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Encyclopedia of Music in Ireland: Michael Holohan

Adrian Smith
adrianvsmith@gmail.com

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Holohan, Michael. (b 27th March 1956). Composer. Holohan graduated from University College Dublin in 1978 and later pursued further studies at Queen’s University Belfast. In the eighties and nineties he attended masterclasses in France with Boulez, Messiaen, Xenakis, Berio and Lachenmann. He served as chairman of the Association of Irish Composers from 1987 to 1989 and was later appointed chairman of the Droichead Arts Centre in Drogheda. His music has received a number of national and international awards including the Celtic Music Prize at the Celtic Film and Radio Festival in Brittany in 2002. He was elected to Aosdána in 1999.

Influenced by his experiences of new music on the continent, Holohan’s early works are notable for their experimentalism with aspects of serialism, exotic scales and extended performance techniques. With his move to Drogheda in the mid-eighties however, the abstraction of his early music receded somewhat as he began to embrace the myths and landscape of the Boyne Valley as a source of inspiration. His style in works such as Cromwell (1994) and the Mass of Fire (1995) became more tonal although the presence of modernist surface features continued to remain an integral part of his music. From the mid-nineties onwards traditional Irish music began to feature in Holohan’s work and he has written a number of works for the uilleann pipes and Irish Bronze Age horns. A consistent theme throughout his career has also been his engagement with Irish and European literature as evinced by his considerable output and settings of poets such as Samuel Beckett, Seamus Heaney, Dermot Healy, Seán O’Riordáin, John F. Deane, Susan Connolly, Paul Durcan, Ivan Lalić and Tomas Tranströmer.

Adrian Smith

Bibliography
Interview with the composer conducted on 10/12/2010

Select Compositions
STAGE
His Final Journey, 2004, Film Score (Dublin 2004). fl., ob., cl., hn, perc.
Where a single footprint lasts a thousand years, 2009 Theatre Score (Dublin 2009). speaker, vv, whistle, bronze age horns, kbd, perc, el-ac. texts Ernest Shackleton, Bill Manhire
Clay and Eveline, 2009 Theatre Score (Dublin , 2009). speaker, pf. text James Joyce
The Selfish Giant, 1987, Dance Score (Dublin 19880. el-ac.
ORCHESTRA
The Ferry across the Boyne, 1993 (Drogheda 1993). string orch.
Cromwell, 1994 (Drogheda 1994). Orch.

BAND

Ritual Landscapes, 1986 (Drogheda 1987). sop cor, 9 cors, flugel hn, 3 hn, 2 bar hn, 2 ten trbn, bass trb, 2 euph, 4 tubas, 2 perc.
Lament for Limerick, 1985 (Drogheda 1986) sop cor, 9 cors, flugel hn, 3 hn, 2 bar hn, 2 ten trbn, bass trb, 2 euph, 4 tubas, 2 perc.

ENSEMBLE

Nada No 2, 1982 (Arklow 1982). ob., pf
I send my love along the Boyne, 1990 (Dowth 1990). fl., str.
Knowth, 1999 (Dublin 1999). carynx, trumpa creda, bronze age hn, large bodhran, crothal.
What the Yew Tree told me, 2005 (Drogheda 2005). wicklow pipes, marimba, db, perc.

SOLO

Even the Olives are Bleeding, 1988 (Dublin 1988). el-fl.
Aoise, 1988 (Dublin 1988). pf. (Dublin: Leinster School of Music)
The Crooked Mile, 1997 (Drogheda 1997). pf. (Dublin: Leinster School of Music)
The Old Swing, 1997 (Drogheda 1997). pf. (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy of Music 1997)
The Bonny Light Horseman, 2010 (Drogheda 2010). pf.
Reverie, 2010 (Drogheda 2011). pf.

CHOIR
Deus Meus, 1985 (Dublin 1985). ssaa. text ancient Irish
All in! All in!, 1988 (Dublin 1988). sa, fl., ob., mouth org., whistles, kbd. text Michael Holohan
Mass Of Fire, 1995 (Drogheda 1995). satb, 4 tpt, trbn., euph, timp., org., str,
River, 2006. satb. text Susan Connolly.
Duet, 2006. satb. text Susan Connolly.
In the Empty Hills, 2009. ssa. text Wang Wei

VOICE
Song-Breath, 1994 (Drogheda 1994). Mez., pf. text Susan Connolly

ELECTRO ACOUSTIC
Moon-splinters, 1989 (Drogheda 1989). el-ac. text Susan Connolly
The Source, 1990 (Drogheda 1990). el-ac.
Stone Dreams, 1994 (Drogheda 1994). el-ac

Discography
[Carlton Singers:] No Money in Madrigals (Eleanor Ryan cond: CD, CS001, 2000)
Contemporary Music Centre: Contemporary Music from Ireland Vol. 3 (Paul Roe: CD, CMC CD03, 2001)
[Dermot Healy:] What the Hammer (CD, IMMA, 1994)
[Lindsay Singers:] Ethna Barror’s Lindsey Singers (Ethna Barror cond: CD, 2001).
Michael Holohan: Fields of Blue and White (Thérèse Fahy: CD, Macehead, 2010).
[Michael Holohan and Breida Delaney:] A River Of Memories (CD, 1999).
[Simon and Maria O’Dwyer:] Overtone (CD, Ancient Music Ireland, 2009).
[The National Chamber Choir:] 48th Cork International Choral Festival (Celso Antunes cond: CD, 2002).
[The Young Lindsays:] 43rd Cork International Choral Festival (Ethna Barror cond: CD, 1996)

Selected Writings

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Association of Irish Composers
Beckett, Samuel
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