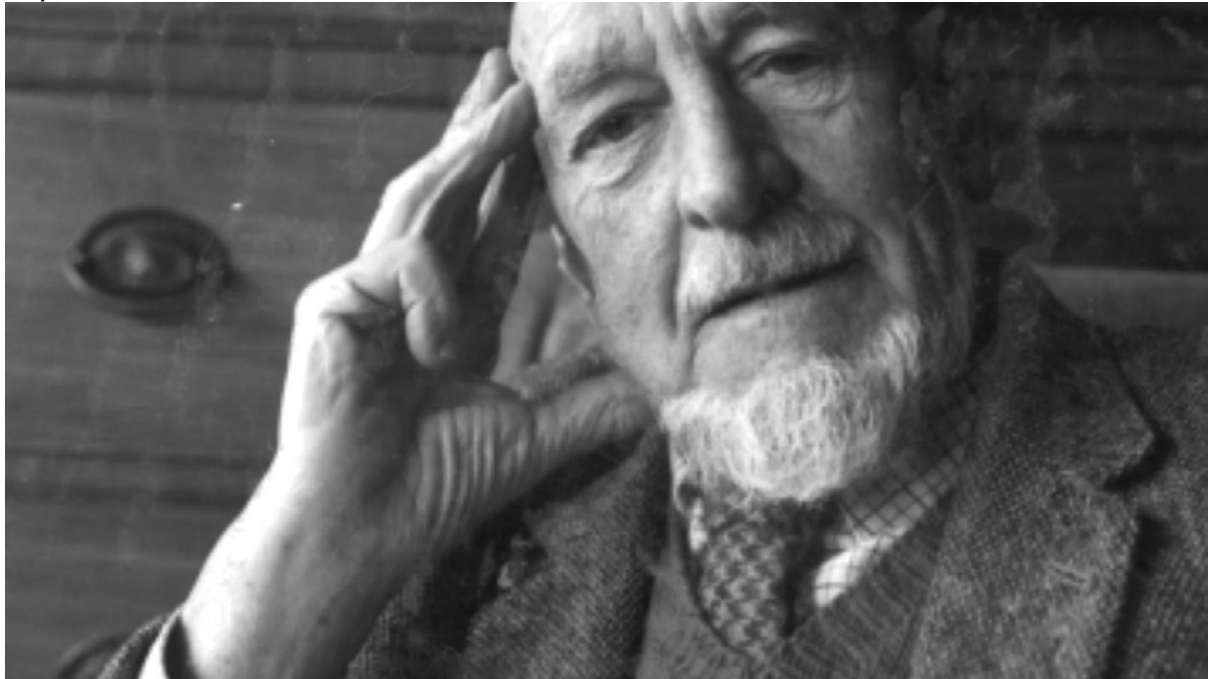


Creative Impulses, Cultural Accents: The genius of composer Brian Boydell

Essays on one of the most significant figures of 20th-century Irish music

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Dr Brian Boydell

Richard Pine

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Creative Impulses, Cultural Accents: Brian Boydell's music, advocacy, painting and legacy

Author: Edited by Barbara Dignam and Barra Boydell

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Brian Boydell (1917-2000) was one of Ireland's most distinguished and persuasive composers and music activists. He has already been commemorated in *The Life and Music*

of Brian Boydell (2004) and his own memoirs, *Rebellious Ferment* (2018). Now we have the proceedings of a centenary conference in 15 chapters addressing his compositions and his contributions to cultural life.

As professor of music at TCD from 1962-1982, Boydell completely reorganised the faculty, making it modern and outward-looking. He was a founder of the Music Association of Ireland in 1948 and a member of the Arts Council for many years. His broadcasts, on both radio and television, familiarised listeners – especially the younger generation – with the classical genre, traditionally regarded as the purlieu of the Ascendancy, a class to which Boydell himself belonged.

This book features almost no biographical study other than Philip Graydon's discussion of Boydell's membership of the White Stag group of painters, who were predominantly pacifist, inclined towards surrealism and part of Dublin life during the Emergency. It concentrates instead on aspects of his compositions that are usually neglected, such as his works for concert and Irish harps (excellent essays by Cliona Doris and Mary-Louise O'Donnell) and his film music (by Laura Anderson). Other aspects of his work – compositions for symphony orchestra, or his superb musicological skills – have been discussed elsewhere.

Quirky humour

I would have much preferred contributions on Boydell's quirky humour, his love of the west of Ireland (especially Achill), and his membership of the Arts Council, where he was influential not alone in musical politics but in its perception of culture generally.

If I have one major quibble, it is with Peter Murray's essay on Boydell as a painter. While it is authoritative, especially on his participation in "Baggotonia", it shows us not a single image from Boydell's brush, such as his cubist *Atlas Approached* (1943), which was displayed at Imma in 2005.

As a composer, Boydell ranks with Frederick May as one of the most significant creative intelligences of 20th-century Irish music. While some aspects of this achievement have been discussed in the 2004 volume by Gareth Cox, Axel Klein and Barra Boydell, Boydell's contribution to the intellectual and artistic vibrancy of that period has yet to find its champion interpreter.