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“Scoring History” with the Vanbrugh Quartet: Developing an Online Archive and Teaching Resource.

Cliona Doris

Dublin Institute of Technology, cliona.doris@dit.ie

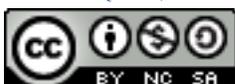
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1 “Scoring History” with the Vanbrugh Quartet: Developing an Online Archive and Teaching Resource

Clíona Doris

Conservatory of Music and Drama

Contact: cliona.doris@dit.ie

Abstract

DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama and the National Concert Hall collaborated on a three-year residency for the internationally renowned Vanbrugh Quartet from 2014–2017. Six themed concert series explored a wide range of chamber music, including “Scoring History” curated by composer Ian Wilson, a Haydn and Schubert Series, Mozart and Brahms Chamber Music, the complete cycle of Beethoven String Quartets, Chamber Music of Ireland 1916–2016 and a Russian Season. An online archive and educational resource relating to and deriving from the residency, interweaves archival concert recordings, profiles, interviews and contextual information on the musical works.

Keywords: *scoring history; online music resource; Vanbrugh Quartet; DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama; National Concert Hall Dublin*

Introduction

DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama and the National Concert Hall collaborated on a three-year residency for the internationally renowned Vanbrugh Quartet from 2014–2017. Six themed concert series explored a wide range of chamber music, including “Scoring History” curated by composer Ian Wilson, a Haydn and Schubert Series, Mozart and Brahms Chamber Music, the complete cycle of Beethoven String Quartets, Chamber Music of Ireland 1916–2016 and a Russian Season.

The Fellowship project provided the opportunity to archive and develop the residency beyond 2017. The online archive and educational resource relating to and deriving from the residency, interweaves archival concert recordings, profiles, interviews and contextual information on the musical works. The Teaching Fellowship resourced the infrastructure for the initial development of the website, continuation of the archive recordings and high quality audio-visual recordings for selected performances for the Beethoven String Quartet Cycle and the final Russian Season.

The BBC’s *Ten Pieces: Get Creative with Classical Music* online music education resource was an inspiration for this project. However, the BBC project was aimed at primary and post-primary cohorts, whereas this project is aimed at third-level and continuing education cohorts. However, teaching resources for post-primary school cohorts could easily be developed to enhance the audience for the project.

The “Scoring History”¹ project aligns with national strategy to build on digital capacity and addresses the following three vision aims contained in the publication *Teaching and Learning in Irish Higher Education: A Roadmap for Enhancement in a Digital World 2015–2017*:

- “Digital platforms, resources and tools are utilised to enhance teaching, learning and assessment, to connect teachers and students, and to increase the level of quality of learning-related communication.
- Students will have access to a range of technological supports and resources to enhance their learning in a manner that enables them to become lifelong learners in the digital world.
- Teachers will be fully enabled to use digital technologies/resources where appropriate, in order to enhance student learning with their disciplines.”²

¹ “Scoring History” is used by kind permission of Ian Wilson as the title for his curated concert series in 2014, which was the inaugural season of the Vanbrugh Quartet’s Artists in Residence programme at the National Concert Hall.

² National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning (2015) *Teaching and Learning in Irish Higher Education: A Roadmap for Enhancement in a Digital World, 2015–2017*. Retrieved from <http://www.teachingandlearning.ie/a-roadmap-for-enhancement-in-a-digital-world-2015-2017/>

Dublin Institute of Technology established the Directorate of Digital Campus and Learning Transformation in July 2016 and the project also supports the key goal:

“To unlock the collaborative potential of the individual functions in order to successfully create and support learning transformation opportunities enabled by technology where appropriate.”³

The overall concept provides an imaginative context to present the artistic practice work of the Conservatory to new audiences and is representative of the Conservatory’s strong engagement with cultural institutions and partners, such as the National Concert Hall and the Vanbrugh Quartet. The following strategic aims for the Conservatory are being realised through this project:

The Conservatory promotes itself and Ireland’s culture and creativity locally, nationally and internationally. Working with partners, the Conservatory widens access to the performing arts in Ireland.⁴

Project Partners

The **Vanbrugh Quartet** arrived in Ireland over thirty years ago in 1986 as RTÉ’s quartet in residence. Since then, the Quartet has sustained an extensive career in performance, recording and music education, both within Ireland and internationally. The members of the Vanbrugh Quartet (Gregory Ellis, Keith Pascoe, Simon Aspell and Christopher Marwood) were appointed as Lecturers in Chamber Music at DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama in 2009. In 2016, the Vanbrugh Quartet received “The National Concert Hall Lifetime Achievement Award” in recognition of its significant contribution to chamber music performance in Ireland.

The National Concert Hall is one of the Ireland’s National Cultural Institutions and presents over 1,000 events each year in the Main Auditorium (1,200 capacity), John Field Room, Kevin Barry Room and Studio. Its mission is to “foster and celebrate the appreciation, knowledge and enjoyment and pure love of music as an integral part of Irish life”.⁵ Established in 1981 on the site of Dublin’s “Great Exhibition of Arts and Manufactures” in Earlsfort Terrace, the National Concert Hall is the home of several national music organisations, including the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra, Chamber Choir Ireland, Irish Baroque Orchestra, Music Network and Music Generation.

DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama was established in 1890 as the Dublin Municipal School of Music. In 1963 it became known as the College of Music and joined Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) in 1978. Today the renamed DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama provides quality performance-based arts education encompassing a Junior Conservatory, undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes and the Research Foundation for Music in Ireland. It offers programmes in classical, jazz and Irish traditional music performance, composition, musicology, music education, opera, drama and, in association with partner colleges, rock and pop music, music theatre, and scoring for film and visual media. The Conservatory will move to a purpose-built facility for the creative and performing arts within the new DIT Grangegorman campus.

³ Dublin Institute of Technology. The Digital Campus and Learning Transformation Directorate. Retrieved from <http://www.dit.ie/dclt/>

⁴ DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama Strategic Plan 2015–2018.

⁵ The National Concert Hall. Retrieved from <https://www.nch.ie>

“Scoring History” Website

The development of the website as a learning and teaching resource continues as the project develops beyond the lifetime of the Fellowship and National Concert Hall Residency. At present, it documents the residency through concert programmes, recordings, interviews and background information. The website is due for publication before the last concert of the residency in June 2017. This coincides with the retirement of first violinist Gregory Ellis from the Vanbrugh Quartet and so the archival nature of this project has a deeper significance.

Proposed Future Work

Further complementary teaching resources will be added to the resource and will reflect the requirements of users. The online resource can be utilised by a wide range of student cohorts and lecturers, as well as engaging with a wider audience. There is further scope to utilise the resource to deliver online continuing professional education and elective programmes in cultural studies, music history, music performance and music appreciation.

The project would not have been realised to this point without the Fellowship support and there are several longer-term strategic aims for the project including:

- To provide a lasting record of an ambitious artistic practice project undertaken by the Vanbrugh Quartet, DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama and the National Concert Hall.
- To disseminate an example of the Conservatory’s artistic practice research.
- To utilise artistic practice research as a teaching resource, underpinning the linkages between scholarship and teaching.
- To provide on-going teaching resources to students and lecturers in the subject areas of musicology, music appreciation, music performance and cultural studies.
- To develop elective modules utilising the online resource.
- To develop online continuing education programmes utilising this online material to engage with wider society.

Dissemination

The project website will be linked to the DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama’s website (www.dit.ie/conservatory) and as a research project on the “Research Foundation for Music in Ireland” website (www.musicresearch.ie) based at the Conservatory. Dissemination through the collaborative partners in the project, the National Concert Hall and the Vanbrugh Quartet, will be developed. As teaching resources are developed, these will be disseminated through appropriate education networks and through papers at academic and educational conferences. The project features in a conference paper entitled “The Vanbrugh Quartet in Ireland: A Survey of Concert Programmes, Recordings and Collaborations, 1986–2017” for the Society for Musicology in Ireland 15th Annual Plenary Conference at Queen’s University Belfast in June 2017.

Residency Artistic Programme 2014–2017

Prior to the Fellowship commencing, there were three series of concerts as part of the artists in residency programme at the National Concert Hall. Archive recordings and other associated materials from these concert series (programmes, publicity, interviews) formed the basis of the source material for the Fellowship project.

A summary of the artistic content of the first three seasons is outlined below.

Autumn 2014

“Scoring History”, curated by Irish composer, Ian Wilson, provided a survey of the string quartet repertoire over a two hundred year period. The season included performances of six quartets by Ian Wilson, as well as repertoire by Schubert, Beethoven, Dvorák, Kurtág, Debussy, Stravinsky and Shostakovich, around the themes “Folk”, “Distant Lands”, “Conflict” and “Solitudes”.

Spring 2015

The Spring 2015 series partnered String Quartets by Haydn and Mozart, as well as a performance of Schubert's *String Quintet in C major*, D. 956 (Op. posth. 163).

Autumn 2015

Mozart and Brahms were the composers featured in the Autumn 2015 series. Each concert opened with a Mozart String Quartet and then the Vanbrugh Quartet were joined by guest musicians to perform Brahms' *Viola Quintet in G major*, Op.111, *Clarinet Quintet in B minor*, Op.115 and *String Sextet No.1 in B flat major*, Op.18.

With the Fellowship award in 2016, there was capacity to continue the archival audio recordings and the additional opportunity for professional video recordings of some concerts, which greatly enhanced the online resource. As RTÉ recorded the "Composing the Island" series, the emphasis was on the Beethoven and Russian seasons in this regard.

The final three seasons are outlined below.

Summer 2016

In May and June 2016, the Vanbrugh Quartet performed the complete cycle of Beethoven Quartets over six concerts. This significant series was part of the opening season in the newly refurbished Kevin Barry Room at the National Concert Hall.

Autumn 2016

The penultimate contribution to the residency was included in the historic centenary project "Composing the Island: A Century of Music in Ireland 1916–2016" which took place over three weeks in September 2016 at the National Concert Hall in collaboration with RTÉ. The Vanbrugh Quartet performed three concerts as part of this series featuring music by major Irish composers, including Hamilton Harty, Frederick May, Ina Boyle, as well as contemporary works by Deirdre Gribbin, John Kinsella and a première performance of *Wayfarers* for choir, soloists and string quartet by Ian Wilson. The performances were recorded by RTÉ for radio broadcast.

Spring/Summer 2017

The final season in Spring/Summer 2017 celebrated the string quartet compositions of Russian composers. Each of the five concerts married a performance of a Shostakovich String Quartet with a work by Borodin, Prokofiev, Taneyev, Schnittke and Tchaikovsky.

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