loreto Abbey, Rathfarnham, Dublin', *Irish Times*, July 07, 1900; 'Feis Ceoil Irish Musical Festival, Dublin May 8th to 13th, 1916: Syllabus of Prize Competitions', NLI, FCAP. The references in relation to Smith vary: *Irish Times*, May 19, 1900; *Irish Times*, May 26, 1900. She is later listed as a student of Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham in 1907.

50 *Irish Times*, May 11, 1901.

51 *Irish Times*, May 09, 1902.

52 *Irish Times*, May 23, 1903.

53 *Irish Times*, May 28, 1904.

54 'Feis Ceoil Irish Musical Festival, Dublin May 14-19, 1906: Syllabus of Prize Competitions', NLI, FCAP.

55 Meehan won the junior division the previous year, where she is listed as a student of Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham. *Irish Times*, May 28, 1904.

56 *Irish Times*, May 16, 1906; 'Feis Ceoil Irish Musical Festival, Dublin May 8th to 13th, 1916: Syllabus of Prize Competitions', NLI, FCAP.

1907 <sup>57</sup>	No award presented 1 <sup>st</sup> Marguerite Gately, Dominican Convent, Blackrock	No award presented Certificate Mary J. Conlan, Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham Certificate Jennie Smith, Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham	1 <sup>st</sup> Jennie Smith, Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham 2 <sup>nd</sup> Mary J. Conlan, Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham 3 <sup>rd</sup> Elsie McGuinness, Dominican Convent, Eccles Street, Dublin <sup>58</sup>
1908 <sup>59</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup> Sadie Casey, Orwell Park, Rathgar 2 <sup>nd</sup> Beda Dunne, Swords, Dublin	--	1 <sup>st</sup> Nora Dowling, Rathmines School of Music 2 <sup>nd</sup> Dorothy Will, Dominican Convent, Sion Hill 3 <sup>rd</sup> Marian Griffin, Loreto College, Stephen's Green
1909 <sup>60</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup> Mary O'Mahony, Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham 2 <sup>nd</sup> A. O'Hagan, Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham	1 <sup>st</sup> Rosie Toman, Loreto Abbey Dalkey 2 <sup>nd</sup> Annie Short, Handel House, Armagh	1 <sup>st</sup> Aggie Sherry, Foxford, Mayo 2 <sup>nd</sup> Kathleen O'Neill, Dominican Convent, Sion Hill, Blackrock
1910 <sup>61</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup> Gertrude Toman, Loreto Abbey Dalkey	2 <sup>nd</sup> Irene McKee, 4 St. Thomas Terrace, Glasnevin	--
1911 <sup>62</sup>	--	2 <sup>nd</sup> Cecilia O'Brien	1 <sup>st</sup> A. O'Hogain, Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham
1912 <sup>63</sup>	No award presented Commended Aggie Sherry, Dominican College	--	--
1913	--	--	--
1914	--	--	--
1915 <sup>64</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup> K. McEllen, Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham	--	--
1916 <sup>65</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup> Beatrice Goulding, Rathmines Road, Dublin 2 <sup>nd</sup> Dorothy Judge	--	--
1917 <sup>66</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup> Nancy Mackey	1 <sup>st</sup> Beatrice Goulding, Dublin 2 <sup>nd</sup> Dorothy Judge	--

57 *Irish Times*, June 01, 1907.

58 The results published in the *Irish Times* differ from those printed in the 1908 programme which suggest that Marie Giron was awarded second prize in the 1907 small Irish harp competition.

59 *Irish Times*, May 30, 1908; 'Feis Ceoil Irish Musical Festival, Dublin May 8th to 13th, 1916: Syllabus of Prize Competitions', NLI, FCAP.

60 *Irish Times*, May 29, 1909.

61 *Irish Times*, May 21, 1910.

62 *Irish Times*, May 10, 1911.

63 *Irish Times*, May 08, 1912.

64 *Irish Times*, May 11, 1915.

65 *Irish Times*, July 22, 1916.

66 'Feis Ceoil Irish Musical Festival, Dublin May 6th to 11th, 1918: Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of

Across the festival's solo competitions, prizes were not awarded unless three entrants competed. An exception to this rule was made for harp, side drum and solo wind competitions, in which a single entrant could be awarded a prize if 'sufficient merit' was shown.<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, on several occasions the top prize was not awarded in the harp competitions but rather a commendation or lesser prize. In 1902 a certificate was presented in the junior double-action competition while second prize in the Irish harp competition was awarded in lieu of first.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, in 1907 the two competitors in the senior competition were presented with certificates, and although there were five entrants for the junior competition, it was felt that '[t]he number of competitors was not sufficiently large to award a prize.'<sup>69</sup> Silver medals were awarded in both the senior harp and Irish harp competitions in 1911, the gold medals having been withheld.<sup>70</sup>

Thus the festival provided recognised accolades in addition to valuable performance experience for emerging harp players. Competition successes were celebrated in local and national press, providing publicity both for harp players and teachers.<sup>71</sup> As noted, several schools participated, and preparation undoubtedly formed an important part of the year's tuition, while the annual gathering also facilitated increased connection among practitioners. Alongside contemporaneous competitions run by the Gaelic League and the Oireachtas, the Feis Ceoil created a template for the growth of a network of local festivals across the country, many of which included the harp, among them the Sligo Feis Ceoil, Feis Shligigh, Feis Maitiú and Feis Átha Cliath.

## Repertoire

At first the repertoire for the Irish harp competitions was at the discretion of the performer, provided it was 'Irish in character,' although no elaboration on this term is provided. A phonograph was employed in the uilleann pipe competitions to collect unpublished airs, but the Irish harp competitions were unfortunately not recorded,

---

Executive Committee', NLI, FCAP; 'Dublin Harpist Scores', *Freemans Journal*, August 08, 1918.

67 'Feis Ceoil Irish Musical Festival, Dublin May, 1917: Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee', NLI, FCAP.

68 *Irish Times*, May 09, 1902.

69 *Irish Times*, June 01, 1907.

70 *Irish Times*, May 10, 1911.

71 For examples see 'Great Musical Treat in Mullingar', *Westmeath Examiner*, February 08, 1908; 'Dublin Harpist's Success', *Sunday Independent*, May 24, 1908; 'Dublin Harpist Scores', *Freemans Journal*, August 08, 1918.

despite similar syllabi requirements for both instruments.<sup>72</sup>

Test pieces were set annually for the junior and senior divisions of the double-action harp competitions, and later for the Irish harp competition. As was the practice in relation to other instruments, the musical subcommittee contacted specialists to seek recommendations regarding repertoire.<sup>73</sup> Advice was initially sought from Owen Lloyd<sup>74</sup> and later from Mother Attracta Coffey (M.A.C.).<sup>75</sup>

Both schooled in the pedal harp tradition, Lloyd and M.A.C. differed in their approach to the instrument. Lloyd became increasingly concerned with the promulgation of an Irish harp tradition from the late nineteenth century onwards, teaching harp classes through the Gaelic League, promoting Irish-made instruments and using the double-action harp in the transmission of Irish airs.<sup>76</sup> Conversely, M.A.C. adopted a more international approach, crafting pedagogical repertoire for the Irish harp based on that of the European pedal harp tradition. While the early festivals reflect Lloyd's outlook, ultimately it was M.A.C.'s influence that shaped the harp's trajectory within the Feis Ceoil.

Annie Patterson, in an article on the 1901 Celtic Congress, draws attention to difficulties in sourcing repertoire for the harp:

Herein are fresh fields and pastures new for the coming Keltic composer. Harp music, again, boasts very few classical and really effective transcriptions of Irish melodies. Perhaps Mr. John Thomas will yet add to his laurels in this department. That settings (good and brilliant solo work) for the harp on "Irish" lines are wanted, every harpist bears witness most of the soloists we know being obliged to arrange their own groups of melodies.<sup>77</sup>

---

72 *Freemans Journal*, May 21, 1900.

73 Meeting of the musical subcommittee, October 27, 1897. Minute book of Programme / Musical Committee 1896 Dec.-1903 Nov., NLI, FCAP.

74 At a meeting of the musical subcommittee on November 06, 1897, it was noted that 'Autumn' by John Thomas had been selected as a test piece for the 1898 festival and that suggestions were awaited from Lloyd. Minute book of Programme / Musical Committee 1896 Dec.-1903 Nov., NLI, FCAP. Lloyd was a performer and adjudicator at the inaugural festival and a member of the Executive Committee.

75 Minutes of the musical subcommittee, September 18, 1899, and September 25, 1899. Minute book of Programme / Musical Committee 1896 Dec.-1903 Nov., NLI, FCAP. M.A.C. suggested the test pieces for the 1900 Festival.

76 McCague notes that '[t]here are no accounts of him performing European pedal harp repertoire after 1899.' McCague, *The Pedal Harp Tradition in Ireland (c.1790-1900)*, 131.

77 Annie Patterson, 'A Plea for Art Progress in Keltia', *Irish Times*, September 07, 1901.

The following year several such arrangements were published by M.A.C. for both Irish and double-action harp. Sister Joseph Alphonsus sent a syllabus to the musical subcommittee in advance of the 1903 competitions, recommending the inclusion of an Irish air arranged by M.A.C. in each class.<sup>78</sup> While this suggestion was not adopted, the committee reorganised the Irish harp competitions hereafter, introducing set pieces and an entry fee from 1903 onwards, in line with the approach to the double-action harp. Despite the availability of other materials, including a collection published in 1903 by Lloyd, the repertoire for the Irish harp competitions were drawn exclusively from M.A.C.'s publications, as evidenced in Table 2.<sup>79</sup>

On each occasion candidates were required to perform selections drawn from *27 Studies for the Irish Harp*<sup>80</sup> and from the series *Irish Melodies*.<sup>81</sup> The former publication contains studies arranged by M.A.C. for Irish harp which were written by composers associated with the European art music tradition, including Bertini, Bochsá, Cardon Fils, Challoner, Czerny, Kiallmark, Krumpholtz, Meyer, Naderman, Pole, Schumann and Viner.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, Lawlor notes that the latter publications can also be identified with this tradition through the employment of Italian tempo and expression markings, classical style harmony and the use of a scored arrangement.<sup>83</sup> She situates M.A.C.'s publications within the canon of international harp music from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, drawing parallels between M.A.C.'s writing for Irish harp and pedal harp, and between her work and that of contemporaneous Welsh harpist, composer and arranger, John Thomas.<sup>84</sup> Thus, although included in the national music section, the Irish harp competition was in fact more closely aligned with European art music, an approach congruent with that of the Feis Ceoil at

---

78 Meeting of the musical subcommittee, November 12, 1902. Minute book of Programme / Musical Committee 1896 Dec.-1903 Nov., NLI, FCAP.

79 Eoghan Laoide, *An Cruitire* (Dublin: Conradh na Gaeilge, 1903).

80 M.A.C., *27 Studies from Five Finger Exercises by Czerny, Etc. Adapted and Fingered for The Irish Harp by M.A.C.* (London: Vincent Music Co., 1902).

81 M.A.C., *Irish Melodies arr., transcribed, and fingered for the Irish Harp by M.A.C.* (London: Vincent Music Co., 1902).

82 I am indebted to Fiona Gryson who has conducted research into the provenance of the studies included in M.A.C.'s *27 Studies for Irish Harp*. Fiona Gryson (TU Dublin Conservatoire) 'The Irish Harp Book: a tutor and companion by Sheila Larchet Cuthbert: A Pedagogical Evaluation of '27 Studies' by Mother Attracta Coffey', paper presented at the Joint SMI and ICTM-IE Postgraduate Conference, January 20, 2023.

83 Lawlor, *Irish Harping 1900-2010*, 26-27. While *Book I* is the only book in the series currently in circulation, given the similar tenor of M.A.C.'s pedal harp publications, it would seem reasonable to infer that the remaining books followed a similar format.

84 M.A.C. was in contact with Thomas, and it is possible that she may have studied with him. Lawlor, *Irish Harping 1900-2010*, 21-30; McCague, *The Pedal Harp Tradition in Ireland (c.1790-1900)*, 135. Thomas' works featured as test pieces in the double-action harp competitions on several occasions.

large. The repositioning of the Irish harp competitions saw competitors engage with contemporary arrangements for the instrument, compiled by a pedagogue directly involved both with the Irish and international harp communities. This approach had a long-lasting impact on the instrument's stylistic development. M.A.C.'s *27 Studies* contributed to the art music revival of the instrument, and later featured in Sheila Larchet Cuthbert's seminal publication *The Irish Harp Book*.<sup>85</sup>

**TABLE 2: IRISH HARP TEST PIECES 1897-1917<sup>86</sup>**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Test Pieces</b>	<b>Additional Information</b>
1897	Irish wire-strung harp; own choice repertoire, 'Irish in character'	
1898, 1899, 1900, 1901, 1902	Small Irish harp; own choice repertoire, 'Irish in character'	
1903	27 Studies for the Irish Harp, Nos. 13, 20 & 24, arr. M.A.C. (Vincent Music Co.) Any two melodies, Book I, Irish Melodies, arr., transcribed, and fingered for the Irish Harp by M.A.C. (Vincent Music Co.)	13 Viner 20 Krumpholtz 24 Naderman
1904	27 Studies for the Irish Harp, Nos. 4, 12 & 25, arr. M.A.C. (Vincent Music Co.) Any two melodies, Books II & III, Irish Melodies, arr. M.A.C. (Vincent Music Co.)	4 Bertini 12 Challoner 25 J. F. Pole
1905	27 Studies for the Irish Harp, Nos. 1 to 15 [sic.], arr. M.A.C. (Vincent Music Co.) <sup>87</sup> Any two melodies, Books II & III, Irish Melodies, arr. M.A.C. (Vincent Music Co.)	1 Viner 15 Viner
1906	27 Studies for the Irish Harp, Nos. 13 & 17, arr. M.A.C. (Vincent Music Co.) Any two melodies, Books I & II, Irish Melodies, arr. M.A.C. (Vincent Music Co.)	13 Viner 17 Kiallmark
1907	27 Studies for the Irish Harp, Nos. 13 & 15, arr. M.A.C. (Vincent Music Co.) Any two melodies, Books I & III, Irish Melodies, arr. M.A.C. (Vincent Music Co.)	13 Viner 15 Viner
1908	27 Studies for the Irish Harp, Nos. 1, 11 & 13, arr. M.A.C. (Vincent Music Co.) Any two melodies, Books I & III, Irish Melodies, arr. M.A.C. (Vincent Music Co.)	1 Viner 11 Challoner 13 Viner
1909, 1910	27 Studies for the Irish Harp, Nos. 1 & 4, arr. M.A.C. (Vincent Music Co.) Nos. 1, 2 & 3, Book III, Irish Melodies, arr. M.A.C. (Vincent Music Co.)	1 Viner 4 Bertini

85 Sheila Larchet Cuthbert, *The Irish Harp Book: a tutor and companion* (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1975); Lawlor, *Irish Harping 1900-2010*, 17.

86 Feis Ceoil Syllabi 1897-1917, NLI, FCAP, F276.

87 It is perhaps reasonable to assume that this should read 1 and 15.



1911, 1912	27 Studies for the Irish Harp, Nos. 1 & 4, arr. M.A.C. (Vincent Music Co.) Nos. 13 & 17, Book II, Irish Melodies, arr. M.A.C. (Vincent Music Co.)	1 Viner 4 Bertini Book II, No. 13 'Song of Inisfail' Book II, No. 17 'Oh! Doubt Me Not' <sup>88</sup>
1913, 1914, 1915, 1916	27 Studies for the Irish Harp, Nos. 12 & 13, arr. M.A.C. (Vincent Music Co.) No. 16, Book II, and No. 32, Book III, Irish Melodies, arr. M.A.C. (Vincent Music Co.)	12 Challoner 13 Viner Book II, No. 16 'Father Quinn'
1917	27 Studies for the Irish Harp, Nos. 1 & 6, arr. M.A.C. (Schirmer) Nos. 1 & 24, Book II, Irish Melodies, arr. M.A.C. (Schirmer)	1 Viner 6 Unknown Book II, No. 24 'Brian Boru's March' The arrangements in Book II are labelled 13-24, continuing the numbering from Book I. No. 1 could refer to the first piece in Book II 'Song of Inisfail', labelled No. 13

The test pieces for the double-action harp competitions interact with European pedal harp literature, as evidenced in Table 3. Of note is the prevalence of pieces by contemporary composers John Thomas (1826-1913), mentioned above, Alphonse Hasselmans (1845-1912) and Albert Zabel (1835-1910). Arrangements by M.A.C. also feature in the junior division, affirming the similar approach adopted in relation to the double-action and Irish harp competitions, while the list of prize-winners confirms that it was not uncommon for competitors to participate in both competitions.

**TABLE 3: MODERN DOUBLE-ACTION HARP TEST PIECES 1897-1917<sup>89</sup>**

Year	Junior Test Pieces	Senior Test Pieces
1897	N/A	'La Source', arr. Thomas Own choice
1898, 1899	N/A	'Autumn', Thomas (Lamborn Cock) 'Sweet Richard, No. 1 of Bardic Relics', Balsir Chatterton (Hutchings & Romer)
1900	'Air Armenien', Parish-Alvars (Hutchings & Romer) 'Romanze', Léon Gatayes; Thomas (ed.) (Hutchings & Romer)	'Harmonious Blacksmith', Thomas (ed.) (Hutchings & Romer) 'Premier Nocturne', Pessard (Leduc)
1901	'Berceuse, op. 2', Hasselmans (Durand & Schoenewerk) 'Simple Melodie, No. 2, Deux Romances Sans Paroles', Hasselmans (Roubier)	'Six Studies for Harp, Series I, No. 6', Thomas (Hutchings & Romer) 'Ballade', Hasselmans (Leduc)

88 While not currently in circulation, the contents of *Book II* are listed in *27 Studies*.

89 Feis Ceoil Syllabi 1897-1917, NLI, FCAP, F276. In each case a sight-reading test was also included.

1902	'Barcarolle, op. 7', Zamara (Cranz) 'Adieu', Schubert, transcribed by Thomas (Hutchings & Romer)	'Etude caracteristique, Fileuse, op. 27', Hasselmans (Noël) 'Am Springbrünnen, op. 23', Zabel (Breitkopf & Härtel)
1903	'Sur les ailes du Rêve', Zamara (Schott) 'Cradle Song, op. 110, No. 3', Oberthür (Ashdown)	'Rêverie', Thomas (Hutchings & Romer) 'Barcarolle', Hasselmans (Schott)
1904	'Chanson Grec de Santorino', Parish-Alvars (Boosey & Co.) 'Three Irish airs for Harp', arr. M.A.C. (Vincent Music Co.)	'Autumn', Thomas (Schott) 'Prière', Hasselmans (Schott)
1905	'Le Ciel a visité la Terre', Gounod, transcribed by Verdalle (Choudens) 'Le Noyer, No. 3 of 3 melodies', Schumann, transcribed by Hasselmans (Durand et fils)	'La Plainte d'une jeune Fille', Parish-Alvars; Thomas (ed.) (Hutchings & Romer) 'Demande et response, Romance, op. 30', Zabel (Breitkopf & Härtel)
1906	'Sois toujours mes seules amours', Godefroid (Durand et fils) 'Three Irish Aairs', arr. M.A.C. (Vincent Music Co.)	'Warum, op. 28', Zabel (Breitkopf & Härtel) 'L'Adieu, Romance No. 20', Parish-Alvars (Hutchings & Romer)
1907	'Romance. No. 14, Book III', Parish-Alvars (Hutchings & Romer) 'Sevillana, op. 17', Verdalle (Giessel, Bayreuth)	'Harmonious Blacksmith', Handel, arr. Thomas (Ashdown) 'Romance, No. 6, Book I', Parish-Alvars (Hutchings & Romer)
1908	'Recueillement, op. 43', Verdalle (Giessel, Bayreuth) 'Romance sans Paroles, op. 41, No. 1 Cantilène', Hasselmans	'Romance', Hasselmans 'Murmure de la Cascade, op. 29', Zabel (Breitkopf & Härtel)
1909	'Patrouille', Hasselmans (Schott) 'Legende, op. 18', Zabel (Schott)	'Prière, op. 13', Verdalle (Schott) 'Air de Ballet, op. 14', Verdalle (Schott)
1910	Three Irish Aairs – 'Love Song', 'Erris Melody', 'Lullaby', arr. M.A.C. (Vincent Music Co.) 'Serenade Melancolique, op. 45', Hasselmans (Durand)	'Romance', Hasselmans (Durand) 'Un Moment Heureux, op. 27', Zabel (Breitkopf and Härtel)
1911	'Barcarolle, op. 7', Zamara (Cranz) 'Trois Melodies religieuses, No. 3', Oberthür (Ashdown)	'Berceuse, op. 2', Hasselmans (Schott) Three Irish Aairs – 'Battle Hymn', 'Go where glory awaits thee', 'Avenging and bright', arr. M.A. O'C (Vincent Music Co.)
1912	'Hymne á la Paix, Pensees Musicales Ier Livre No. 6', Godefroid (Schott) 'Serenade', Oberthür	'Romance', Hasselmans (Durand) 'Am Springbrunnen', Zabel (Breitkopf & Härtel)
1913, 1914, 1915, 1916	'Bois Solitaire, Pensées Musicales, No. 4', Godefroid (Durand) Three Melodies – 'Irish Love Song', 'An Erris Melody', 'Lullaby', arr. M.A.C. (Vincent Music Co.)	'Reverie', Thomas (Hutchings and Romer) 'Gondoliera, op. 39', Hasselmans (Durand)
1917	'Songs without words, op. 24, No. 1', Oberthür (Ashdown) 'Trois Melodies Religieuses', Oberthür (Ashdown)	'Ballade', Hasselmans (Schott) 'Autumn', Thomas (Hutchings and Romer)

A sight-reading test formed part of the instrumental competitions, including those for double-action harp. This was not the case for the Irish harp competitions, despite the adoption of a literate approach from 1903. An open approach to repertoire continued in the uilleann pipe and fiddle competitions, with no set repertoire or entry fee for

both instruments in the 1917 festival.<sup>90</sup> Hence the Irish harp competitions remained somewhat apart from both the instrumental competitions and the other national instruments.

Concerts and events associated with the festival provide further insights into repertoire. While the Irish harp competitions situate the instrument within a European aesthetic, it is the instrument's nationalistic associations which appear to have been valued in the early concert programming. In addition to 'The Gol' referenced above which featured on several occasions, 'Cronan', an arrangement for solo, chorus, and band of harps by Dr. Koeller was performed in 1900,<sup>91</sup> while in 1905 Irish harpist Birdie McKenna contributed to a concert-lecture on 'The Evolution of Irish Folk Song' presented by Mrs. C. Milligan Fox.<sup>92</sup>

The double-action harp was also included, both in a solo capacity and as part of larger ensemble works. Signor Esposito's winning Oberthür Prize composition was premiered in 1899,<sup>93</sup> while 'Lorelei' by Oberthür was performed in 1900,<sup>94</sup> and 'Priese' [sic.] by Hasselman [sic.] in 1906.<sup>95</sup> Prize-winners' concerts during this period featured repertoire drawn from the competition syllabi for junior and senior double-action harp. Examples include Pessard's 'Premier Nocturne', performed at the 1900 concert,<sup>96</sup> 'Fileuse' by Hasselmans in 1902,<sup>97</sup> and 'Autumn' by John Thomas in 1904.<sup>98</sup> 'Le Ciel a visite la terre' by Gounod and 'Demande et Reponse' by Zabel featured in the 1905 prize-winners' concert,<sup>99</sup> followed by Hasselmans' 'Romance sans paroles' in 1908,<sup>100</sup> and both 'Legende' by Zabel and Verdalle's 'Air de Ballet' in 1909.<sup>101</sup>

---

90 'Feis Ceoil Irish Musical Festival, Dublin May, 1917: Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee', NLI, FCAP.

91 Annie Patterson, 'Belfast Feis Ceoil', *Irish Times*, May 26, 1900.

92 *Irish Times*, May 23, 1905.

93 *Irish Times*, May 19, 1899.

94 Annie Patterson, 'Belfast Feis Ceoil', *Irish Times*, May 26, 1900. Patterson also notes that one of the singers, Miss Nicholls, was accompanied by a harpist, although it is not clear whether she is referring to Irish or double-action harp.

95 *Irish Times*, January 27, 1906. This performance formed part of a Ladies' Committee event in January 1906, and it is likely that the piece was in fact 'Prière' by Hasselmans.

96 *Freemans Journal*, May 21, 1900.

97 *Irish Times*, May 12, 1902.

98 *Irish Times*, May 28, 1904.

99 *Irish Times*, May 27, 1905.

100 Prize-winners' concert programmes, NLI, FCAP, MS 40, 231.

101 Prize-winners' concert programmes, NLI, FCAP.

Less detail is provided regarding Irish harp repertoire performed at prize-winners' concerts. References to the inclusion of an Irish harp arrangement by M.A.C. in the 1908 programme, and to 'The Gentle Maiden', arranged by M.A.C. in 1909 suggest that the repertoire was also drawn from competition syllabi.<sup>102</sup>

## Dichotomous Ideologies

In many ways the harp competitions encapsulate the dichotomy of the early festivals, which saw competing ideologies at play, that of preserving and promoting Irish music and of engaging with the international art music tradition. Marie McCarthy notes that the national music competitions were often judged by classical musicians 'who, in essence, grafted their aesthetic values onto another tradition which evolved from a radically different aesthetic',<sup>103</sup> as evidenced in Graham P. Moore's comments above. Art music gradually became the dominant style within the festival, yet Irish harp continued to feature, albeit in a less traditional guise following initial attempts to engage with the wire-strung harp tradition.

## Conclusion

Feis Ceoil competitions and performances offer valuable insights into the Irish harp landscape of the early twentieth century. They illustrate an important move from antiquarian interest to engagement with a living tradition of harping, refashioned to meet the needs of a new century. While the Feis Ceoil ultimately could not sustain the competing ideologies central to its formation, the harp competitions were one area in which this vision was feasible, successfully embodying a multitude of dichotomies. The harp's position within the festival was at once ancient and modern, progressive and traditional, national and international. It is this ability to adapt and transform on which the instrument's longstanding history is predicated.

---

102 Prize-winners' concert programmes, NLI, FCAP.

103 McCarthy, 'The Transmission of Music and the Formation of National Identity in Early Twentieth-Century Ireland', 148.



## Rachel Duffy

Rachel Duffy is a harper from Bray, Co. Wicklow. She has a keen interest in the twentieth-century development of Irish harping and is currently completing a PhD on this subject at Technological University Dublin, funded by a TU Dublin PhD Scholarship. As a performer, she has appeared at festivals in China, Spain, Germany, Scotland and Wales and plays regularly with groups including Na Cauci, Triad Trio and the National Folk Orchestra. She enjoys teaching the harp in Wicklow and Dublin and working with harp ensembles at Bray CCÉ and TU Dublin. She will co-direct An Chúirt Chruitireachta, Cairde na Cruite's International Harp Festival for the first time in June 2023.