



The 1792 Harpers' Assembly first day

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NATIONAL MUSIC OF IRELAND

Every one who feels the power of simple melody, and whose taste has not been too highly cultivated by the rich harmony of the Italian masters, must approve of cherishing a taste for the native airs of *Ireland*. If they want the polish of modern composition, they abound in those strokes of nature which, coming direct from the heart of the composer, seldom fail to excite corresponding sensations in the hearer.

As languages frequently lose their sinews in proportion to their refinement, so music loses its command over the passions in the same degree as the wild touches of the Harp give place to the regulated tunes of the Harpsichord. Our recollection that in one of the polished states of Greece, *Timotheus* was banished for adding a few strings to the *Lyre*, shews us that Music was not entirely considered an object of amusement, but attracted the attention of the State, in Greece, the mistress of the fine arts.

With these ideas, we were pleased with the scheme of encouraging a meeting of the Irish Harpers at Belfast, which would have been more fully attended had earlier and more general notice, been distributed over the most remote parts of the kingdom. — The number that were present in our Exchange Rooms on Wednesday last, and who are to continue to assemble in the same place for three days longer, were *ten* — a sufficient proof of the declining state of that simple but expressive instrument, and of the propriety of holding out every lure to prevent the original music of this country from being lost.

As a principal motive in this undertaking was to revive some of the most ancient airs, now nearly obsolete, their dates and authors perhaps for centuries unknown, pains will be [someone has written in 'were'] taken to reduce to notes some of those that have been played on this occasion, which might lead to a general publication of the best sets of our tunes. No one that remembers the exquisite taste and finger of *Dominic*, will hesitate to confess the capability of the Harp of Ireland, and how worthy it is of preservation. By such means alone can our national airs be saved from oblivion. Wales and Ireland have a national music, while England has none; if she had, it would not, like that of the two first countries, be only in the hands of a few itinerant minstrels.

The following is the order in which the Harpers played — and the particular airs chosen by each, in contending for the premiums which are to be adjudged on Saturday:

	DENNIS DEMPSEY,* (blind), from the county of Derry, aged 86.		
Played —	The Dawning of the Day.	...	Carolans.
	Ul a Condo Wo	}	
	The County of Leitrim	}	Authors and dates unknown.

* Dempsey is obviously an error for Hempsey or Hempson, of Magilligan, County Derry.

	ARTHUR O'NEILL, (blind), from the county Tyrone, aged 55.		
Played —	Green Woods of Trough.	...	Author and date unknown.
	The Fairy Queen	...	Carolans.
	Mrs. Crofton	...	Same.

CHARLES FANNING, from the county of Cavan, aged 56.
 Played — Condou Dee Lish, or Black-headed Deary. ... Author and date unknown.
 Rose Dillon and Jig ... Carolan.
 Colonel O'Hara ... Same.

DANIEL BLACK, (blind), from the county of Derry, aged 75.
 Played — The Receipt for Drinking Whiskey ... Carolan.
 Sir Alick O'Burke ... The same.
 Thomas a Burke ... The same.

CHARLES BYRNE, from the county of Leitrim, aged 80.
 Played — The *Old* Trough ... author and date unknown.
 Oganioge ... the same, very ancient.

HUGH HIGGINS, (blind), from the co. Mayo, aged 55.
 Played — Madam Cole ... Carolan.

PADDY QUIN, (blind), from the co. Armagh, aged 70.
 Played — The Rocks of Pleasure,
 Carolan's Devotion,
 Grace Nugent, by Carolan.

WM. CARR, from the co. Armagh, aged 15.
 Played — The Dawn of the Day.

ROSE MOONEY, (blind), from the co. Meath. [aged ??]
 Played — Sir Charles Coote,
 Mrs. Judge,
 Mrs. French, or Miss Fanny Power.

JAMES DUNCAN, from the co. of Down, aged 45.
 Played — Molly Astore ... date and author unknown.
 Morning Star ... the same.
 Catherine Tyrrel ... the same.

The Irish Harpers were succeeded by a *Welsh* one, whose execution was very great. The contrast between the plaintive tones of the Irish Instrument, and the bold martial ones of the Welsh, had a pleasing effect; and marked a difference of character between the two nations.

The evening produced an exhibition in a very different style, and perhaps less directed to the heart, in the admirable performance of Madam Gautherot on the Violin, Mr. Mahon on the Voce Claría, and Mr. Reignagle on the Violincello [sic].

* The chords of the Lyre were originally four. They were afterwards encreased [sic] to seven, at which number they were fixed by the laws of Sparta; and *Timotheus* was banished for adding four. In process of time it acquired forty strings: Music then became a complicated art, and its noblest end and aim were lost. Its history in Greece confirms the assertion of Dr. Gregory, that "in proportion as it becomes more artificial and more difficult in the execution, it loses its power and influence".

Transcribed by David Byers, 17 March 2018, Belfast.