

## *Soli Deo Gloria: Catholic Church Music in Limerick c.1860–c.1950*

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The significant role of Limerick city in the development of Catholic church music in Ireland during the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is discussed. The contribution of continental European organists, particularly from Belgium and Germany, was of major importance. The directives of Pope Pius X in 1903 led to renewed emphasis on Gregorian chant by a male choir and diminished the role of female vocalists.

On the 17 May 1864, the celebrated English virtuoso W. T. Best (1826–97), organist of St George's Hall in Liverpool since 1855, inaugurated the 'new and noble' three-manual Hill organ at St John's Cathedral in Limerick.<sup>1</sup> The 'magnificent organ', ordered for the Cathedral through 'an eminent Dublin house' at a cost in excess of £1,000, was 'a noble gift to religion and the people' from the Earl of Dunraven.<sup>2</sup> Playing works by Bach, Handel, Meyerbeer, and Lemmens, as well as what appears to have been four of his own op. 38 concert pieces, Best showed off the new instrument 'in a manner to which no description can do justice', and 'nothing which human hands and feet could achieve in organ playing was left undone.'<sup>3</sup>

The concert, hailed as a 'great musical feast' by the *Munster News*, also included vocal solos, ensembles, and choruses, and among the key participants were three prominent Limerick and Ennis based Catholic church musicians: F. P. De Prins, the 'popular organist' of Limerick's Redemptorist Church, who sang the solo bass part in the opening movement from Rossini's *Stabat Mater* and in Sir John Stevenson's duet 'O Lord, our Governor'; 'Mons' Nono, organist at the Church (later Pro-Cathedral) of St Peter and St Paul in Ennis, whose 'fine bass voice' was heard in the motet *Splendente te, Deus* (KV Anh. 121) by Mozart; and C. A. Wötzel, 'the untiring and skilful' organist of St John's Cathedral, who acted as conductor on the occasion. Like many of the other accomplished organists who held posts at Catholic cathedrals and churches throughout Ireland during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, these three musicians came from mainland Europe and were to supply the Irish church with badly needed musical expertise. One can only agree with Limerick-born Fr Michael Tracy (d.1954), Fr Heinrich Bewerunge's successor as Professor of Sacred Music at St Patrick's College, Maynooth, that such 'foreign' appointments proved remarkably successful, and that 'results ... justified the procedure.'<sup>4</sup>

Charles Louis Nono (1834–95) and brothers Francis Prosper (1829–84) and Léopold De Prins were among the few Belgian organists working in Ireland before 1900. Nono

<sup>1</sup> *Munster News and Limerick and Clare Advocate* (hereafter *MN*), 18 May 1864, see also *MN*, 12 April 1864.

<sup>2</sup> *MN*, 28 March 1863 and 27 February 1864.

<sup>3</sup> *MN*, 18 May 1864.

<sup>4</sup> Fr Michael Tracy, 'The Training of the Organist and Choirmaster', in Aloys Fleischmann (ed.), *Music in Ireland: A Symposium* (Cork, 1952) pp 143–4.



arrived in Ennis to take up his new post in 1859, while Francis De Prins, whose brother became organist at St Mary's Cathedral in Cork, was appointed to Limerick's Redemptorist Church of Mount St Alphonsus in 1862. Francis, 'possessing great musical taste, with the power to impart it successfully to others', had previously 'occupied the eminent position of organist to the Dominican Church of his native place, Louvain',<sup>5</sup> and was probably recruited for the Limerick appointment by Belgian-Province Redemptorists, who had established their order's first community in Ireland at Limerick in 1853.<sup>6</sup> Reporting on the formal dedication of Mount St Alphonsus, which took place on 7 December 1862, the *Munster News* noted that the 'musical portion of the proceedings', under the direction of De Prins, was rendered by 'the first exclusively male choir formed in Limerick, in a Catholic Church', the choir numbering 'close on seventy.'<sup>7</sup> It was further remarked that when the Belgian organist first assembled his 'choral corps of one sex', its members:

were with few exceptions ignorant of music. They began no further back than two months ago, and yet on Sunday last, they rendered the service in a manner that reflected infinite credit on their talented instructor, and the judgment of the Fathers in having secured his valuable services.<sup>8</sup>

Like other Belgian and German organists working in late nineteenth-century Ireland, Francis and Léopold De Prins were devoted advocates of Cecilian reform. Even before the bulletin of the Irish Society of St Cecilia - *Lyra Ecclesiastica* - first appeared in 1878, Francis and Léopold De Prins had edited a quarterly journal entitled *St Cecilia* (from 1876),<sup>9</sup> and the brothers were ardent members of the Irish Society and committed supporters of its bulletin.<sup>10</sup> The Society, indeed, had a strong presence in Limerick,<sup>11</sup> indigenous Cecilians excelling alongside their foreign colleagues, as we learn from the following notice, which appeared in the January 1880 issue of *Lyra*:

We were glad to read in the *Musica Sacra*, published in Toulouse, that at a *concours* given by the organ class in the recently established church music school

<sup>5</sup> *MN*, 10 December 1862.

<sup>6</sup> Other Redemptorist foundations were to follow at Dundalk (St Joseph's, 1876) and Belfast (Clonard, 1896), both of these communities employing Belgian organists. Redemptorists in Baltimore, the first episcopal see of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States, were also supportive of liturgical music reform during this period (see Ann Louise Silverberg, 'Cecilian Reform in Baltimore, 1868-1903' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1992) pp 287-9).

<sup>7</sup> *MN*, 10 December 1862.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> 'St. Cecilia. Quarterly Journal of Catholic Church Music by the best ancient and modern composers. Edited by MM. De Prins.'

<sup>10</sup> See Kieran Anthony Daly, *Catholic Church Music in Ireland, 1878-1903: The Cecilian Reform Movement* (Dublin, 1995) p. 51).

<sup>11</sup> The following were listed among the members of the Irish Society of St Cecilia in the March 1879 supplement to *Lyra Ecclesiastica* (hereafter *LE*): Most Rev. Dr Butler, Bishop of Limerick; Rev. Joseph Bourke, President, Diocesan Seminary; Catholic Literary Institute; Rev. C. Conway, Adm., St Michael's; Patrick Corbett, 40 George's Street; F.P. De Prins, Mount St Alphonsus (organist); Fitzgerald, 138 George's Street; Rev. John Greene, D.D., C.C., Rathkeale; C.J. Hanrahan, 1 Charles Street; Rev. John Mortell, Diocesan College; Patrick Murray; C.A. Nash, 18 Upper Cecil Street; Very Rev. Dean O'Brien, P.P., V.G., Newcastle West; J. O'Connor, 3 Military Road; Thomas O'Connor, 13 Emmet Place; Very Rev. E. O'Donnell, C.Ss.R., Mount St Alphonsus; Rev. E. O'Dwyer, C.C., St Michael's; Rev. James O'Shea, C.C., St Michael's; Thomas J. Purcell, St Michael's (organist); James Quinn, 70 George's Street; Joseph Smith, St John's Cathedral (organist); David Tidmarsh, The Crescent; Miss M. Williams, 33 Charles Street; Miss Williams, Rathkeale; A.C. Wotzel, Jesuit Church, The Crescent; Sisters of Mercy; Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, Laurel Hill.



of Malines, under the direction of M. Lemmens, an Irishman and a member of our society (Mr. Hanrahan of Limerick) distinguished himself, and was warmly commended by the critical jury present.<sup>12</sup>

As early as June 1879, *Lyra* requested subscribers in the Limerick region to forward their annual subscriptions to Francis De Prins, while earlier in the same year, Francis and Léopold were among the first to report to the bulletin on liturgical music outside of Dublin. Of the quarterly *St Cecilia* and its editors, *Lyra* was to give the following assessment in January 1879:

This ably-conducted and beautifully edited publication has now been before the public for two years, and was the first practical effort made in this country to bring Cecilian music within the reach of our choirs and choristers. The Messrs. De Prins have been favourably known for many years past (one in Limerick and one in Cork), as almost the only organists who persistently applied themselves to upholding and practically applying the principles of the Cecilian Society in their respective choirs, and the selections they have already published in their quarterly journal prove the soundness of their judgement in Church musical matters, as well as their artistic discernment.<sup>13</sup>

Further evidence of the De Prins brothers' commitment to Cecilian ideals may be gleaned from the accounts they forwarded to *Lyra* in 1879 of their St Patrick's Day and Holy Week liturgies. In May, for example, Francis reported on the Holy Week ceremonies at Mount St Alphonsus:

The music sung on Palm Sunday at the blessing of the palms and the procession which followed, was that prescribed in the *Processionale Romanum*. The Ordinary of the Mass sung on that day was Haller's *Missa Quarta*; the Proper of the Mass was sung in Gregorian ... The Mass on Easter day was Haller's celebrated *Missa Assumpta est*, for four equal voices; this Mass is, perhaps, one of that grand composer's finest specimens of Church Music we know of.<sup>14</sup>

After the establishment of the Church Music Institute at Malines by Jaak Nikolaas Lemmens (1823–81) in the same year, the brothers, it would seem, took an added interest in developments in sacred music in their native country. On Christmas Day 1882 Francis introduced a *Messe en re* by Lemmens to Mount St Alphonsus,<sup>15</sup> while *Lyra*'s music supplements of 1883 included 'two little motets for three voices' by Palestrina, which had been forwarded to the bulletin by the Limerick-based Belgian. The motets, the bulletin noted, 'were first published ... by direction of the Cardinal Archbishop of Malines, a great lover of real Church Music.'<sup>16</sup> Following Francis's death on 5 July 1884,<sup>17</sup> the July/August issue of *Lyra* lauded the influential Cecilian's efforts at promoting 'the standard of true liturgical music':

<sup>12</sup> *LE*, (January 1880) p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> *LE*, (January 1879) p. 40.

<sup>14</sup> *LE*, (May 1879) p. 72.

<sup>15</sup> *LE*, (February 1883) p. 15.

<sup>16</sup> *LE*, (September/October 1883) p. 64.

<sup>17</sup> See *MN*, 5 July 1884 and *Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator*, 8 July 1884.



The Irish Society of St Cecilia can badly afford the loss which it has sustained in the death of one of its most sincere and zealous working members, Mons F.P. de Prins of Limerick ... Years before our Society was established, the standard of true liturgical music, in opposition to the frivolous style which then prevailed, was raised in the Redemptorist Fathers' Church in Limerick by the Messrs de Prins, with the joyful approbation of the Fathers and there, under the cross of the mission the true music of the Church has flourished and waxed strong in a congenial atmosphere ... Setting himself steadily against the 'solo' system and thus depriving himself at first of the countenance and help of most of the educated musicians, who were strongly devoted to this system, Mons de Prins, out of untrained material, educated, trained and brought to efficiency, a choir of forty men and boys, now for the most part readers of music and capable of singing, in a style which leaves nothing to be desired, the most difficult works of the ancient and modern church writers.<sup>18</sup>

Three days before Francis De Prins's death, it was reported that Limerick man P. J. Murray had been appointed to the 'important position' of organist at Mount St Alphonsus.<sup>19</sup> Murray, who remained in the post for two and a half years, may or may not have been related to the E. Murray who was organist at the Dominican church during the mid 1880s and whose son, the organist and conductor John F. Murray, had been appointed to the cathedral early in the same decade.<sup>20</sup> After P. J. Murray's departure from Mount St Alphonsus, the Redemptorists advertised the vacant position, and endeavouring to appoint a musician who would maintain the high standard set by De Prins, requested that 'none but a thoroughly competent person need apply', adding - not surprisingly - that such a person 'must be a Cecilian and well versed in plain chant.'<sup>21</sup> The ensuing eleven-year period from 1887 to 1898 saw the engagement of at least two local organists at the church - Mr Fitzgerald (from 1889?)<sup>22</sup> and John F. Murray (from 1890)<sup>23</sup> - before 'the Fathers' once again opted to appoint a Belgian, this time Lemmens laureate Jozef Bellens (1876-1939), who was employed at Mount St Alphonsus from mid 1898 to 1919.<sup>24</sup> A composer of sacred music and works for organ, Bellens's output included a motet, *Salva nos, Domine*, for SATB and organ, and a *Missa prima* and *Ave Maria*, both for two equal voices and organ.<sup>25</sup>

Like his fellow countryman Joseph Sireaux, who was organist at St Patrick's, Dundalk (1910-19), Bellens became involved in the relief of Belgian refugees at the start of the Great War, being a member of the reception committee that welcomed forty such refugees to Limerick in December 1914.<sup>26</sup> Following his return to Belgium in April 1919

<sup>18</sup> *LE*, (July/August 1884) p. 54.

<sup>19</sup> *MN*, 2 July 1884.

<sup>20</sup> See *MN*, 15 May 1886. There was also a Henry Murray, organist to the Dominican church in Limerick until the end of 1899, who was educated at the Brussels Conservatoire, *MN*, 30 December 1899.

<sup>21</sup> *MN*, 19 January 1887.

<sup>22</sup> *MN*, 24 April 1889. A 'Mr Fitzgerald' was also organist at the Franciscan church in 1900, while composer Augustine Fitzgerald was organist at St Michael's in the same year (see *MN*, 3 January 1900). The latter's son, Joseph, won 'first prize in all Ireland at the organ competition' in the 1908 Feis Ceoil, *Irish Catholic*, 24 October 1908.

<sup>23</sup> *MN*, 5 April 1890. Two other organists employed at Mount St Alphonsus during this period were M. Brunard, Mus.Bac., appointed in early 1887 (*MN*, 5 April 1887), and Mr Monypenny, who was there in 1898 (*MN*, 9 April 1898).

<sup>24</sup> See Bellens's advertisement in *MN*, 31 August 1898: see also *MN*, 26 April 1919.

<sup>25</sup> These three works appeared in supplements to the Belgian journal *Musica Sacra*, xvii (1897/8) p. 12; xxxi (1911/12) pp 3-7; and xxxii (1912/13) p. 5) respectively.

<sup>26</sup> *Limerick Leader* (hereafter *LL*), 23 December 1914.



to teach music at a seminary in Hoogstraten, another Lemmens graduate Firmin Van de Velde (b. 1888) was appointed to Mount St Alphonsus.<sup>27</sup> Van de Velde previously served as organist at St Joseph's Church, Dundalk (1910–12) and at St Nicholas' Pro-Cathedral, Galway (1912–19), and was a brother of 'that celebrated musician M. Eugene Van de Velde ... director of the Scola Cantorum of Belgium'.<sup>28</sup> He remained in Limerick until 1935, when he moved to St Senan's, Kilrush, and some of his compositions, like those of Bellens mentioned above, appeared in supplements to the Belgian journal *Musica Sacra*.

The conductor of the May 1864 concert at St John's, Caspar Anton Wötzel, had been appointed organist-choirmaster to the cathedral in early 1862, approximately six months after the 'noble edifice'<sup>29</sup> first opened its doors to worshippers.<sup>30</sup> Born in 1828 and originally from Mainz, this 'highly distinguished professor of music' and composer, whose 'eminent skill became available' to St John's, had previously served in the administration of the Governor-General of India as 'conductor of the musical service in the department.'<sup>31</sup> As early as March 1862, commenting on the 'Lenten Ceremonies' at the Cathedral, the *Munster News* remarked:

We must not omit stating that the eminent musical professor, whose services the Clergymen of the Cathedral have secured for their choir, has as an organist fully sustained the prestige with which fame environs all musical children of the Rhineland, whence Herr Wortzel [*sic*] comes.<sup>32</sup>

In 1876, three years after Wötzel's death, another German, Carl Arnold, became cathedral organist. Arnold, an advocate of Gregorian chant, had lived 'for many years' in Belgium and England, and came to Limerick 'recommended by ... Cardinal Manning ... and other Catholic dignitaries in England.'<sup>33</sup> A 'distinguished student' of the School of Music in Aix-la-Chapelle (Aachen), he also studied at Roulers in Belgium, and had been organist to the German church in London for the previous nine years. Shortly before Arnold's arrival at St John's, a 'Mr L. [?] Wotzel'—perhaps a son of Caspar Anton—was appointed organist to the Church of the Sacred Heart in the Crescent.<sup>34</sup> The previous organist at this Jesuit church, Signor Pacifico Alessandri, had been a pupil of the Italian operatic composer Saverio Mercadante (1795–1870), and had introduced that 'great' composer's sacred music to Limerick.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, works by Mercadante and Dutch composer Johannes Bernardus van Bree (1801–57)—not to mention Weber's 'well known' Mass in G, op. 76 (1819)<sup>36</sup> and Gounod's *Messe Solennelle* (1874) and *Messe du Sacré-Coeur* (1876)—would continue to remain popular with Limerick choirs.

Following Arnold's brief stay at St John's, the post of cathedral organist was filled by Joseph Smith, arguably the most energetic and engaging figure in Limerick musical life before the turn of the century.<sup>37</sup> Born in 1856, of Irish parents, at Dudley in

<sup>27</sup> *MN*, 4 June 1919.

<sup>28</sup> *MN*, 6 April 1929.

<sup>29</sup> *MN*, 12 April 1864.

<sup>30</sup> *MN*, 1 February 1862.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *MN*, 22 March 1862.

<sup>33</sup> *MN*, 14 October 1876.

<sup>34</sup> *MN*, 24 June 1876. This organist is subsequently referred to as 'Mr A. Wotzel' or 'A.C. Wotzel'.

<sup>35</sup> *MN*, 31 March 1877.

<sup>36</sup> *MN*, 18 April 1900.

<sup>37</sup> See 'Dr. Joseph Smith', *The Musical Herald* (hereafter '*MH*'), July 1896, pp 199–201.



Worcestershire and largely self-taught in music, Smith was educated in Belgium from the age of twelve. He began his career at seventeen as organist of a church in Galway, a position he occupied for two years. Between 1877 and September 1882 he was organist at St John's, thereafter moving to Dublin to become organist of the Church of the Three Patrons, Rathgar, and Professor of Music at Mount Anville convent school.<sup>38</sup> He graduated from TCD with a Mus.Bac. (1880) and Mus.Doc. (1881), and in 1883, in conjunction with Sir Robert Stewart, was appointed Professor of Music in the newly constituted Royal University of Ireland. An accomplished conductor and composer, he succeeded Joseph Robinson as conductor of the Dublin Musical Society in 1890, and his sacred works, which include Masses, cantatas, anthems, and motets, were much admired by Westminster Cathedral's R. R. Terry, who deemed 'the scholarly and devotional compositions of ... Dr. Smith' to be 'surely worthy of attention'.<sup>39</sup> Smith, who edited the series *Catholic Choir Music*, also held the post of organist at St Kevin's, Harrington Street, from 1903, before immigrating to North America, where he died in 1907.<sup>40</sup>

During his time in Limerick, Smith - 'an artist far above the ordinary level'<sup>41</sup> - was much acclaimed as an organist, conductor and composer, his appearances in concerts at the Athenaeum and Theatre Royal earning him particular praise. Within a year of his appointment as organist to the cathedral, however, the twenty-two-year-old maverick caused something of a stir with a series of four letters written to the editor of the *Munster News* on the topic of church music reform, or, more specifically, 'on the advisability of introducing the Gregorian style of music into the choirs of Irish Catholic Churches'.<sup>42</sup> Given the imminent establishment of a 'St. Cecilia society'<sup>43</sup> in Dublin, Smith, in his letters of August and September 1878, wished 'to bring the question of Church music before the public, so as to make them well acquainted with the existing evils of the system, and to qualify them to judge in a certain degree correctly of any proposal for reformation that may be advanced'.<sup>44</sup> Early in his first letter, Smith identified the principal ill afflicting Catholic church music:

There is no doubt that the choirs of some of our churches of late years are too often liable to give one rather the idea of some badly managed operatic stage (if without irreverence we may institute the comparison) than that of a sacred place devoted to the sober and decent worship of God. We have sufficient reason to know that most of the nice bits of the more popular operatic works are generally made to do a sort of supplementary duty as sacred music in our churches...<sup>45</sup>

Notwithstanding such abuses, Smith took issue with those who held that Gregorian chant is '*par excellence* the music of the Church' and 'the one musical language alone capable of expressing the emotions of the mind acted upon by feelings of love and reverence for

<sup>38</sup> While in Limerick, Smith also taught music at the Diocesan Seminary at 1 The Crescent (see advertisement, *MN*, 11 January 1882). Regarding Smith's move to Dublin, see notice in *LE*, (September 1882) p. 72.

<sup>39</sup> R.R. Terry, *Catholic Church Music* (London, 1907) p. 66.

<sup>40</sup> See 'News from All Parts', *MH*, (September 1905) p. 271; also 'The late Dr. Joseph Smith', *MH*, (July 1907) p. 212.

<sup>41</sup> *Limerick Chronicle* (hereafter *LC*), 16 November 1878.

<sup>42</sup> See editorial comment entitled 'Church Music', *MN*, 24 August 1878. Smith's letters appeared in the *MN* on 24 August, 31 August, 7 September, and 28 September 1878.

<sup>43</sup> *MN*, 24 August 1878.

<sup>44</sup> *MN*, 7 September 1878.

<sup>45</sup> *MN*, 24 August 1878.



God.’<sup>46</sup> How could a ‘style of music’ which fulfilled its intended aim centuries ago be expected to do so with equal effectiveness ‘in an age which requires far more powerful stimulus to emotion of any kind, and when even the involuntary critical faculties have reached so high a development?’<sup>47</sup> The affective power of Gregorian chant could never match that of ‘modern music’ in awakening awe and reverence, contrition and joy: ‘those deep feelings ... which it is the province of all sacred music to excite.’<sup>48</sup> For Smith, the value of plainchant ultimately resided in a ‘negative’ rather than a ‘positive excellence’:

In other words, its adoption is generally advocated, rather by reason of its comparative freedom from the abuses that are sometimes connected with figurate music, than on account of any worth or beauty of its own. Such a recommendation, however, is hardly sufficient to convince us of the desirability of its general revival.<sup>49</sup>

Leaving aside two brief responses to the newspaper’s editor from Fr (later Bishop) Nicholas Donnelly, intended simply to clarify some misleading editorial statements concerning the ‘proposed’ St Cecilia Society ‘and its intentions’,<sup>50</sup> Smith’s attack on Gregorian music elicited sharp responses from Cork-based Léopold De Prins and from Thomas J. Purcell, organist of St Michael’s Church.<sup>51</sup> The more moderate Purcell even recommended that the young cathedral organist ask himself the question, “‘Am I not a Heretic condemned by the decrees of the Church in *musico liturgical* matters?’”<sup>52</sup> An impenitent Smith, however, in his final letter of 28 September, went on to characterize leading Cecilian composers as ‘a few petty scribblers’, referring to the Society as ‘nothing more than a most insignificant little clique in the world of sacred music.’<sup>53</sup> ‘Let us see’, responded an anonymous Limerick Cecilian.<sup>54</sup> Within six months, Smith’s name was to be found on the Irish Society of St Cecilia’s first published membership list,<sup>55</sup> and in January 1881 - the year he was awarded the Mus.Doc. - he presented a paper at the Society’s second general meeting.<sup>56</sup> It appeared that Léopold De Prins’s wish ‘that some day Mr Smith [would] have his eyes opened, and be converted’ had finally been granted.<sup>57</sup> Alas, not entirely. In an interview with *The Musical Herald* in July 1896, Smith was to voice his unease regarding the Cecilian credo:

To a certain extent I am in sympathy with the St. Cecilian movement. The style of our Roman Catholic church music is undoubtedly bad. In endeavouring to reform it, the Cecilians go to the extreme of severity. Palestrina, as an exclusive diet, does

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> *MN*, 31 August 1878.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> *MN*, 31 August 1878 and 4 September 1878.

<sup>51</sup> *MN*, 28 August 1878 (Purcell); *MN*, 31 August 1878 (De Prins); *MN*, 14 September 1878 (De Prins); *MN*, 18 September 1878 (Purcell).

<sup>52</sup> *MN*, 18 September 1878.

<sup>53</sup> *MN*, 28 September 1878.

<sup>54</sup> *MN*, 5 October 1878.

<sup>55</sup> See supplement to *LE*, (March 1879) p. 4 where Smith is listed as one of the 27 Limerick members of the Society.

<sup>56</sup> *LE*, (February/March 1881) pp 25–30.

<sup>57</sup> *MN*, 14 September 1878.



not appeal to the average hearer, and he is most difficult to render properly ... Unless, therefore, the Cecilianists can propose other reforms they will not prevail. The happy medium has not been struck.<sup>58</sup>

After Smith's departure to Dublin, which was 'much regretted' in Limerick,<sup>59</sup> works by Cecilian composers were privileged in music programmes at St John's,<sup>60</sup> particularly during the tenure of John F. Murray, organist-choirmaster from late 1882 to 1890.<sup>61</sup> Murray, previously organist at Thurles Cathedral, was one of Limerick's most beloved musicians, and being Joseph O'Mara's singing teacher, he occasionally invited the tenor to lead the male section of the cathedral choir in Limerick.<sup>62</sup> The liturgical connection between the two musicians was to last, indeed, into the 1890s, after Murray's appointment to Mount St Alphonsus.<sup>63</sup>

The new century brought sweeping changes to both musical programmes and personnel at St John's and other churches as the directives of Pius X's 1903 *motu proprio* (*Tra le sollecitudini*) on the renewal and regulation of sacred music were realized. Pius's vision was most certainly being accomplished at the cathedral by early 1905, when the *Munster News* remarked:

An interesting feature of the ceremonies during Holy Week will be the rendering of the Sacred Music by the male choir who will adhere strictly to the Gregorian Chant according to the approved Solesmes method.<sup>64</sup>

In short, the chant was in and the ladies were out. No longer would Limerick's leading female vocalists - heirs to Mrs Pfaff, Mrs Otty, and Mrs Cusack, who graced liturgical life at the cathedral a generation earlier - find a welcome in the organ gallery. By the time Pius's *motu proprio* was promulgated, Charles Kendal Irwin (1863-1929) had been cathedral organist for 13 years. Irwin, who revived the Limerick Musical Society in 1892, and was lauded as a 'pioneer of musical culture' in the city,<sup>65</sup> taught at Laurel Hill Convent and St Munchin's College, and produced an annual concert at the Theatre Royal.<sup>66</sup> A former professor at the Royal Irish Academy of Music and conductor of the Mapleson Italian Concert Company and Ludwig American Concert Company, Irwin would remain as organist at St John's for almost 40 years.<sup>67</sup>

In 1928, 25 years after the publication of Pius X's *motu proprio*, there appeared the Apostolic Constitution *Divini cultus* of Pope Pius XI, which reinforced the decrees of the

<sup>58</sup> 'Dr. Joseph Smith', *MH*, (July 1896) pp 199-200.

<sup>59</sup> *MN*, 20 September 1882. Despite his move to Dublin, Smith intended to remain as conductor of the Limerick Musical Society, and made arrangements to come to Limerick 'two days in each week' for rehearsals (See *LC*, 26 September 1882). His 'last appearance in Limerick' - at an Athenaeum concert featuring the Limerick Musical Society - was on 30 November 1882 (*LC*, 2 December 1882 and *MN*, 6 December 1882).

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, *MN*, 15 May 1886 (as n.20 above).

<sup>61</sup> See *LE*, (October 1882) p. 80, for news of Murray's appointment to St John's; see also *MN*, 21 October 1882 also Murray's notice in *MN*, 11 November 1882. Murray, furthermore, was 'professor of Gregorian Music' at Mungret College (see *MN*, 24 March 1888).

<sup>62</sup> *MN*, 24 March 1888, 28 March 1888 and 22 December 1888.

<sup>63</sup> *MN*, 28 December 1895 and 14 April 1897.

<sup>64</sup> *MN*, 15 April 1905.

<sup>65</sup> *MN*, 30 April 1904.

<sup>66</sup> See Irwin's advertisement entitled 'Music', *MN*, 9 April 1890 and 3 May 1890. For Theatre Royal concerts, see *MN*, 28 December 1895, 2 January 1897 and 8 January 1898.

<sup>67</sup> *MN*, 6 February 1929.



1903 papal directive on sacred music. Observing this legislation and endeavouring to play its part in the 'Gregorian revival movement ... an integral part of the Liturgical movement,'<sup>68</sup> the Diocese of Limerick organised plainchant competitions annually from 1933.<sup>69</sup> These competitions, held initially in connection with the Thomond Feis, were instituted by Revd Dr James Cowper of St Michael's Church, and were adjudicated by 'the original founder of the movement for the restoration of plain song in Ireland', Revd Dr John Burke of the National University, Dublin.<sup>70</sup> The annual competitive festival was refashioned in 1939, when 60 choirs - representing some 2000 children<sup>71</sup> - took part in Limerick's first Liturgical Festival. The new festival, organized principally by Fr Cowper and Fr William O'Grady (C.C., St John's),<sup>72</sup> typically opened with Solemn High Mass, during which the Common ('Cum Jubilo') was sung by the massed choirs and the Proper was rendered by a special choir. The groups involved were later tested at auditions that were non-competitive, and the weekend event concluded with further liturgies, including Benediction. During the 1940s, Glenstal Benedictines Dom Winoc Mertens, Dom Maur Ellis, and Dom Paul McDonnell were involved as adjudicators, while 'Professor' Michael King-Griffin (1909-81), cathedral organist and a native of Miltown-Malbay, provided the accompaniments.<sup>73</sup>

Limerick, then, was an important centre in the development of church music in Ireland during the latter half of the nineteenth and early years of the twentieth centuries. Of particular note, too, is the preponderance of foreign musicians working in the city's churches during the period. These musicians, along with the many other Belgians and Germans employed at Catholic cathedrals and churches throughout Ireland, provided stalwart musical leadership in a Church that had repeatedly failed to afford its native musicians the opportunity to avail of proper training in sacred music in Ireland. Despite the efforts, however, of Belgian organist-choirmasters like Belfast-based Arthur de Meulemeester (1876-1942) and Ennis-based Ernest de Regge (1904-58) to address the issue of training, it was not until 1970, with the establishment of the *Schola Cantorum* at St Finian's College in Mullingar, Co. Westmeath, that an Irish episcopacy began to remedy the situation.

<sup>68</sup> *LL*, 3 June 1942.

<sup>69</sup> *LL*, 28 May 1934 and the reference to *Divini Cultus* in *LL*, 27 May 1939. See also Hubert Rooney, 'The Plainchant Movement', in Fleischmann (ed.), *Music in Ireland*, pp 218-21; also Marie McCarthy, *Passing It On: The Transmission of Music in Irish Culture* (Cork, 1999) pp 120-1; eadem, 'Music Education in the Emergent Nation State', in Richard Pine (ed.), *Music in Ireland, 1848-1998* (Cork, 1998) pp 69-70.

<sup>70</sup> *LL*, 26 March 1938.

<sup>71</sup> See photograph under heading 'City and County Choirs Assembled for Limerick's Great Liturgical Festival', *LL*, 10 June 1939.

<sup>72</sup> *LL*, 13 May 1950.

<sup>73</sup> See Eoin Devereux, 'Remembering Professor King-Griffin', *Old Limerick Journal*, 40 (Winter 2004) pp 14-16.



