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The Feis Ceoil 1918–1959:
Sustaining and shaping Irish harping traditions

Rachel Duffy



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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 2026 Feis Ceoil, Rachel Duffy explores harp competitions there between 1918 and 1959 and celebrates the support and opportunities offered by Feis Ceoil to harpers throughout that time.

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

Editor

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The Feis Ceoil 1918–1959: Sustaining and shaping Irish harping traditions

Rachel Duffy

Introduction

The Feis Ceoil was borne out of an Irish cultural revival and was part of a movement which sought to address the neglect of music in Ireland and to reconstruct an Irish identity in response to a perceived threat from Anglo-Irish values. It took the form of an annual festival which encompassed both ‘Irish music’ and ‘music in Ireland’ more broadly.¹ The first festival was held in Dublin in 1897 and reflected the overlapping harp traditions of the late nineteenth century through attempts to engage with the wire-strung harp tradition, the emergent Irish harp tradition and the pedal harp, likely the result of the involvement of harpist Owen Lloyd.² Lloyd played a formative role in the 1897 Feis Ceoil and served on the Executive Committee for 1898,³ however both Lloyd and Annie Patterson, a founder of the Feis Ceoil, soon turned their attention to another festival, An tOireachtas,⁴ which placed greater emphasis on Irish traditional music.⁵ The Feis Ceoil continued to provide competitions for harp, focusing on the ‘small Irish harp’ and the ‘modern double-action harp’.⁶ While antiquarian interest was initially in evidence, a practical approach characterised the festival’s engagement with the harp

1 Karol Mullaney-Dignam & Jimmy O’Brien Moran, ‘Feis Ceoil’ in Barra Boydell & Harry White (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2013), 372.

2 Owen Lloyd was born in Kilkee, Co. Clare in the 1850s and came to prominence as a pedal harpist in the late 1870s. He also played an Irish harp made by Francis Hewson and was increasingly associated with this instrument and with the performance of Irish repertoire as his career progressed. Lloyd had a significant impact on harping in Ireland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through his work as a teacher, performer and arranger, most notably through his involvement with the Gaelic League. For further details see Mary Louise O’Donnell, ‘Owen Lloyd and the De-Anglicization of the Irish Harp’, *Éire-Ireland*, 48:3 (2013), 155-175.

3 Helen Doyle, *Voices of the Feis Ceoil: an Exploration of the Association’s Operational and Choral Networks, 1897-1932* (PhD Thesis, Technological University Dublin, 2024), 300.

4 An tOireachtas, meaning the ‘assembly’ or ‘gathering’, was inaugurated in the same year as the Feis Ceoil, and was initially run in conjunction with this festival. It was established by the Gaelic League ‘to celebrate the arts among the Irish-speaking communities and within the Irish-language movement.’ ‘Oireachtas na Gaeilge / Oireachtas na Samhna (‘An t-Oireachtas’) in Fintan Vallely (ed.), *The Companion to Irish Traditional Music*, 3rd edn. (Cork: Cork University Press, 2024), 636.

5 O’Donnell, ‘Owen Lloyd and the De-Anglicization of the Irish Harp’, 166.

6 The pedal harp is referred to as the ‘modern double-action harp’ in competition syllabi and programmes during this period and this term will be used throughout this article.

in the early twentieth century, during which time Mother Attracta Coffey,⁷ the musical directress at Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham, had a pronounced impact. This article follows on from my previous contribution to *Harp Perspectives* which explored harping in the Feis Ceoil between 1897 and 1917.⁸ It charts developments between 1918 and 1959 with reference to syllabus design, style, repertoire and engagement, and assesses the festival's role in sustaining and shaping harping in Ireland during a period of significant change within the harp landscape.

Syllabus Design

Throughout the period under discussion, Feis Ceoil syllabi continued to include competitions for 'small Irish harp' in the national section, and junior and senior 'double-action harp' in the instrumental section.⁹ From the mid-1920s, harpist Caroline Mary Townshend (1859-1951) shaped the direction of harping within the Feis Ceoil, resulting in a focus on the practice of singing to harp accompaniment. This was a genre which she championed through her teaching and which was central to the instrument's twentieth-century popularisation. Townshend came from a wealthy family of Anglo-Irish descent, with properties in both Cork and Dublin. Following the death of her father in 1907, an inheritance of £3,000 provided her with financial independence,¹⁰ allowing her to share her passion for the harp and singing to harp accompaniment. She taught initially in Cork, where her students performed 'exhibitions of Irish harp music' on small Irish harps under her direction,¹¹ and spent her latter years in Dublin where she continued to teach the harp, often providing lessons without a fee.¹² She dressed in

7 Mary Coffey (1849-1920), later known as Mother Attracta Coffey, was born in Mullingar. She joined the Loreto Order in 1868 and was professed a nun in 1870. She was musical directress at Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham where she taught Irish and pedal harp. She authored several publications under the acronym M.A.C. including *27 Studies from Five Finger Exercises by Czerny, Etc. Adapted and Fingered for The Irish Harp by M.A.C.*, a *Tutor for the Irish harp* and arrangements of Irish airs for Irish and pedal harp. Clare McCague, *The Pedal Harp Tradition in Ireland (c.1790-1900): Practitioners, Pedagogy, Trade and Repertoire* (PhD Thesis, Technological University Dublin, 2021), 135.

8 Rachel Duffy, 'Competing Ideologies: The Feis Ceoil and the Promotion of Irish Harping 1897-1917', Aibhlín McCrann and Eithne Benson (eds.), *Harp Perspectives*, Cruit Éireann Harp Ireland (CÉHI), March 2023.

9 Feis Ceoil, *Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of the Executive Committee, 1918*, Feis Ceoil Offices (FCO), 19, 26.

10 Angela Frewen, 'The Life and Legacy of Caroline Townshend – Part One', <https://myirishharp.blogspot.com/2021/06/the-life-and-legacy-of-caroline.html>, accessed August 10, 2022.

11 *Southern Star*, February 02, 1946.

12 Cormac De Barra, 'Sustaining the harp in Ireland: Máirín and Róisín Ní Shéaghda's music, teaching and legacy' in Helen Lawlor and Sandra Joyce (eds.), *Harp Studies II: World Harp Traditions* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2024), 92-93.

‘national costume’,¹³ a style of dress which was mirrored by her band of student harpers in performances at high-profile events in Dublin between the late 1920s and the 1940s¹⁴ and in harp performances more generally in the mid-twentieth century.¹⁵



Figure 1: The Townshend Family. Image courtesy of Cormac De Barra.¹⁶

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- 13 Mercedes McGrath, ‘Harping Back – Harp Mania and Friends who Helped’ in Ann Jones Walsh (ed.), *Cairde na Cruite Newsletter*, Spring 1996, 5.
- 14 Examples include a performance for the Royal Dublin Society in the late 1920s, at the fifth annual Feis Tighe of the Free State Civil Service Gaelic Society at the Mansion House, Dublin on St. Patrick’s Day, 1931; at a reception hosted by Lady Powerscourt on 6 February 1933 and at an Oireachtas event in the Mansion House on 28 October 1940. De Barra, ‘Sustaining the harp in Ireland’, 93; *Irish Times*, March 18, 1931; *Irish Times*, February 07, 1933; *Irish Times*, October 29, 1940.
- 15 See Helen Lawlor, ‘Popularity and Revival: Factors Affecting Harp Reception in the 1950s and 1960s’ in Thérèse Smith (ed.), *Ancestral Imprints: Histories of Irish Traditional Music and Dance* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2012), 143-158.
- 16 I am indebted to Cormac De Barra who has provided images of Caroline Townshend and the Townshend Cup. Caroline Townshend is pictured in the middle of the back row, fourth from the right.

In 1925 Townshend donated a cup to the Feis Ceoil for the performance of songs in Irish to harp accompaniment.¹⁷ The inscription on the cup reads as follows:

*FEIS CHEOIL Duais don té is fearr a chanfaidh dhá amhrán i nGaedhilge,
á gceol-fhreagairt an uair chéadna ar an gcrúit
FEIS CEOIL A prize for the person who will best sing two songs in Irish
with self-accompaniment at the same time on the harp*¹⁸



Figure 2: The Townshend Cup. Image courtesy of Cormac De Barra.

Townshend was also associated with a competition for ‘a group of Irish harps, numbering not less than three performers on the small Irish harp of the Brian Boru model’ which was introduced by the Ladies’ Committee in 1931.¹⁹ The test piece, which was an arrangement of Irish airs, could be obtained from Townshend at her address in Dublin.²⁰ She donated the Dr. Annie Patterson Medal in memory of her close friend; organist, composer, educator and academic Annie Wilson Patterson (1868-1934), a founder of the Feis Ceoil and a figure central to the festival’s initial phase of development.²¹ It was

awarded for ‘the best setting of two songs of contrasting character for the Irish harp’ and featured in festival syllabi from 1939 onwards.²² This completed the range of harp competitions offered during the period under discussion. A further amendment saw

17 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1926, FCO, 20.

18 Translation courtesy of Cormac De Barra.

19 *Irish Times*, January 03, 1931.

20 The airs in question are not specified. Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1931, FCO, 18.

21 Martin Dowling, ‘Patterson, Annie’ in Fintan Vallely (ed.), *Companion to Irish Traditional Music*, 3rd edn. (Cork: Cork University Press, 2024), 661-662; William Murphy, ‘Patterson, Annie Wilson’, <https://www.dib.ie/biography/patterson-annie-wilson-a7229>, accessed January 30, 2026.

22 *Irish Times*, December 17, 1938.

the ‘small Irish harp’ competition reconstituted as ‘*An Chruit*’ in 1943,²³ in line with broader revisions to the national section (*ceól náisiúnta*) which resulted in ‘a wholesale embracing of Gaelic typescript as well as the use of Irish language competition titles, descriptions, and syllabus requirements.’²⁴ However, in practical terms, this did not entail any changes to competition requirements.

Repertoire and Style

Examination of Feis Ceoil test pieces provides insights into the music used in harp teaching in the first half of the twentieth century. The test pieces for the double-action harp competitions continue the approach adopted in the festival’s formative years, during which the instrument was approached through a contemporary lens and in an international context.²⁵ Alphonse Hasselmans (1845-1912), Gabriel Verdalle (1847-1918) and Charles Oberthür (1819-1895) feature prominently, while works by Elias Parish Alvars (1808-1849), John Thomas (1826-1913), and Albert Zabel (1835-1910) are also well represented. There is a focus on European pedal harp literature, however the inclusion of works by Oberthür, who taught and performed in Ireland²⁶ and by Irish pedagogues Mother Attracta Coffey (M.A.C.) and Mother Alphonsus O’Connor (M.A.O’C)²⁷ lend a national character to the double-action harp competitions. Test pieces reflect the type of repertoire performed by harpist Owen Lloyd in the late 1800s, during which time ‘he regularly combined works by Oberthür, Parish Alvars, John Thomas, Aptommas with selections of Irish or Welsh melodies.’²⁸ Examination of prize-winners from this period, detailed below, confirms that students from Loreto schools were active in the Feis Ceoil network as competitors. Accordingly, music collections from the late nineteenth century associated with Loreto schools align with repertoire set for the double-action harp competitions.²⁹

23 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1943, F276, National Library of Ireland (NLI), 21.

24 Doyle, *Voices of the Feis Ceoil*, 259.

25 Duffy, ‘Competing Ideologies’, 17.

26 McCague, *The Pedal Harp Tradition in Ireland (c.1790-1900)*, 97.

27 Angela O’Connor, later known as Mother Alphonsus O’Connor, was a harpist, pianist and organist. She studied with M.A.C., and at just seventeen years of age was appointed harp tutor at the Royal Irish Academy of Music. She returned to Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham in 1899 to pursue a religious vocation, becoming a Loreto nun in 1902 and continuing the standard of tuition established by her predecessor. She published Irish airs under the acronym M.A.O’C.

28 McCague, *The Pedal Harp Tradition in Ireland (c.1790-1900)*, 130.

29 For example, through the inclusion of works by harpist-composers Thomas, Oberthür, Zabel and Hasselmans. McCague, *The Pedal Harp Tradition in Ireland (c.1790-1900)*, 206-207.

Table 1: Test Pieces for the Modern Double-Action Harp Competitions 1918-1959

Year	Junior Test Pieces	Senior Test Pieces
1918 ¹	'Three Irish airs', arr. M.A.C. (Vincent) 'Le Ciel a visité la terre', Verdalle (Schott) ²	'Fileuse', Op. 27, Hasselmans (Schott) 'Barcarolle', Hasselmans (Schott)
1919 ³	'Le Ciel a visité la terre', Verdalle (Schott) 'Serenade', Oberthür (Schott)	'Elegie', Op. 54, [Hasselmans] (Durand) 'Chanson de Mai', Op. 40 (Hasselmans)
1920- 1921 ⁴	'Le Ciel a visité la terre', Verdalle (Schott) 'Serenade', Oberthür (Schott)	'Berceuse', Op. 2, Hasselmans (Schott) 'Elegie', Op. 54 Hasselmans (Schott)
1922- 1923 ⁵	'Sevillana' Verdalle (Schott) 'Three Irish Airs', arr. M.A.C. (Winthrop Rogers)	'Le Reveil des Sylphes', Op. 10, Boussagol (Lemoine, Paris) 'Prière', Verdalle (Schott)
1924 ⁶	'Romance', Op. 45, No. 16, Oberthür (Ashdown) 'Petite Berceuse', Hasselmans (Durand)	'Warum', Op. 28 Zabel (Chester) 'Chanson de Mai', Op. 40 Hasselmans (Durand)
1925 ⁷	'Air de Ballet', Verdalle (Schott) 'Le Ciel a visité la terre', Gounod (Schott)	'Warum', Op. 28 Zabel (Chester) 'Chanson de Mai', Op. 40 Hasselmans (Durand)
1926 ⁸	'Air de Ballet', Verdalle (Schott) 'Recueillement', Verdalle (Schott)	'Fileuse', Hasselmanns (Schott) 'Barcarolle', Hasselmanns (Schott)
1927 ⁹	'Le Ciel a visité la terre', Verdalle (Schott) 'Romance sans paroles', Verdalle (Schott)	'Echoes of a Waterfall', Thomas (Ashdown) 'Le danse des Fées', Alvars (Ashdown)
1928 ¹⁰	'Three Irish melodies', [composer/arranger not specified] 'Air de ballet' [Verdalle]	'The Spinning Wheel', Thomas 'Ballade', Hasselmans
1929 ¹¹	'Valse Caprice', Verdalle 'Romance No. 3', Verdalle	'Warum?', Op. 28, Zabel 'Elegie', Op. 54, Hasselmans
1930 ¹²	'Feuille d'Automne', Renie 'Prière', Delmas	'Impromptu', Fauré 'Legende', Gaubert
1931 ¹³	'Bebe dort', Op. 15, Verdalle (Schott) 'Feuilles d'Automne', Op. 45 Hasselmans (Durand)	'Romance', Op. 6, Zabel (Chester) 'La Source', Op. 44, Hasselmans (Durand) An <i>Irish Times</i> article lists 'Three Irish airs', arr. M.A.O.C. in lieu of 'Romance' by Zabel ¹⁴
1932 ¹⁵	'Feuilles d'Automne', 'Esquisse', Renié (Lemoine & Co.) 'Bébé dort', Verdalle (Schott)	'Contemplation', Renié 'Rêverie', Shücker

Tables throughout this article reflect different styles of reporting and presentation within syllabi, programmes and press coverage of the festival in which test pieces and competitors' names are listed in various formats in both Irish and English, and fadas are often omitted from competitors' names. I have preserved the original format where possible, adjusting the order of elements within test piece titles in some cases for consistency and removing personal details from competitors' addresses.

- 1 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1918, FCO, 19.
- 2 This is likely an arrangement of Charles Gounod's piece of the same name by harpist Gabriel Verdalle.
- 3 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1919, FCO, 19; *Irish Times*, May 14, 1919.
- 4 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1920, FCO, 19; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1921, FCO, 20.
- 5 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1922, FCO, 23; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1923, FCO, 21.
- 6 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1924, FCO, 22.
- 7 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1925, FCO, 22-23.
- 8 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1926, FCO, 25.
- 9 *Irish Times*, May 05, 1927; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1927, FCO, 25.
- 10 *Evening Herald*, May 16, 1928.
- 11 *Irish Times*, May 03, 1929.
- 12 *Irish Times*, May 13, 1930.
- 13 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1931, FCO, 25-26.
- 14 *Irish Times*, May 16, 1931.
- 15 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1932, FCO, 28; *Irish Times*, May 14, 1932.

Table 1 cont/d

1933 ¹⁶	'Caprice original', Op. 12, Verdalle (Durdilly, Paris) 'Le Ciel a visité la terre', Verdalle (Schott)	'Marguerite au Rouet', Zabel 'Echoes of the Waterfall', Thomas
1934-1936 ¹⁷	'Sevillana', Op. 27, Verdalle (Schott) 'Recueillement', Op. 43, Verdalle (Schott)	'Im Frühling', Op. 22, Schücker (Schott) 'Un moment heureux', Zabel (Schott)
1937-1938 ¹⁸	'Hungarian March', Parish Alvars (Schott) No. 3 of 'Three Irish Melodies', Op. 122, Oberthür (Schott)	'La Danse des Sylphes', Godefroid (Schott) 'Il Papagallo', Parish Alvars (Schott)
1939 ¹⁹	'Three Irish Airs' – arranged for Double-action Harp, M.A.C. (Pigott) 'Three Musical Illustrations', No. 1, 'The Troubadour', Oberthür (Schott)	'Erin! Oh Erin!', Op. 183, Oberthür (Schott) 'A Fairy Legend', Op. 182, Oberthür (Schott)
1940 ²⁰	'Romances for the Harp', No. 18, Parish Alvars 'Three Irish Airs' arranged for double-action harp, M.A.C. (Pigott) Later amended to: No. 6, 'Romances of the Harp', Book II, Parish Alvars ²¹	'Romances for the Harp', No. 10, Parish Alvars (Schott) 'Romances for the Harp', No. 20, Parish Alvars (Schott) Later amended to: Nos. 4 and 5, 'Six Romances for the Harp', Book II, Parish Alvars, (Schott) ²²
1941 ²³	Nos. 2 and 3, 'Three Musical Sketches', Oberthür (Schott)	'Erin, oh! Erin', Op. 183, Oberthür (Schott) 'Adieu', Op. 298, Oberthür (Schott)
1942 ²⁴	'Three Irish Airs', arr. M.A.C. (Pigott) 'Irish Melodies', Book II, No. 9, arr. M.A.C. (Pigott)	'Three Irish Melodies', arr. M.A. O'C. (Pigott) 'Irish Melodies', Book I, Nos. 3 and 4, arr. M.A.C. (Pigott)
1943 ²⁵	'Bulgarian Gypsy Dance', Parish Alvars (Schott) '3 Musical Illustrations'. No. 1 'The Troubadour', Oberthür (Schott)	No. 6, 'Six Romances', Book II, Parish Alvars 'Barcarola', Parish Alvars
1944 ²⁶	Irish Airs: 'An Irish Love Song', 'An Erris Melody', 'Lullaby', arr. M.A.C.	'Autumn', Thomas (Leonard, Gould and Boltler) 'Reverie', Thomas (Leonard, Gould and Boltler)
1945 ²⁷	'Bulgarian Gypsy Dance', Parish Alvars, (Schott) 'Lough Sheeling', No. 5 'Irish Melodies', arr. M.A.C.	'Erin, Oh Erin', Oberthür (Schott)
1946 ²⁸	'A Fairy Legend', Oberthür (Schott)	'Spring Fancies', No. 1, Harty, Novello
1947 ²⁹	'Bulgarian Gypsy Dance', Parish Alvars (Schott)	'Elégie', Hasselmans (UMP)

16 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1933, FCO, 28; *Irish Independent*, May 09, 1933.

17 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1934, FCO, 27; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1935, FCO, 27; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1936, FCO, 18.

18 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1937, FCO, 26; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1938, FCO, 27.

19 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1939, FCO, 27.

20 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1940, FCO, 26-27.

21 In the 1940s war exigencies impacted repertoire choices as copies of certain works were difficult to obtain, necessitating amendments to syllabi. *Irish Times*, February 10, 1940.

22 *Irish Times*, February 10, 1940.

23 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1941, F276, NLI, 29.

24 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1942, F276, NLI, 29.

25 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1943, F276, NLI, 29.

26 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1944, MS 40, 228/6, FCAP, NLI, 22.

27 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1945, MS 40, 228/6, FCAP, NLI, 33.

28 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1946, MS 40, 228/6, FCAP, NLI, 29.

29 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1947, MS 40, 228/6, FCAP, NLI, 32.

Table 1 cont/d

1948 ³⁰	'Bulgarian Gypsy Dance', Parish Alvars (Schott)	'Fileuse', Hasselmans
1949 ³¹	'Bulgarian Gypsy Dance', Parish Alvars (Schott)	'Gitana', Hasselmans (United Music Pub.)
1950 ³²	'Bulgarian Gypsy Dance', Parish Alvars (Schott)	'Conte de Noël', Hasselmans (G. Morley)
1951 ³³	'Bulgarian Gypsy Dance', Parish Alvars (Schott)	'Conte de Noël', Hasselmans (G. Morley)
1952 ³⁴	'Irish Airs arr. for Pedal Harp', M.A.C.	'Le Sylphe', Oberthür
1953-1959 ³⁵	Competition offered if two or more entries received	

30 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1948, MS 40, 228/6, FCAP, NLI, 33.

31 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1949, MS 40, 228/6, FCAP, NLI, 35.

32 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1950, MS 40, 228/6, FCAP, NLI, 28.

33 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1951, MS 40, 228/6, FCAP, NLI, 30.

34 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1952, MS 40, 228/6, FCAP, NLI, 23.

Connections can also be drawn between the double-action harp competitions and the Irish harp competitions through the inclusion of arrangements by M.A.C.. Her influence is pronounced in the Irish harp competition in which test pieces were selected exclusively from her publications between 1903 and 1958. M.A.C. crafted pedagogical repertoire for the Irish harp based on that of the European pedal harp tradition. She was in contact with Thomas and possibly Oberthür, and dedicated her first publication *Irish Melodies* (six arrangements of Moore's melodies for harp) to Thomas in 1902.³¹ Repertoire for the Irish harp competition was drawn from *27 Studies for the Irish Harp*³² which features arrangements of studies by composers associated with the European art music tradition,³³ and the series *Irish Melodies*³⁴ which features arrangements of Irish airs in an art music style.³⁵ Thus while the Irish harp was positioned in the national music section, from a stylistic perspective it was more closely aligned with the double-action harp competitions, with an emphasis on art music which reflects the approach of the Feis Ceoil at large.³⁶ Of note is the engagement with the Irish harp as a living tradition, in that competitors were required to perform 'contemporary arrangements for the instrument, compiled by a pedagogue directly

31 Helen Lawlor, *Irish Harping 1900-2010* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2012), 21-30; McCague, *The Pedal Harp Tradition in Ireland (c.1790-1900)*, 135, 207.

32 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).

33 Composers featured include Bertini, Bochsá, Cardon Fils, Challoner, Czerny, Kiallmark, Krumpholtz, Meyer, Naderman, Pole, Schumann and Viner.

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

35 Lawlor, *Irish Harping 1900-2010*, 26-27.

36 See Duffy, 'Competing Ideologies' and Doyle, *Voices of the Feis Ceoil*, 27

involved both with the Irish and international harp communities.³⁷ Notwithstanding the practical approach adopted, adjudication comments often reflected the former antiquarian outlook, focusing on the Irish harp's romantic and nationalistic associations, rather than giving constructive advice to competitors.³⁸

The set pieces in 1959 were a Bach Minuet from the piano publication, *School of Easy Classics*, and a setting of 'The Devil in Dublin', arranged for harp by Mercedes McGrath.³⁹ McGrath, who was commended in the Dr Annie Patterson Medal competition in 1942,⁴⁰ responded to the dearth of harp publications in the mid-twentieth century by creating arrangements, several of which featured as Feis Ceoil test pieces in the late twentieth century.⁴¹ From 1959 set pieces were consistently drawn from a more diverse range of sources, despite the lack of published material available. Arrangements by practitioners continued to be a defining feature of this competition which remained connected to art music, but increasingly incorporated arrangements of traditional music. This change in approach reflects the harp's unique position both within the festival and the wider Irish musical landscape.

37 Duffy, 'Competing Ideologies', 16.

38 See for example W.H. Reed's comments in 1940. Reed, who was leader of the London Symphony Orchestra and Professor at the Royal College of Music, London, had adjudicated at the Feis Ceoil previously between 1923 and 1926. Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1941, F276, NLI, 39.

39 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1959, MS 40, 228/7, Feis Ceoil Association Papers (FCAP), NLI, 31.

40 *Irish Times*, May 15, 1942.

41 See for example Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1961, MS 40, 228/7, FCAP, NLI, 31; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1969, F276, NLI, 33 and Feis Ceoil Programme, 1977, K189, NLI, 8.

Table 2: Test Pieces for the Small Irish Harp Competition 1918-1959

Year	Test Pieces
1918-1921 ³⁶	Nos. 1 and 12, 27 Studies for Irish Harp, M.A.C. Nos. 25 and 26, Irish Melodies arr. For Irish Harp, Book III, M.A.C.
1922-1928 ³⁷	Nos. 1 and 6, 27 Studies, M.A.C. (Winthrop Rogers) Nos. 1 and 4, Irish Melodies, Book III, arr. M.A.C. (Winthrop Rogers)
1929 ³⁸	Nos. 13, 16 and 18, Irish Melodies, Book II, M.A.C. No. 34, Irish Melodies, Book III, M.A.C.
1930 ³⁹	Nos. 1 and 11, Irish Melodies, Book I, M.A.C. (Pigott) Nos. 26 and 28, Irish Melodies, Book III, M.A.C. (Pigott)
1931 ⁴⁰	Nos. 26 and 33, Irish Melodies, Book III, arr. M.A.C. (Pigott)
1932 ⁴¹	Nos. 21 and 33, Irish Melodies, Book II, arr. M.A.C. No. 32, Irish Melodies, Book III, arr. M.A.C.
1933 ⁴²	Nos. 26 and 31, Irish Melodies, Book III, arr. M.A.C. (Pigott & Co.)
1934-1935 ⁴³	Nos. 32 and 33, Irish Melodies, Book III, arr. M.A.C. (Pigott & Co.)
1936 ⁴⁴	Nos. 26 and 31, Irish Melodies, Book III, arr. M.A.C. (Pigott & Co.)
1937-1938 ⁴⁵	Nos. 32 and 33, Irish Melodies, Book III, arr. M.A.C. (Pigott & Co.)
1939 ⁴⁶	Nos. 26 and 32, Irish Melodies, Book III, arr. M.A.C. (Pigott & Co.)
1940 ⁴⁷	Nos. 31 and 33, Irish Melodies, Book III, arr. M.A.C. (Pigott & Co.)
1941 ⁴⁸	Nos. 25 and 36, Irish Melodies, Book III, arr. M.A.C. (Pigott & Co.)
1942 ⁴⁹	NNos. 28 and 30, Irish Melodies, Book III, arr. M.A.C. Pigott & Co.

- 36 The pieces are listed under the publisher Vincent in 1918 and 1919 and under Winthrop Rogers in 1920 and 1921. Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1918, FCO, 26; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1919, FCO, 26; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1920, FCO, 26; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1921, FCO, 28.
- 37 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1922, FCO, 29; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1923, FCO, 28; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1924, FCO, 29. Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1925, FCO, 28; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1926, FCO, 31; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1927, FCO, 30; *Evening Herald*, May 16, 1928.
- 38 *Irish Times*, May 03, 1929.
- 39 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1930, FCO, 19.
- 40 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1931, FCO, 18.
- 41 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1932, FCO, 19.
- 42 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1933, FCO, 18.
- 43 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1934, FCO, 18.; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1935, FCO, 18.
- 44 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1936, FCO, 19.
- 45 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1937, FCO, 18; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1938, FCO, 18.
- 46 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1939, FCO, 18.
- 47 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1940, FCO, 17.
- 48 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1941, F276, NLI, 19.
- 49 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1942, F276, NLI, 20.

Table 2 cont/d

Year	Test Pieces
1943 ⁵⁰	Nos. 27 and 29, Irish Melodies, [volume not specified], arr. M.A.C. (Pigott).
1944 ⁵¹	'O Breathe not his name' and 'Kitty of Coleraine', Irish Melodies, Book II, arr. M.A.C. (Pigott)
1945	'A Lovely Lass' (No. 26) and 'The Tree in the Wood' (No. 35), Irish Melodies, Book III, arr. M.A.C. (Pigott) ⁵²
1946 ⁵³	Nos. 5 and 11, Irish Melodies, Book I, M.A.C.
1947 ⁵⁴	Nos. 1 and 2, Irish Melodies, Book III, M.A.C.
1948 ⁵⁵	Nos. 7 and 8, Melodies for the Irish Harp, Book I, (Vincent Music Co., 60 Berners St, London)
1949 ⁵⁷	Nos. 25 and 31, Melodies for the Irish Harp, Book III (Vincent Music Co., 60 Berners St, London)
1950-1958 ⁵⁷	Uimhreacha 27 agus 31, Leabhar III de Melodies for the Irish Harp (Vincent Music Co., 60 Berners St., London)
1959 ⁵⁸	'Minuet', No. 1 from School of Easy Classics by Beringer, J.S. Bach (Augener) 'The Devil in Dublin', Irish Folk-tunes, arr. Mercedes McGrath (Copyright)

50 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1943, F276, NLI, 21.

51 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1944, MS 40, 228/6, FCAP, NLI, 22.

52 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1945, MS 40, 228/6, FCAP, NLI, 23.

53 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1946, MS 40, 228/6, FCAP, NLI, 20.

54 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1947, MS 40, 228/6, FCAP, NLI, 22.

55 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1948, MS 40, 228/6, FCAP, NLI, 23.

56 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1949, MS 40, 228/6, FCAP, NLI, 23.

57 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1950, 25; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1951, 27; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1952, 36. Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1953, 32; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1954, 33; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1955, 37; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1956, 39; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1957, 40; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1958, 41. All MS 40, 228/6-7, FCAP, NLI.

58 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1959, MS 40, 228/7, 31.

Given that repertoire choice in the Townshend Cup was at the competitor's discretion and not published in festival programmes, it is difficult to draw conclusive trends. Selections are occasionally detailed in press coverage of the festival.⁴² For example, in 1927 'Úna Bhán', 'An Maidirín Ruadh' and 'Tá an Lá ag Teach' were among the pieces performed by the three competitors.⁴³ In 1930 the adjudicator commented that two of the five competitors had performed songs which were not Irish, and that 'An Choisire' was a popular choice among competitors.⁴⁴ This song was also performed in 1934, on which occasion other selections included 'Caislean Dhruim an Oir', 'An Spailpín Fánach' and 'An Raibh tú ag an gCarraig'.⁴⁵ Máirín Ní Shéaghda won the Townshend

42 I have reproduced the song titles as they appear in the newspaper archives.

43 *Evening Herald*, May 04, 1927.

44 *Irish Times*, May 15, 1930.

45 These pieces are referred to as 'test pieces', however it is likely that they were the own-choice pieces selected by candidates for the competition. *Irish Press*, May 12, 1934.

Cup in 1935 with her renditions of ‘Seo tho le d’thoil’ and ‘Neillí Bhan’, while Neasa Ní Shéaghdha was awarded second place for her performances of ‘Bruach na Carraige Baine’ and ‘Cnocainín Airiach Cill-Mhuire’.⁴⁶ Following her win in 1936, Róisín Ní Shéaghdha sang ‘Dún do Shúile’ in the prize-winners’ concert in the Metropolitan Hall, Dublin.⁴⁷ More information is available regarding repertoire in the late 1950s as candidates’ selections were published in the festival programme. A range of songs featured, as illustrated in Table 3, several of which appear repeatedly, including ‘Dá bhFaighinn mo rogha’, ‘An Habit Shirt’, ‘Dún do Shúile’ and ‘Caisleáin Droim an Óir’, suggesting the emergence of a core repertoire of songs associated with this practice, which was largely propagated by Máirín Ní Shéaghdha through her teaching at the Dominican Convent at Sion Hill, Blackrock, Co. Dublin.

46 *Irish Press*, May 16, 1935.

47 *Irish Times*, May 18, 1936.

Table 3: Repertoire Selections for the Townshend Cup Competition 1957-1959*

Year	1957 ⁵⁹	1958 ⁶⁰	1959 ⁶¹
Entrants and Repertoire	Noelin O'Sullivan (a) Báidín Fheidhlimid (b) Buachaill Caol Dubh	Vanessa Liddy (a) Caisleán an Drom Óir (b) An Maidrín Rua	Sorcha Ní Súileabháin (a) Cailín Deas Cruidhte na mBó (b) An Habit Shirt
	Gemma Gannon (a) Dún do Shúile (b) Óró Bog Liom Í	Nuala Ní Bhroin (a) Ailliú Eanaí (b) Leanbh Ó Shasana	Eilís Ní Bhriain (a) Mo Chaora Bhán (b) Dilín Ó Deamhas
	Kathleen Keany (a) Cúachín Gleann Néifín (b) Ceol a' Mhála	Síle Ní Fhloinn (a) Bog Braon (b) Dá bhFaighinn mo Rogha	Pádraigín Nic Cárthaigh (a) Mo Cheallachín Fionn (b) Dá Gabhairín Buí
	Therese Hayes (a) Slán le Máigh (b) Ceol an Phóbaire	Terésa Ní Raghailigh (a) Dá bhFaighinn mo Rogha (b) Caisleán an Drom Óir	Eithne Ní Duinn (a) Éiníní (b) Leanbh Ó Shasana
	Mary Freyne (a) Bog Braon (b) An Buachaill Beó	Pádraigín Nic Cúrthaigh (a) Gleann Beag Lúghach an Cheóil (b) Mo Theaghlach	Cristín Ní Bhroin (a) Dún do Shúil (b) Dá bhFaighinn mo rogha
	Peggy Mullaney (a) Eibhlín a Rún (b) Habit Shirt	Máire de Fréin (a) Seoithín Seotho (b) Beidh Aonach Amáireach	Therese O'Reilly [pieces not listed]
	Deirdre O'Callaghan (a) Bríd Ní Mháille (b) Dá bhFaighinn mo rogha	Eibhlín Ní Fhloinn (a) Dún do Shúile (b) Ó hí Ó hí Beir a' bó	Eibhlín Ní Floinn (a) Bog Braon (b) Óhí Óhí
	Ann O'Connell (a) Mo Theaghlach (b) Caisleáin Droim an Óir	Deirdre Ní Cheallacháin (a) Áirtí Cuan (b) Dil Ó Deamhas	Lilian Courtney (a) Fill a Rúin Ó (b) An Cat a' s a Mathair
	Lilian Courtney (a) Airdí Chuan (b) Dilín Ó Deamhas	Dolores Ní Coilléir (a) Seothó lo thóil (b) Cuirimid Deandí	Dolores Collier (a) Seo leo thoil (b) Amhrán na Cuiginne
	Dolores Collier (a) Ailiu Eanaí (b) Haí Didil Dom	Áine Ceannt (a) Bríd Óg Ní Mháile (b) An Cat is a Máthair	Kay Rice (a) Déirín Dé (b) Peigi Leitir Mhoir
	Carina Sullivan (a) An Ceallaicín Fionn (b) Tá Dhá Gabhairín Buí gam	Mairéad Ní Mhaolainnigh (a) Eibhlín a Rún (b) An Habit Shirt	Therese Hayes (a) Eibhlín a Rúin (b) Ceol an Phiobaire
		Terésa Nic Aodha (a) Deirín Dé (b) An Coileach ag Fógáirt	Betty Keary (a) Drom an Óir (b) Cuirimid Deandaí
			Vanessa Liddy (a) Bean Dubh a' ghleanna (b) Dá bhFaighinn
		Máirín Ní Cíosáin (a) An Maidrín Rua (b) Bog Braon	

59 Feis Ceoil, Official Programme and Time Table of Competitions with Names of Competitors, 1957, MS 40, 227/1, FCAP, NLI, 20-21.

60 Feis Ceoil, Official Programme and Time Table of Competitions with Names of Competitors, 1958, MS 40, 227/1, FCAP, NLI, 27.

61 Feis Ceoil, Official Programme and Time Table of Competitions with Names of Competitors, 1959, MS 40, 227/1, FCAP, NLI, 47.

* I have reproduced song titles and competitors' names as they appear in source material.

Guidelines for adjudicators of the Townshend Cup and the Dr. Annie Patterson Medal provide further insights into the style of performance espoused, and the role of the harp therein:

The object of the “Annie Patterson Medal” and of the “Townshend Cup” is to obtain the simplest harp accompaniments and settings to Gaelic songs – settings that can be easily learned by those who have not had the advantage of a musical education, and who have little leisure for study.

The harp is regarded as a support for the voice, just as the guitar is for the Italian Stornello (folk song). Elaborate harp effects are not possible on these small instruments, nor are they desirable. At the same time, the harp playing should make a full effect, the chords being rolled out, one hand after the other. The harp playing should also be graceful, the hands being held in the right position. All three, the harp playing, the language and the singing are of equal importance.

The Brian Boru model is preferred, because, resting on the lap, the singer does not have to stoop over the instrument, as is the case with the small standing Irish harp.⁴⁸

Such commentary captures changes in the Irish harp landscape at this time, during which several different types of instruments were in use in both instrumental and vocal contexts. In the 1935 Irish harp competition competitors played both the ‘large McFall harp’ and the ‘small Irish model’,⁴⁹ while adjudicators highlighted the variance in the standard of instruments in both the Irish harp and Townshend Cup competitions throughout this period.⁵⁰

Entry Numbers

The frequent repetition of test pieces from the 1910s onwards suggests that engagement with the instrumental harp competitions was low. This is corroborated by references to entry numbers in syllabi and press coverage of the festival. No entries were received for the harp competitions in 1920 and 1921, and in 1922 the single entrant did not

48 For the Adjudicator of the “Townshend Cup”, MS 40,239/6, FCAP, NLI.

49 Mary Carroll and Lucy Dunne, students of St. Mary’s School for the Blind, Merrion performed on large harps and were awarded first and third place respectively, while Seán Broe who was awarded second place played on a small Irish harp. *Irish Press*, May 16, 1935.

50 *Irish Times*, May 05, 1927; *Irish Times*, May 03, 1929; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1941, F276, NLI, 40.

compete.⁵¹ There was only one entrant for the inaugural Townshend Cup competition in 1925,⁵² however entry numbers for this competition increased thereafter. Adjudicators, who were assisted by an Irish language specialist, presented positive impressions of performances in the Townshend Cup competition, which was the most well supported of the harp competitions in the late 1920s.⁵³ A notable eight entries were received in 1927, a significant number in light of the lack of engagement with the festival's harp competitions at this time, however only three harpists competed.⁵⁴ With the exception of this increase in engagement, the highest number of entrants recorded for any of the harp competitions in the 1920s was four.⁵⁵ Press commentary suggests that the low levels of participation were reflective of wider trends within the harping landscape. The paucity of entries for the 1927 festival prompted a reporter in the *Irish Examiner* to note that:

From the fewness of the entries in two harp competitions at the Feis Ceoil to-day, it is clear that the instrument which has given us a national symbol is not popular. In the case of one of the contests no first prize was awarded so poor was the playing. There have been several attempts to revive interest in the harp since the Feis Ceoil was established thirty years ago, but it seems to have been given a place in the instrumental museum, where the spinet and the harpsichord repose, to be brought forth occasionally for spectacular purposes. In romance and poetry its place as a sort of national instrument is no doubt secure, and it is possible that strangers might visit the island expecting to find harpists in large numbers. The Feis Ceoil faithfully reflects musical conditions. There must be many thousands of players of the piano and the violin for every harpist in the country.⁵⁶

Commenting on the introduction of a harp ensemble competition in 1931, Bluebird of the *Irish Times* notes that '[i]t does seem extraordinary that the harp, once the great Irish musical instrument, has been allowed to fade in our midst, and at a moment, too, when in other countries it is having a vogue'.⁵⁷ The harp ensemble competition

51 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1926, <https://www.itma.ie/texts/feisprogrammes> accessed October 07, 2022, 56; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1930, FCO, 54; *Irish Times*, May 11, 1922.

52 *Irish Times*, May 07, 1925.

53 Mr Eamonn O'Neill, B.A. assumed this role between 1926 and 1929. *Irish Times*, May 08, 1926; *Irish Times*, May 05, 1927; *Irish Times*, May 18, 1928; *Irish Times*, April 30, 1929.

54 *Irish Times*, April 23, 1927; *Irish Times*, May 05, 1927.

55 There were four entrants for the Townshend Cup in both 1928 and 1929, and for the senior double-action harp competition in 1929. *Irish Times*, April 17, 1928; *Irish Times*, April 16, 1929.

56 *Irish Examiner*, May 05, 1927.

57 *Irish Times*, April 25, 1931.

attracted little engagement, and the award was presented on one just occasion, to an ensemble from St. Mary's School, Merrion in 1939.⁵⁸ An article in the *Irish Times* following performances by French harpist Lily Laskine in Dublin in April 1935 sheds further light on the dearth of harping activity in the capital:

Her remarkable technique drew from some music lovers the remark that they had heard the harp for the first time in their lives. Indeed, this instrument, which has been for so many centuries the national emblem of Ireland, seems to have been abandoned by our musical students. This brilliant musician to our city, I am sure, has created a greater interest, and perhaps the Feis Ceoil, which is ever prepared to encourage any new venture, may succeed in inducing our musical students to take up the harp with more enthusiasm than of recent years.⁵⁹

While the instrument's potency as a symbol was a constant, such commentary underscores the importance of the Feis Ceoil as a forum for harping at a time when the practice was at a low ebb. Engagement with all of the festival's harp competitions was limited between the 1930s and the early 1950s.⁶⁰ However, encouragement for the practice of singing to harp accompaniment continued to be provided by successive adjudicators,⁶¹ in contrast with the more critical tenor of reports relating to the instrumental competitions.⁶² Entry numbers for the Townshend Cup consistently reached double figures from the mid-1950s onwards,⁶³ indicative of the growing popularity of singing to harp accompaniment. Conversely, the instrumental competitions often failed to attract a single entrant,⁶⁴ a notable exception being the 1942 Irish harp competition for which there were six entries.⁶⁵ No harp teachers are listed at either the Dublin or Cork Municipal Schools of Music or the Leinster School

58 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1941, F276, NLI, 56.

59 *Irish Times*, April 13, 1935.

60 The highest number of entrants recorded in press coverage of the harp competitions in the 1930s was five entrants for the Townshend Cup in 1930 and 1931. *Irish Times*, April 26, 1930; *Evening Herald*, May 14, 1931.

61 *Irish Times*, May 07, 1925; *Irish Times*, May 08, 1926; *Irish Times*, May 18, 1928; *Irish Times*, April 30, 1929; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1942, F276, NLI, 44; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1943, F276, NLI, 45; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1954, MS 40, 228/7, FCAP, NLI, 39; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1955, MS 40, 228/7, FCAP, NLI, 42.

62 *Evening Herald*, May 16, 1928; *Irish Times*, May 03, 1929; *Irish Times*, May 13, 1930.

63 For example, there were 10 entries in 1955, 11 entries in 1957, 12 entries in 1958 and 14 entries in 1959. *Irish Times*, May 11, 1955; *Irish Times*, May 15, 1957; *Irish Times*, May 14, 1958; Feis Ceoil, Official Programme and Time Table of Competitions with Names of Competitors, 1959, MS 40, 227/1, FCAP, NLI, 47.

64 For example, there were no entries for the double-action harp competitions in 1947 and 1948 or for any of the instrumental competitions in 1949. Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1949, MS 40, 228/6, FCAP, NLI, 49, 63.

65 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1943, F276, NLI, 45; *Irish Times*, May 15, 1942.

of Music in Aloys Fleischmann's 1952 *Music in Ireland: A Symposium*,⁶⁶ indicating that access to instrumental tuition may have been an issue in the early 1950s. The committee ceased prescribing test pieces for the double-action harp from 1953, with the provision that a competition would be arranged if two or more entries were received.⁶⁷ No prize-winners are listed for either the Irish or double-action harp competitions in the period 1950 to 1956, suggesting that engagement was negligible. Entry numbers for the Irish harp fluctuated between 1957 and 1959,⁶⁸ while just four entries were received for the double-action harp competitions – one for the senior competition in 1957 and three for the junior competition in 1959.⁶⁹ It is clear that by the close of the 1950s, accompaniment to singing was the predominant form of harping within the Feis Ceoil.

Prize-Winners

Tracing the prize-winners of the festival's harp competitions provides further insights into developments within the harp landscape. The Feis Ceoil was based in Dublin and prize-winners were primarily drawn from this county. All known prize-winners of the instrumental competitions in the period 1918 to 1939 were based in Dublin or students of Dublin institutions, with the exception of winners from Tyrone and Belfast in 1928 and 1929. The low level of harping engagement during the 1910s and 1920s is reflected in the lack of awards presented during this period. A minimum of three entrants were required for the award of prizes in the festival's solo competitions, however concessions were made for selected instruments, including the harp, provided that 'sufficient merit'

66 Thomas H. Weaving, 'Local Centre and Diploma Examinations in Music', in Aloys Fleischmann (ed.), *Music in Ireland: A Symposium* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1952), 124-128.

67 This approach was also applied to other competitions including the Lennox Braid Cup for Church Choirs, Plainsong Church Choirs, String Orchestra, String Quartet, Senior Instrumental Trio, Brass Bands, Bassoon, French Horn, Cornet in B flat, Alto Saxhorn in E flat, Tenor Horn in B flat and Euphonium competitions. Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1953, MS 40, 228/7, FCAP, NLI, 11.

68 There was one entrant for the Irish harp competition in 1957, two entries in 1958 and seven entries in 1959. Feis Ceoil, Official Programme and Time Table of Competitions with Names of Competitors, 1957, 49; Feis Ceoil, Official Programme and Time Table of Competitions with Names of Competitors, 1958, 39; Feis Ceoil, Official Programme and Time Table of Competitions with Names of Competitors, 1959, 48. All MS 40, 227/1, FCAP, NLI.

69 The programme does not specify if the 1957 double-action harp competition is a junior or senior competition, however the test piece, 'Elégie' by Hasselmans was set for the senior competition previously. Feis Ceoil, Official Programme and Time Table of Competitions with Names of Competitors, 1957, MS 40, 227/1, FCAP, NLI, 35; Feis Ceoil, Official Programme and Time Table of Competitions with Names of Competitors, 1959, MS 40, 227/1, FCAP, NLI, 44.

was shown.⁷⁰ While this was the case in some instances,⁷¹ on several occasions prizes were withheld in order to maintain standards.⁷²

Students of Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham feature prominently among the prize-winners in the 1920s, while students from St. Mary's School for the Blind, Merrion, Dublin were regular prize-winners from 1927 onwards, affirming the role of schools in promoting the harp during this period. All prize-winners in the instrumental competitions in the 1930s were students of St. Mary's School, with the exception of Sanchia Pielou, who was a pupil of Annie Fagan⁷³ at the Royal Irish Academy of Music (RIAM); and Seán Broe, the son and pupil of harpist Treasa Ní Chormaic.⁷⁴ Engagement remained low in the 1940s, however prize-winners were consistently drawn from a range of areas for the first time including Antrim, Dublin, Tyrone and Wexford. This aligns with Helen Lawlor's assertion that '[a]ccounts from the 1940s show more diverse activity in harp competitions. It appears that more players were active, and certainly more names were mentioned in the newspapers than in the previous decade.'⁷⁵ A decrease in activity followed, with no awards presented in the instrumental harp competitions in the period 1950 to 1956, prior to a renewed interest in the late 1950s from students studying at Dublin-based institutions, including the newly-formed harp class at the Municipal School of Music.⁷⁶ Of note is the overlap between competitors in the Irish and double-action harp competitions throughout this period.

70 This was also the case in the side drum and solo wind competitions. Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1926, <https://www.itma.ie/texts/feisprogrammes> accessed October 07, 2022,

71 There was one entrant in both the junior and senior double-action harp divisions in 1923, and the standard was such that in each class the competitor was awarded first prize. This was also the case in the senior double-action harp competition in 1926 and 1933; the Irish harp competition in 1932 and the junior double-action harp competition in 1936. In 1935 the three competitors in the Irish harp competition were all presented with prizes. *Irish Times*, May 08, 1923; *Irish Times*, May 04, 1926; *Irish Independent*, May 12, 1932; *Irish Independent*, May 09, 1933; *Irish Press*, May 16, 1935; *Irish Times*, May 16, 1936.

72 In 1924 there was one entrant for the junior double-action harp competition and no award was presented, while in 1925 the single entrant in this competition was awarded third prize. Three entrants competed in 1927 on which occasion second place and the bronze medal was awarded. The prize was withheld in the senior double-action harp competition in 1930 on which occasion there was one entrant and in 1938 on which occasion there were two competitors. *Irish Times*, January 25, 1924; *Irish Times*, April 19, 1924; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1926, <https://www.itma.ie/texts/feisprogrammes>, accessed October 07, 2022, 56; *Irish Times*, May 05, 1925; *Irish Times*, May 05, 1927; *Irish Times*, May 13, 1930; *Irish Times*, May 11, 1938.

73 Harpist Annie Fagan was active as a performer in Ireland and at Gaelic concerts in London, Glasgow, Manchester and Liverpool. She toured with the Carl Rosa and O'Mara Opera Companies and taught harp at the Royal Irish Academy of Music from 1930.

74 Treasa Ní Chormaic (1886-1949) performed in Ireland and internationally from the early 1900s. While still a teenager, she led an Irish harp class under the auspices of the Gaelic Literary Society in Harold's Cross and later ran her own Irish Harp School.

75 Lawlor, *Irish Harping 1900-2010*, 39.

76 Una O'Donovan and Nuala Herbert were students of this institution.

Table 4: Winners of the Instrumental Harp Competitions 1918-1959

Year	Junior Double-Action Harp	Senior Double-Action Harp	Irish Harp
1918 ⁶²	No winner listed in syllabus	1 st Mrs Haythornthwaite	No winner listed in syllabus
1919 ⁶³	No winner listed in syllabus	1 st Mrs. Dorothy Judge, Drumcondra, [Dublin] 2 nd Miss O'Flanagan, Fitzwiliam Terrace, Dartry Road, [Dublin]	1 st Mrs Haythornwaite, St. Philip's Rectory, Milltown, [Dublin]
1920 ⁶⁴	No winner listed in syllabus	No competition	No entry
1921 ⁶⁵	No winner listed in syllabus	No winner listed in syllabus	No entry
1922 ⁶⁶	No winner listed in syllabus	The single entrant did not compete	No entry
1923 ⁶⁷	1 st Miss Pauline Foley, Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham, [Dublin]	1 st Miss Nancy Mackey, Rathfarnham, [Dublin]	No entry
1924 ⁶⁸	No entry	No entry	No entry
1925 ⁶⁹	No entry	1 st withheld 3 rd Pauline Foley (bronze medal)	No entry
1926 ⁷⁰	No entry	1 st Pauline Fogarty, Loreto Rathfarnham, [Dublin]	No entry
1927 ⁷¹	1 st withheld 2 nd Miss Cathleen Halpenny, Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham	No entry	No entry
1928 ⁷²	1 st Eithne Pender, Drumcondra, Dublin 2 nd Mairead Gavin, School for the Blind, Merrion, Dublin	1 st Mrs. Gertrude E. Wright, Moy, Tyrone Joint 2 nd Rosanna Behan, School for Blind Girls, Merrion, [Dublin] Joint 2 nd Mary D. Coleman, Antrim Rd., Belfast Syllabus: 1 st withheld 3 rd Gertrude C. Wright (bronze medal) ⁷³	1 st Sanchia Pielon [sic.], Sandyford Ave., Dublin 2 nd Mairead Gavin, School for the Blind, Merrion, Dublin

62 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1926, <https://www.itma.ie/texts/feisprogrammes>, accessed October 07, 2022, 56.

63 *Irish Times*, May 14, 1919.

64 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1926, <https://www.itma.ie/texts/feisprogrammes>, accessed October 07, 2022, 56.

65 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1930, FCO, 54.

66 *Irish Times*, April 21, 1922; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1930, FCO, 54.

67 'Feis Ceoil', *Irish Times*, May 08, 1923; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1930, FCO, 54.

68 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1930, FCO, 54.

69 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1926, <https://www.itma.ie/texts/feisprogrammes>, accessed October 07, 2022, 56; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1930, FCO, 54.

70 *Irish Times*, May 04, 1926; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1930, FCO, 54.

71 *Irish Times*, May 05, 1927; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1930, FCO, 54; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1931, FCO, 50.

72 *Evening Herald*, May 16, 1928.

73 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1931, FCO, 50.

Table 4 cont/d

Year	Junior Double-Action Harp	Senior Double-Action Harp	Irish Harp
1929 ⁷⁴	1 st Miss Annie Hughes, St. Mary's School for the Blind, Merrion, Dublin The other competitor was Miss Jeanne Alibert, Leinster School of Music	1 st Mrs. Gertrude C. Wright, Moy, Tyrone Joint 2 nd Miss Eithne Pender, Drumcondra, [Dublin] and Miss Mairead Gavin, St. Mary's School for the Blind, Merrion	1 st Lulu Ashby, Dundrum, Dublin 2 nd Rosanna Behan, St. Mary's School for the Blind, Merrion 3 rd Maggie Gavin, St. Mary's School for the Blind
1930 ⁷⁵	1 st Miss Sanchia Pielou, Sandford Road, Ranelagh, [Dublin]	No award	1 st Miss Annie Hughes, St. Mary's School for the Blind, Merrion, Dublin 2 nd Miss Mairead Gavin, St. Mary's School for the Blind 3 rd Miss Rosanna Behan, St. Mary's School for the Blind
1931 ⁷⁶	No winner listed in syllabus	1 st Miss Sanchia Pielou, Sandford Road, Ranelagh, [Dublin] Very highly commended Miss Mary Gavin, St. Mary's School for the Blind, Merrion, [Dublin]	1 st Mairead Gavin
1932 ⁷⁷	No entries	1 st Mairgead Gavin, St. Mary's Schools, Merrion, Dublin 2 nd Annie Hughes	1 st Rosanna Behan, St. Mary's School, Merrion
1933 ⁷⁸	No winner listed in syllabus	1 st Annie Hughes, St. Mary's School for the Blind, Merrion	No winner listed in syllabus
1934 ⁷⁹	No winner listed in syllabus	No winner listed in syllabus	No winner listed in syllabus
1935 ⁷⁹	No winner listed in syllabus	No winner listed in syllabus	1 st Mary Carroll, St. Mary's School, Merrion, [Dublin] 2 nd Sean Broe, Ballygall Road, Finglas, [Dublin] 3 rd Lucy Dunne, St. Mary's School, Merrion, [Dublin]
1936 ⁸¹	1 st Miss Mary Carroll, St. Mary's School for the Blind, Merrion, [Dublin]	No winner listed in syllabus	1 st No award 2 nd Mary Carroll
1937 ⁸²	No winner listed in syllabus	No winner listed in syllabus	No winner listed in syllabus

73 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1931, FCO, 50.

74 *Irish Times*, May 03, 1929.

75 *Irish Times*, May 13, 1930; *Irish Times*, May 15, 1930.

76 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1935, FCO, 49; *Irish Times*, May 16, 1931.

77 *Irish Times*, May 14, 1932; *Irish Independent*, May 12, 1932.

78 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1935, FCO, 49; *Irish Times*, May 09, 1933.

79 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1935, FCO, 49.

80 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1936, FCO, 49; *Irish Times*, May 16, 1935.

81 *Irish Press*, 23 May 1936; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1939, FCO, 49; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1941 FCO, 51.

82 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1939, FCO, 49; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, FCO, 1941, 51.

Table 4 cont/d

Year	Junior Double-Action Harp	Senior Double-Action Harp	Irish Harp
1938 ⁸³	No winner listed in syllabus	No award made	No winner listed in syllabus
1939 ⁸⁴	No winner listed in syllabus	No winner listed in syllabus	No winner listed in syllabus
1940 ⁸⁵	No winner listed in syllabus	1 st Miss M. C. Wright Moy, Tyrone	1 st Grania McFadden, Convent of Sacred Heart of Mary, Lisburn, Antrim 2 nd Margaret M. O'Leary, St. Ibar's Villas, Wexford Commended Colm O Dochartaigh, Bothar Claud, Dublin
1941 ⁸⁶	No winner listed in syllabus	No winner listed in syllabus	1 st Aileen McArdle, Convent of the Sacred Heart of Mary, Lisburn, Antrim 2 nd Mary Murphy, St. Mary's School for the Blind, Merrion, Dublin 3 rd Margaret O'Leary, St. Ibar's Villas, Wexford
1942 ⁸⁷	No winner listed in syllabus	1 st Isolda Peterson, Winton Avenue, Rathgar, [Dublin]	1 st Mary Murphy, St. Mary's School, Merrion, Dublin 2 nd Margaret O'Leary, St. Ibar's Villas, Wexford 3 rd Lois Ruth Davidson, Rathdown Park, Dublin Highly commended Anne and Mercedes Bolger, Gorey, Wexford
1943 ⁸⁸	No winner listed in syllabus	No winner listed in syllabus	No gold medal awarded 1 st and silver medal Lois Davidson, Rathdown Park, Terenure, [Dublin] 2 nd and bronze medal Mercedes Bolger, Millmount, Gorey, Wexford [Both students of the RIAM]
1944 ⁸⁹	1 st Lois Ruth Davidson, Rathdown Park, Terenure, [Dublin] 2 nd Mary Murphy, St. Mary's School for the Blind, Merrion, [Dublin]	No winner listed in syllabus	1 st Mercedes Bolger, Millmount, Gorey, [Wexford]
1945 ⁹⁰	No winner listed in syllabus	No winner listed in syllabus	No winner listed in syllabus

83 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1939, FCO, 49; *Irish Times*, May 11, 1938;

84 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1941, FCO, 51.

85 *Irish Times*, May 11, 1940; *Irish Times*, May 02, 1940; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1941, F276, NLI.

86 *Irish Times*, May 15, 1941; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1942, F276, NLI; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1945, MS 40, 228/6, FCAP, NLI.

87 *Irish Times*, May 15, 1942; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1943, F276, NLI.

88 *Irish Times*, May 14, 1943; *Irish Times*, May 22, 1943; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions 1944, MS 40, 228/6, FCAP, NLI; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1945, MS 40, 228/6, FCAP, NLI.

89 *Irish Times*, May 11, 1944; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1945, MS 40, 228/6, FCAP, NLI.

90 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1946, MS 40, 228/6, FCAP, NLI.

Table 4 cont/d

Year	Junior Double-Action Harp	Senior Double-Action Harp	Irish Harp
1946 ⁹¹	No winner listed in syllabus	No winner listed in syllabus	1 st Cora McArdle, Convent of Sacred Heart, Lisburn, [Antrim] 2 nd Agnes Acton, Convent of Sacred Heart, Lisburn, [Antrim]
1947 ⁹²	No competition	No competition	1 st Patricia Hunter, Sacred Heart of Mary Convent, Lisburn, Antrim 2 nd Deirdre White, Sacred Heart of Mary Convent, Lisburn, Antrim 3 rd Barbara Robinson, Kimmage Road West, Dublin
1948 ⁹³	No competition	No competition	1 st Geraldine Fennell, Clontarf, [Dublin] [student of Teresa Ní Chormaic]
1949 ⁹⁴	No winner listed in syllabus	No winner listed in syllabus	No competition
1950-1956 ⁹⁵	Not mentioned in syllabus		
1957 ⁹⁶	No entrants	Nuala Herbert, Griffith Avenue, [Dublin]	1 st Una Ní Dhonnabháin [Una O'Donovan], Dalkey, Dublin
1958 ⁹⁷	1 st Una O'Donovan, Dalkey, Dublin	No winner listed in syllabus	1 st Una O'Donovan, Dalkey, Dublin
1959 ⁹⁸	1 st Sheelagh Woods, Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham, [Dublin] 2 nd Una O'Donovan, Ard-na-Cree, Dalkey, Dublin 3 rd Aileen Coyne, Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham, [Dublin]	No winner listed in syllabus	1 st Ann Crowley, Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2 nd Joan Burke, Dartry Road, Dublin 3 rd Rita Kenny, Pearse Street, Dublin

91 *Irish Times*, May 14, 1946; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1947, MS 40, 228/6, FCAP, NLI, 58.

92 *Irish Times*, May 14, 1947; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1949, MS 40, 228/6, FCAP, NLI, 63.

93 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1949, MS 40, 228/6, FCAP, NLI, 63; *Irish Times*, May 12, 1948; *Irish Times*, February 20, 1954.

94 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1949, MS 40, 228/6, FCAP, NLI, 49.

95 Feis Ceoil, Syllabi of Prize Competitions, 1950-1956, MS 40, 228/6-7, FCAP, NLI.

96 *Irish Times*, May 16, 1957; *Irish Times*, May 17, 1957.

97 *Irish Times*, May 15, 1958; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1959, FCO; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1960, MS 40, 228/7, FCAP, NLI, 58.

98 *Irish Times*, May 14, 1959; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1960, MS 40, 228/7, FCAP, NLI.



Figure 3: Entrants for the 1931 Townshend Cup Competition. Image courtesy of the Irish Newspaper Archives.⁷⁷

Repeated engagement is particularly pronounced in the Townshend Cup, the winners of which were also primarily from Dublin. The sole entrant for the inaugural competition, Dublin harpist Margaret O'Donohoe, retained the cup in 1926, on which occasion the other two entrants were from County Cork.⁷⁸ O'Donohoe continued to compete,⁷⁹ and won the

cup for a third time in 1929. She is pictured in the *Irish Times* following her win, wearing a traditional costume, a style of presentation espoused by Townshend and her pupils.⁸⁰ Similarly, Figure 3 shows that competitors dressed in national costume in 1931.⁸¹ All prize-winners in the 1930s were pupils of Townshend. A small number of participants supported the competition in this decade and the early 1940s including the Ní Shéaghda sisters and the Sheridan sisters.⁸² The competition was later reinvigorated by students of Sion Hill, where Townshend's former pupil Máirín Ní Shéaghda taught from the early 1950s.⁸³

77 *Evening Herald*, May 14, 1931. The winner Miss Lelia Sheridan (front centre) holds the Townshend Cup.

78 *Irish Times*, May 07, 1925; *Irish Times*, May 08, 1926.

79 For example, in 1928 she was highly commended in the Townshend Cup competition. *Irish Times*, May 18, 1928.

80 *Irish Times*, April 30, 1929.

81 *Evening Herald*, May 14, 1931.

82 *Irish Press*, May 13, 1933; *Irish Press*, May 16, 1935.

83 De Barra, 'Sustaining the harp in Ireland', 100.

Table 5: Winners of the Instrumental Harp Competitions 1918-1959

Year	Townshend Cup
1925 ⁹⁹	1 st Miss Margaret Donohoe, [Dublin]
1926 ¹⁰⁰	1 st Miss Margaret Donohoe, [Dublin] 2 nd Miss Frances O'Donovan, Barrett's Buildings, Cork 3 rd Miss Annie Ryan, North Mall, Cork
1927 ¹⁰¹	1 st Miss Rosanna Behan, St. Mary's School for the Blind, Merrion, Dublin Highly commended Miss Maureen Donnachada, Fontenoy Street, Dublin Commended Sanchia Pielow [sic], Sandford Road, Dublin
1928 ¹⁰²	1 st Miss Nora Brady, School for Blind Girls, Merrion, Dublin Highly commended Miss Margaret O'Donohoe, Fontenoy Street, Dublin
1929 ¹⁰³	1 st Miss Margaret O'Donohoe, Fontenoy Street, Dublin Commended Miss Norah Brady, St. Mary's School for the Blind, Merrion, Dublin
1930 ¹⁰⁴	1 st Miss Leila Sheridan, Blackrock, Dublin
1931 ¹⁰⁵	1 st Miss Lelia Sheridan
1932 ¹⁰⁶	1 st Máire Ní Sheaghda, Dundrum, [Dublin] 2 nd Máire Ní Sheireadain [Sheridan] 3 rd Máirín Ní Chathain
1933 ¹⁰⁷	1 st Máire Ní Sheaghda
1934 ¹⁰⁸	1 st Máire Sheridan, Blackrock, Dublin
1935 ¹⁰⁹	1 st Máirín Ní Shéaghda, Dundroma, Atha Cliath 2 nd Neasa Ní Shéaghda, Dundroma, Atha Cliath
1936 ¹¹⁰	1 st Róisín Ní Sheaghda, Dun Druma, Atha Cliath 2 nd Mairin Ni Bhriain, Sydenham Villas, Bray, [Wicklow]
1937- 1938 ¹¹¹	No winner listed in syllabus
1939 ¹¹²	1 st Róisín Ní Shéaghda, Dundrum, [Dublin] Highly commended Niamh Ní Shéaghda
1940 ¹¹³	1 st Máirín Ní Chathain, Bothar Waterloo Ath' Cliath Also mentioned – Derahra Medcalf, Templemore Avenue, Ranelagh, [Dublin] Máirín Ní h-Annrachain, Bothar Haddington, Dublin
1941 ¹¹⁴	1 st Niamh Ní Shéaghda, Dundrum, Dublin
1942 ¹¹⁵	1 st Derahra Medcalf, Templemore Avenue, Rathgar, [Dublin]

99 *Irish Times*, May 07, 1925.

100 *Irish Times*, May 08, 1926.

101 *Irish Times*, May 05, 1927; *Evening Herald*, May 04, 1927.

102 *Irish Times*, May 18, 1928.

103 *Irish Times*, April 30, 1929.

104 *Irish Times*, May 15, 1930.

105 *Evening Herald*, May 14, 1931.

106 *Irish Independent*, May 12, 1932; *Sunday Independent*, May 15, 1932.

107 *Irish Press*, May 13, 1933.

108 *Irish Press*, May 12, 1934.

109 *Irish Press*, May 16, 1935.

110 *Irish Times*, May 13, 1936.

111 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1941, FCO, 51.

112 *Irish Times*, May 13, 1939.

113 *Irish Times*, May 11, 1940.

114 *Irish Times*, May 17, 1941.

115 *Irish Press*, May 16, 1942.

Table 5 cont/d

Year	Townshend Cup
1942 ¹¹⁵	1 st Derahra Medcalf, Templemore Avenue, Rathgar, [Dublin]
1943 ¹¹⁶	1 st Eibhlín Ní Chearbhaill, Eadan Mor, Raheny, Dublin Runners-up Dr. Becker, Rathmines, [Dublin] and Nuala Ní Sheaghda, Dundrum, Dublin
1944 ¹¹⁷	1 st Blaithin Ni Annrachain, Haddington Road, Dublin
1945 ¹¹⁸	No award
1946 ¹¹⁹	1 st Eilís Nic Cearbhaill, Rath Eanna, Baile Átha Cliath
1947 ¹²⁰	No competition
1948 ¹²¹	1 st Eilis McCarvill, Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin
1949 ¹²²	No competition
1950- 1951 ¹²³	No winner listed in syllabus
1952 ¹²⁴	1 st Deirdre A. Ní Fhloinn, Clochar San Dominic, Carraig Dubh [Sion Hill, Blackrock, Dublin] 2 nd Maire Ní Eaghra, Clochar San Dominic, Carraig Dubh 3 rd Caitrin Nic Uaith, Clochar San Dominic, Carraig Dubh
1953 ¹²⁵	1 st Mary O'Hara, Dunseverick road, Clontarf, [Dublin] Highly commended Deirdre Flynn, Upper Drumcondra Road and Caitlin Nic Uaitcín, Saggart, [Dublin]
1954 ¹²⁶	1 st Lilian Courtney
1955 ¹²⁷	1 st Maureen Hurley, Sandymount Avenue, Dublin Highly commended Noeleen O'Sullivan, Ann Cant, Sally O'Sullivan and Lillian Courtney, all Dominican Convent, Sion Hill, Dublin
1956 ¹²⁸	1 st Therese Hayes, Dominican Convent, Sion Hill, Blackrock, Dublin Very Highly Commended Noeleen O'Sullivan and Deirdre Gallagher, Dominican Convent, Sion Hill, Blackrock, Dublin
1957 ¹²⁹	1 st Deirdre O'Callaghan, Dominican Convent, Sion Hill, Blackrock, Dublin 2 nd Noellin O'Sullivan, Dominican Convent, Sion Hill, Blackrock, Dublin
1958 ¹³⁰	1 st Dolores Collier, Dominican Convent, Blackrock, Dublin Highly commended Therese O'Reilly, Glasnevin, [Dublin]; Deirdre O'Callaghan, Dominican Convent, Blackrock, [Dublin] and Ann Cant, Dominican Convent, Blackrock, [Dublin]
1959 ¹³¹	1 st Dolores Collier, Dominican Convent, Sion Hill, [Dublin] 2 nd Kay Rice, Jonesboro, Newry, Down

116 *Irish Times*, May 15, 1943.

117 *Irish Times*, May 12, 1944.

118 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1947, MS 40, 228/6, FCAP, NLI, 56.

119 *Irish Times*, May 18, 1946.

120 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1949, MS 40, 228/6, FCAP, NLI, 59.

121 *Irish Times*, May 12, 1948.

122 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1949, MS 40, 228/6, FCAP, NLI, 49.

123 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1951, MS 40, 228/6, FCAP, NLI; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1952, MS 40, 228/6, FCAP, NLI.

124 *Irish Times*, May 13, 1952.

125 *Irish Times*, May 12, 1953.

126 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1956, MS 40, 228/7, FCAP, NLI, 46.

127 *Irish Times*, May 11, 1955.

128 *Irish Times*, May 09, 1956.

129 *Irish Press*, May 15, 1957.

130 *Irish Times*, May 14, 1958.

131 *Irish Times*, May 14, 1959.

Prior to the introduction of the Dr Annie Patterson Medal in 1939, composition competitions for harp had attracted scant engagement,⁸⁴ with just one award presented in the first twenty years of the festival.⁸⁵ The Dr Annie Patterson Medal was awarded regularly, however scrutiny of the prize-winners reveals that just six entrants were awarded prizes between 1939 and 1959, as shown in Table 6. Ernest de Regge⁸⁶ won the competition five times in the period 1940 to 1953, while Ruth Mervyn⁸⁷ was awarded the medal on seven occasions between 1950 and 1958. Her winning compositions from the 1958 festival were performed in the 1959 prize-winners' concert by harpist Teresa Garvey.⁸⁸ Both de Regge and Mervyn also achieved success in the composition competitions at the Oireachtas,⁸⁹ and Mervyn continued to write for the harp thereafter.⁹⁰

84 No entries were received for a harp solo composition competition initiated in 1897, which was subsumed into another category in 1901. Doyle, *Voices of the Feis Ceoil*, 121, 127.

85 G. Molyneux Palmer was awarded a prize in 1917 for an 'Irish Air with Accompaniment for Irish Harp'. Palmer was born in Sussex in 1882 and studied at the Royal College of Music under Sir Charles Villiers Stanford and Dr. Charles Wood. He was appointed organist and choirmaster at Mallow Church in 1912 before relocating to Dublin in 1915. Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1926, <https://www.itma.ie/texts/feisprogrammes>, accessed October 07, 2022, 43.

86 Ernest de Regge (1901-1958) was born in Flanders. He moved to Ireland to assume the post of music professor at St. Flannan's College in Ennis and organist and choirmaster in Ennis Cathedral, and played a key role in the development of church music in Ennis. He also achieved success in the Milligan Fox Medal competition at the Feis Ceoil and in the Oireachtas composition competitions. Ghislaine de Regge, 'Ernest de Regge (1901-1958): Biography', Clare Local Studies and Archives, <https://clarelibraries.ie/localstudies/people/ernest-de-regge-1901-1958/biography/>, accessed May 22, 2026.

87 Mervyn was a composer, arranger, pianist, and organist who moved to Ireland in 1935.

88 *Irish Times*, May 18, 1959

89 An tOireachtas 1951 Clár and An tOireachtas 1953 Clár, Conradh na Gaeilge Papers, University of Galway; Ghislaine de Regge, 'Ernest de Regge (1901-1958): Biography'.

90 Several of her settings for harp and voice were later published. Ruth Mervyn, *Dhá Amhrán le Tionlacan Cruite* (Baile Átha Cliath: Oifig an tSoláthair, 1977); Nancy Calthorpe, *The Calthorpe Collection: Songs and airs arranged for the voice and Irish harp* (Dublin: Waltons Piano & Musical Instrument Galleries Ltd., 1974): 'In Old Donegal' (10-11), 'I Won't Marry at All' (32-33), 'The Grey Man' (34-35), 'The Mitcher' (36-38).

Table 6: Winners of the Dr. Annie Patterson Medal 1939-1959

Year	Dr. Annie Patterson Medal
1939 ¹³²	No winner listed in syllabus
1940 ¹³³	1 st E. de Regge, Ashline, Ennis, Clare Commended Niall Breathnach, Stillorgan Park, Blackrock, Dublin
1941 ¹³⁴	1 st E. de Regge, Ashline, Ennis, Clare Highly commended, George M. Rothwell, Rathmines Park, Dublin
1942 ¹³⁵	1 st Ernest de Regge, Ennis, Clare Commended Mrs. D. J. Bolger, Millmount, Gorey, Wexford
1943 ¹³⁶	1 st Ernest de Regge, Ashline, Ennis, Clare
1944- 1946 ¹³⁷	No award
1947- 1948 ¹³⁸	1 st Patrick E. Murphy
1949 ¹³⁹	No award
1950 ¹⁴⁰	1 st Mrs. R. Mervyn, Merville, Donegal
1951 ¹⁴¹	No award
1952 ¹⁴²	1 st Mrs. Ruth Mervyn, Millfield, Buncrana, Donegal
1953 ¹⁴³	1 st Mr. E. de Regge, Bindon Street, Ennis, Clare
1954- 1955 ¹⁴⁴	1 st Mrs. Ruth Mervyn, Millfield, Buncrana, Donegal
1959 ¹⁴⁵	No award

132 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions and Report of Executive Committee, 1940, FCO.

133 *Irish Times*, July 02, 1940.

134 *Irish Times*, June 28, 1941.

135 *Irish Times*, May 15, 1942.

136 *Irish Times*, May 14, 1943.

137 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1945, MS 40 228/6, FCAP, NLI, 57; *Irish Times*, May 15, 1945; *Irish Times*, May 17, 1946.

138 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1948, MS 40 228/6, FCAP, NLI, 53; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1949, FCO, 56.

139 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1951, MS 40 228/6, FCAP, NLI, 47.

140 *Irish Times*, May 09, 1950.

141 Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1952, MS 40 228/6, FCAP, NLI, 47.

142 *Irish Times*, May 15, 1952.

143 *Clare Champion*, May 16, 1953.

144 *Irish Times*, May 19, 1954; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1956, MS 40 228/7, FCAP, NLI, 46; *Irish Times*, May 11, 1956; *Irish Press*, May 15, 1957; Feis Ceoil, Syllabus of Prize Competitions, 1959, MS 40 228/7, FCAP, NLI, 52.

145 *Irish Press*, May 15, 1959.

While competitions were a central focus of the Feis Ceoil, they form just one element of the festival. Helen Doyle alludes to a broader network of spectators, supporters, events and performances.⁹¹ Harpists featured in prize-winners' concerts, associated

91 Doyle, *Voices of the Feis Ceoil*, 21.

performances and radio broadcasts,⁹² and were often singled out in press reviews,⁹³ while competition successes were also referenced in performance advertisements.⁹⁴ Moreover, successive generations of harpists gained performance experience through engagement with the Feis Ceoil, many of whom went on to forge successful international careers.⁹⁵

Conclusion

Consideration of harping activity in the Feis Ceoil during the first half of the twentieth century provides insights into stylistic, pedagogical and organological developments, most notably a growth in the practice of singing to harp accompaniment. The promotion of composition for the instrument and the introduction of new competitions evinces a practical approach to supporting the harp, however high standards were maintained with prizes withheld on several occasions. Despite low levels of engagement, the festival continued to provide a forum for harping, and through the involvement Townshend, responded to and influenced developments in the Irish harp landscape. The Feis Ceoil played a key role in sustaining and shaping harping activity at a crucial period in harping history, laying the foundations for a revival in the mid-twentieth century by harpists who gained performance experience at the festival. Practitioners including Mary O'Hara promoted the instrument on the international stage in the 1950s, mirroring Townshend and Ní Shéaghda's approach to performance, while the formation of Cairde na Cruite in 1960 ushered in a new era for the Irish harp, providing focus and direction for the next phase of development.

92 The RIAM Students' Musical Union organised an 'At Home' in the Aberdeen Hall of the Gresham Hotel, Dublin in June 1931 which featured Feis Ceoil prize-winners including harpist Sanchia Pielou. In August 1933 Annie Hughes, winner of the senior double-action harp competition featured in a concert by Feis Ceoil prize-winners broadcast on radio. Similarly, Mary Carroll, winner of the Irish harp competition, and Máirín Ní Shéaghda, winner of the Townshend Cup featured on *2RN* in June 1935. *Irish Times*, July 01, 1931; *Irish Press*, August 03, 1933; *Irish Times*, June 01, 1935; *Irish Times*, June 15, 1935.

93 *Irish Times*, May 14, 1923; *Irish Times*, May 09, 1927; *Irish Times*, May 21, 1928; *Irish Times*, May 19, 1930; *Irish Times*, May 18, 1931; *Irish Times*, May 18, 1936.

94 Lelia Sheridan, winner of the Townshend Cup, was among the artists featured in a concert at the Theatre Royal on 19 November 1933 in aid of St. Patrick's Missionary Priests, Kiltegan, Co. Wicklow. Harpists Miss Behan and Miss Gavin, both Gold Medalists, were to feature in a radio broadcast of a concert by past and present pupils of St. Mary's School for the Blind, Merrion, Dublin on 29 September 1935. *Sunday Independent*, November 19, 1933; *Irish Press*, September 28, 1935.

95 Examples include orchestral harpist Sanchia Pielou, harp soloist Una O'Donovan, and harpist-singer Mary O'Hara.



Rachel Duffy

Rachel Duffy is a harper from Bray, Co. Wicklow. In addition to performing across Ireland, Rachel has appeared at festivals in China, France, Germany, Spain, Wales and Scotland and has featured in numerous radio and television broadcasts. She enjoys collaborating with ensembles including Triad Harp Trio, Na Cauci and the National Folk Orchestra. Recent performance highlights include appearances at Dublin TradFest, Electric Picnic, Creative Connexions in Sitges, Spain and Tradition Now at the National Concert Hall. Rachel is a founder and co-director of The Sugarloaf Sessions, a new traditional music festival in Bray and co-director of the annual international harp festival An Chúirt Chruitireachta, which celebrates its 40th anniversary in 2026.

Rachel enjoys teaching the harp to students of all ages in Wicklow and Dublin. She directs the Bray CCÉ harp ensemble, co-directs the TU Dublin Harp Ensemble and works as a tutor and composer with Music Generation Wicklow's Rithim Orchestra.

She has a keen interest in both the Irish harp's history and its contemporary transformation, which is the subject of her PhD research at Technological University Dublin under the supervision of Professor Clíona Doris. In Autumn 2024 she was awarded a Research Fellowship at Boston College and completed a project based on the Mary O'Hara Papers. She has shared her findings through journals including Harp Perspectives, An Cruitire and Ethnomusicology Ireland.