

EMIL Entry

Seóirse Bodley

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**Bodley, Seóirse**

(b Dublin, 4 Apr. 1933)

Composer. Bodley is one of Ireland's most important composers, and his engagement with both Ireland's Gaelic cultural heritage and the European avant-garde has had a profound effect on his extensive compositional output, in particular his attempts to achieve a synthesis of Irish traditional music and MODERNISM.

Bodley studied composition privately with HANS WALDEMAR ROSEN and under his supervision completed two partsongs for male voices to texts by Milton which were broadcast in 1950-1. He also had some of his early songs performed by TOMÁS Ó SÚILLEABHÁIN. In 1952 Bodley composed his first significant work, *Music for Strings*, in which he handles some unresolved dissonance within a tonal-modal setting. It was first performed that year by the DUBLIN ORCHESTRAL PLAYERS and was well received. In the same year his

enthusiasm for the Irish language led him to adopt the Irish version of his Christian name [George], Seóirse. He studied music at UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN (UCD) under JOHN LARCHET, and during the 1950s he arranged numerous Irish airs, mostly for the Raidió Éireann Singers [see RTÉ SINGERS]. In 1956 he wrote what can be regarded as his first major choral work, *An bhliain lán* [The Full Year] for tenor solo and SATB chorus, a setting of a text by Tomás Ó Floinn.

Bodley continued his studies with Johann Nepomuk David at the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik in Stuttgart, where he also encountered the music of Stockhausen, Boulez and Nono. There he completed his first major orchestral work, *Salve, Maria virgo* (1957), a tonal work with effective use being made of quartal and quintal sonorities, and his Sonata for Violin and Piano (1959). His Symphony no. 1 (1959) displays the influence of Hindemith and was first performed by the Raidió Éireann Symphony Orchestra [see RTÉ NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA] in 1960. Bodley submitted it for the degree of DMus, awarded in 1960 in UCD, where he had just been appointed to a lectureship in music and where he remained for his entire career, retiring as emeritus professor in 1998. For over 40 years he was also active as an accompanist, adjudicator, broadcaster and conductor, notably as conductor of the CULWICK CHORAL SOCIETY (1961–71), presenting the Irish premières of works by Tippett, Orff, Britten and Stravinsky. In 1962 he was commissioned to write a choral work for the Seminar on Contemporary Choral Music as part of the 1963 CORK INTERNATIONAL CHORAL FESTIVAL. The resulting *Trí aortha* [Three Satires] for SATB are settings of humorous old Irish texts in which he uses diatonic triads juxtaposed within contrapuntal contexts to generate some mild dissonant effects.

Following several visits to the Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik in Darmstadt (1963–5), Bodley immersed himself in European modernism, a process which resulted in a series of avant-garde works. He engaged closely with the diverse musical languages of the Darmstadt school and absorbed many of them fluently into his compositions. In 1963 he wrote a solo piano piece, *Prelude, Toccata and Epilogue*, which experiments with pianistic textures and sonorities, and his *Chamber Symphony no. 1* of 1964 displays techniques and textures reminiscent of Webern. For the YEATS centenary in 1965 he composed *Never to Have Lived Is Best*, a cycle of Yeats settings for soprano and orchestra which show his command of dramatic vocal writing and orchestral colour. *Configurations* (1967) is scored for an expanded orchestra (organised spatially) which includes two harps, piano, celesta and electric guitar, as well as a large percussion section, and in this he applies serial techniques to the rhythmic structure and dynamics.

One of the features of Bodley's scores during this period is his concern to evolve new types of musical notation to indicate relative durations. In his two-movement String Quartet no. 1 (1968), first performed in January 1969 during the DUBLIN FESTIVAL OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY MUSIC, he allowed himself freedom in manipulating the tone-row while retaining a large measure of serial rigour and employing some aleatoric techniques. *Meditations on Lines from Patrick Kavanagh* (1971) comprises five movements inspired by Kavanagh's poetry, the penultimate movement of which is an angular and moving setting for contralto of 'Canal Bank Walk'. He completed two further works in this style in 1973: a full orchestral song-cycle, *Ceathrúintí Mháire Ní Ógáin* [Máire Ní Ógáin's Quatrains] for soprano solo and orchestra, and *September Preludes* for flute and piano.

In the early 1970s Bodley turned to exploring the possibility of evolving a compositional idiom influenced by Irish folk music as he attempted a distinctly Irish mode of musical utterance. He embarked on a close study of Irish music, particularly the tradition of SEAN-NÓS, becoming interested in the problem of transcribing the melismatic complexity and rhythmic freedom of slow airs into conventional musical staff notation (his research was published in ÉIGSE CHEOL TÍRE). He also jointly founded the Folk Music Society of Ireland in 1970, being elected its inaugural chair. The first important score in which Bodley's change of stylistic direction becomes manifest is a short work for two pianos entitled *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* (1972), where Bodley juxtaposes a slow melody suggesting a stylised evocation of the sean-nós tradition with dissonant material. He developed this stylistic duality in the orchestral work *A Small White Cloud Drifts over Ireland* (1975), which became one of his best-known compositions, and *Aislingí* (1977), a substantial work for solo piano. Bodley collaborated with the poet Brendan Kennelly on three works: *A Chill Wind* (1977) for mixed choir using some traditional Irish nonsense syllables; *A Girl* (1978), a cycle of 22 songs containing melodic lines which displays extensive ornamentation in an Irish style (premiered and recorded by BERNADETTE GREEVY and JOHN O'CONNOR and described by Bodley as a large-scale dramatic cantata for solo voice and piano); and *Ceol: Symphony no. 3* (1980), commissioned for the inauguration of the NATIONAL CONCERT HALL in Dublin in 1981. *Symphony no. 2, 'I Have Loved the Lands of Ireland'* (1980) was commissioned to commemorate the centenary of Pádraig Pearse and incorporates a range of allusions to Gaelic mythology and early Irish literature (each of its seven movements is inspired by a quotation from early Irish sources). Some controversy was provoked by his work for vocal quartet and electronics

entitled *The Banshee* (1983) for the Sonorities Festival in BELFAST, in which Bodley sought to evoke the supernatural harbinger of death. Much use is made of extended vocal techniques in conjunction with musical contours and ornamentation derived from Irish folk music, with these sonorities being synthesised. His Trio for Flute, Violin and Piano (1986) sustains his use of overtly Irish material. His congregational masses, written from the middle to the end of the 1970s, draw on the congregation's natural affinity with Irish music, in particular his *Mass of Peace* (1976).

Between 1990 and 1991 Bodley produced two symphonies in close succession: his Fourth Symphony was commissioned by the Orchestra Sinfonica dell'Emilia-Romagna 'Arturo Toscanini', and his Fifth was commissioned to commemorate the signing of the Treaty of Limerick. Although the latter is not programmatic in any obvious sense it is pervaded by sharp contrasts of peacefulness and turbulence, and at times the musical language recalls the work of Stravinsky and Shostakovich. These symphonies and his String Quartet no. 2 (1992) display his use of developing variation as a structural device. During this phase of his career Bodley composed several important song-cycles, many of them for the mezzo-soprano AYLISH KERRIGAN, with whom Bodley gave numerous recitals in Ireland and abroad. In 1987 he collaborated with the Irish poet Micheal O'Siadhail, composing a song-cycle, *The Naked Flame*. He then marked the 400 years since the Spanish Armada with *Carta Irlandesa*, a cycle of four songs to texts by González-Guerrero completed in 1988.

By the early 1990s Bodley's musical language began to recover the serial and post-serial techniques of his early works. This became manifest in three virtuosic piano works where he re-engages with the avant-garde idioms which he had encountered on his visits to Darmstadt. However, Bodley now allowed himself to include tonal elements within his freely-atonal language and to use serially-generated material based on rows of more than 12 notes. *News from Donabate*, based on a 21-note row, is an expansive and virtuosic 50-minute work for piano in ten movements (all with titles) which displays many irregular rhythms, rapid flourishes and rich sonorities. *Chiaroscuro*, commissioned as a test piece for the DUBLIN INTERNATIONAL PIANO COMPETITION in 2000, was inspired by a painting by Caravaggio in the NATIONAL GALLERY OF IRELAND, *The Taking of Christ*. In its employment of dramatic extremes of dynamics and register *Chiaroscuro* has much in common with the post-war piano music of Boulez and Stockhausen, yet retains certain quasi-tonal references as Bodley avoids a rigid application of his 15-note row. *An Exchange of Letters* (2002) comprises seven movements, all of which also have descriptive but non-programmatic titles. In 2000 the

NATIONAL YOUTH ORCHESTRA OF IRELAND commissioned an orchestral work to be performed during the millennium celebrations, resulting in *Sinfonietta*, a work which harks back stylistically to his Fifth Symphony. In the same year he completed a short song-cycle, *The Earlsfort Suite* for mezzo-soprano and orchestra, again to texts by O'Siadhail. In *Metamorphoses on the Name Schumann* (2004) Bodley uses four 'Schumann' notes to form a mobile unit within a row. The musical material of his Third String Quartet (2004) is largely based on a 16-note row, and rhythmic irregularity is generated by the use of additive durations. The years 2003-4 saw the composition of three vocal works to texts by Goethe: *Wanderers Nachtlied* for mezzo-soprano, followed by a cycle of seven songs for soprano, baritone and piano entitled *Mignon und der Harfner*, and *Zeiten des Jahres* (2004), a setting of one of Goethe's *Venetianischen Epigrammen* for mezzo-soprano and guitar. A further Goethe song cycle was premiered in 2012.

Around this time Bodley had also begun to consider the writings of the Viennese philosopher Karl Popper and his ideas on historicism. Bodley found in his philosophies a way to clarify his own unpredictability in his many stylistic changes of direction over the years and his return to neo-tonality. His two-movement String Quartet no. 4 (2007) is pervaded by strong tonal references of a kind that are almost unprecedented in his previous work, with deliberately strong statements of primary chords as he reclaims tonal territory. His most recent work suggests that his stylistic explorations have not reached an end, and he is clearly untroubled by the apparent discontinuities and contradictions between the different phases of his development.

Bodley was elected a founder member of AOSDÁNA in 1981 and received Ireland's highest artistic award of *Saoi* in 2008.

*Compositions Orchestral*: Music for Strings (1952) | Movement for Orchestra (1956) | *Salve, Maria virgo* (1957) | Symphony no. 1 (1959) | *Divertimento* (1961) | Chamber Symphony no. 1 (1964) | *Configurations* (1967) | *A Small White Cloud Drifts over Ireland* (1975) | Symphony no. 2, 'I Have Loved the Lands of Ireland' (1980) | Chamber Symphony no. 2 (1982) | *Celebration Music* [orchestral version] (1984) | Symphony no. 4 (1991) | Symphony no. 5, 'The Limerick Symphony' (1991) | *Sinfonietta* (2000) | *Metamorphoses on the Name Schumann* (2004) | *Chamber: Capriccio nos 1 & 2* for Violin and Piano (1951/2) | *Sonatina* for Wind Quintet (1955) | *Sonata* for Violin and Piano (1959) | *Scintillae* (1968), 2 Irish hp | String Quartet no. 1 (1968) | *In Memory of Seán Ó Riada* (1971), fl, pf | *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* (1972), 2pf | *September Preludes* (1973), fl, pf | *Celebration Music* (1983), str qt, 3tp | Trio for Flute, Violin and Piano (1986) | *The Fiddler* (1987), vn, va, vc, spkr, opt.

ch, perc, insts | Phantasms (1989), fl, cl, hp, vc | String Quartet no. 2 (1992) | Ceremonial Music (1995), brass qt | String Quartet no. 3: Ave atque vale (2004) | Zeiten des Jahres (2004), v, gui | Islands (2006), gui | String Quartet no. 4 (2007) | *Solo Piano*: Scherzo (c1953) | Movement in B (c1954) | Four Little Pieces (Ceithre phíosá beaga don phianó) (1954) | Prelude, Toccata and Epilogue (1963) | Planxty Rosen (1974) | The Tightrope Walker Presents a Rose (1976) | Aislingí (1977) | The Narrow Road to the Deep North [solo pf version] (1977) | Christmas Prelude (1986) | News from Donabate (1999) | Chiaroscuro (1999) | In Quiet Celebration ... (2000) | An Exchange of Letters (2002) | *Choral*: Ring Out Ye Crystal Spheres (text, Milton) (1950), male octet | Song on May Morning (text, Milton) (1951), male octet | Trí hamhráin grá (text, Tomás Ó Raithille) (1952), SATB | Cúl an tí (text, Seán Ó Ríordáin) (1954), SATB | An bhliain lán (text, Tomás Ó Floinn) (1956), T, SATB | An bás is an bheátha (text, Irish proverbs) (1960), SATB, SSA, TTB | Trí aortha (1962), SATB | A Chill Wind (text, Brendan Kennelly) (1977), SATB | The Radiant Moment (text, Thomas MacGreevy) (1979), SATB | Ceol: Symphony no. 3 (text, Brendan Kennelly) (1980), S, A, T, B, SATB, semi-ch, children's ch, audience, spkr, orch | Fraw Musica (1996), Mez, SATB, str orch, fl, bn (opt.), org | *Vocal*: 11 Early Songs for Baritone (texts, Shakespeare, W. B. Yeats, Séamus Ó Néill, Seán Ó Ríordáin, Liam Gógán & Allingham), Bar, pf | Never to Have Lived Is Best (text, W.B. Yeats) (1965), S, orch | Ariel's Songs (text, Shakespeare) (1969), S, pf | Meditations on Lines from Patrick Kavanagh (text, Kavanagh) (1971), A, orch | Ceathrúintí Mháire Ní Ógáin (text, Máire Mhac an tSaoi) (1973), S, orch | A Girl (text, Brendan Kennelly) (1978), Mez, pf | The Banshee (text, Bodley) (1983), S, A, T, B, electronics | A Passionate Love (text, Bodley) (1985), Mez/Bar, pf | The Naked Flame (text, Micheal O'Siadhail) (1987), Mez, pf | Carta Irlandesa (text, Antonio González-Guerrero) (1988), Mez/Bar, pf | By the Margins of the Great Deep (text, Æ Russell) (1995), medium v, pf | Pax bellumque (text, Wilfred Owen & Thomas MacGreevy) (1997), S, fl, cl, pf, vn | Look to This Day (text, anon., Sanscrit) (1997), v, pf | Earlsfort Suite (text, Micheal O'Siadhail) (2000), v, orch | After Great Pain (texts, Emily Dickinson & Walt Whitman) (2002), Mez, pf | Wanders Nachtlied (text, Goethe) (2003), Mez, pf | Mignon und der Harfner (text, Goethe) (2004), S, Bar, pf | Squall (text, Micheal O'Siadhail) (2006), S, pf | *Liturgical Music*: Mass of Peace (1976) | Hymn to St John of God (1978) | Mass of Joy (1978) | The 'O' Antiphons (1978) | Psalm 95 (1979) | Hymn to Our Lady of Knock (1979) | Mass of Glory (1980) | Hymn for the Congregation of St Louis (1980) | A Concert Mass (text, Bodley) (1984), S, A, T, B, SATB, str | traditional German carols | traditional Irish carols | the Kilmore carols | Irish religious folksongs | Amra Cholúm Cille (text, Old Irish) (2007), SATB | *Film Music*: From Ireland's Past (1978) | James Joyce: 'Is There

One Who Understands Me?' (1981) | Between the Canals (1983) | Caught in a Free State (1984) | over 100 choral and orchestral arrangements, mostly of Irish airs  
*Select Discography* *New Music from Old Erin* (*Music for Strings*) (RÉSO, cond. Milan Horvat: LP, Decca, 1958) | *Prelude, Toccata and Epilogue* (Charles Lynch, pf: LP, New Irish Recording Company, 1971) | *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* [solo pf version] (John O'Connor, pf: LP/Cass., Gael Linn, 1980) | *A Girl* (Bernadette Greevy, Mez, John O'Connor, pf: LP, Gael Linn, 1980) | *Irish Vocal Music by Seóirse Bodley* (*The Naked Flame, Carta Irlandesa, By the Margins of the Great Deep*) (Aylish Kerrigan, Mez, Seóirse Bodley, pf: CD, Echo Classics Digital, 1996) | *Symphonies nos 4 & 5* (NSOI, cond. Colman Pearce: CD, Marco Polo, 2001) | *Chamber Symphony no. 1, A Small White Cloud Drifts over Ireland, Symphony no. 2: I Have Loved the Lands of Ireland* (RTÉ NSO, cond. Robert Houlihan: CD, RTÉ lyric fm, 2009)  
*Select Writings* "Technique and Structure in "Sean-nós" Singing", *Éigse cheoltíre* 1 (1973), 44–54 | ["Seán Ó Riada:] The Original Compositions: An Assessment", *Integrating Tradition: The Achievement of Seán Ó Riada*, ed. Fryer & Harris (Ballina, 1981), 28–40 | "The Claims of Conformity", *Teaching the Unteachable? The Role of Composition in Music Education*, ed. Flynn (Waterford, 2009), 32–57  
*Select Bibliography* Charles Acton: 'Interview with Seóirse Bodley', *Éire-Ireland* 5: 3 (Autumn 1970), 117–33 | Malcolm Barry: 'Examining the Great Divide', *Soundpost* 3 (1983), 15–20 | Daniel Murphy *et al.*, eds: 'Seóirse Bodley', *Education and the Arts: The Educational Autobiographies of Contemporary Irish Poets, Novelists, Dramatists, Musicians, Painters and Sculptors: A Research Report* (Dublin, 1987), 230–8 | Pádhraic Ó Cuinneagáin: 'The Piano Music of Seóirse Bodley' (MA, NUIM, 1992) | Axel Klein: "'Aber was ist heute schon noch abenteuerlich?": Ein Porträt des irischen Komponisten Seóirse Bodley', *MusikTexte* 12 (January 1994), 21–5 | Michael Dungan: 'Interview with Seóirse Bodley', *New Music News* (Sept. 1996), 9–11 | Axel Klein: *Die Musik Irlands im 20. Jahrhundert* (Hildesheim, 1996) | Gareth Cox: 'An Irishman in Darmstadt: Seóirse Bodley's String Quartet no. 1 (1968)', *IMS 7: Irish Music in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Cox & Klein (Dublin, 2003), 94–108 | Lorraine Byrne Bodley, ed.: *A Hazardous Melody of Being: Seóirse Bodley's Song-Cycles on the Poems of Micheal O'Siadhail* (Dublin, 2008) | Gareth Cox: *Seóirse Bodley* (Dublin, 2010)

Gareth Cox