

EDGAR DEALE

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No one will claim that Edgar Deale was a great composer. During his long life, he wrote less than forty works and about thirty arrangements. He composed no opera, symphony or concerto and only three of his original works last twenty minutes or more. In fact, he regarded himself as a part-time composer having devoted his life to the insurance business as well as to many noble voluntary organisations. But his development as a major composer was not only hindered by his work-load but by the lack of adequate music teachers in his formative years in Ireland which caused him great frustration. In fact, it is only in the last twenty years or so that people are beginning to realise that serious music does exist in Ireland.

Edgar Martin Deale was born in Dublin on 1 August 1902 to Edwin and Minnie, neé Martin, their wedding having taken place at the Centenary Methodist Church in Dublin in October 1901. Edwin Deale was a director of his own company, Edwin Deale & Sons, who were wholesale paper merchants.. No doubt, young Edgar learned his business acumen from his father as he did his love of music ... his father was organist at the Centenary Methodist Church for fifty years. In fact, young Edwin was always interested in music ... to quote him, "even from my cradle." He took up the piano with a Miss Yoakley but soon abandoned it. He became a chorister at Christ Church Cathedral and attended the cathedral grammar school which had been established around 1460. He absorbed all types of church music progressing on to the symphonies of Beethoven and Brahms and through such repertoire as was available on gramophone records. He was also attracted to a wide range of literature and found time to study astronomy and "the worthless pursuit of reading science fiction." He was an active young man enjoying golf, swimming and tennis. He joined the Culwick Choral Society as a second bass in 1922 and served them for sixty years ... for twenty years, from 1955, he was the Society's president. He has always loved singing and regularly searched in vain for a good singing teacher. He attempted to study with Percy Whitehead for a few years in the 1940s but he was unable to help with the matter of voice production. Deale tried again and this time it was with his cousin, Turner Huggard, who was assistant organist at St Patrick's Cathedral but, by now, Edgar was so involved with voluntary work and his demanding job as an insurance manager with the Zurich Insurance Company that he gave up. However, he felt one last try was in order and so he went to a leading organ recitalist, William Watson, but this was also a desultory affair. As with his cousin, he endured lessons in harmony and counterpoint but, as Deale continually pointed out, there were no outstanding, or even competent, music teachers in those days with, perhaps, the exception of C H Kitson, the famous author of technical books and the organist and choir master at Christ Church from 1913 - 20.

It was Ireland's tenacity to maintain its culture and traditional music that shut the door on serious music thinking it was a British colonial thing. The dominance and restrictions of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland precluded serious music as an intrusion of Protestantism.

But Kitson tried to reverse this prejudice and during Deale's boyhood, Kitson mounted a performance of Brahms' A German Requiem and he was so stunned by the uproar of the timpani that he 'hardly sang a note'.

Deale married Ruth Margaret Doran in 1931. She was a kind and encouraging wife and she also played the piano well. They had no children and she died during 1970.

The first major work of Edgar Deale was the Three Christmas Songs written for the Culwick Choral Society and first performed by them at Dublin's Metropolitan Hall in 1945 conducted by Turner Huggard. To further show how backward the Irish were in their appreciation of real music they found these settings for SSATB 'modern' and some argumentative discussions followed. A setting of Charles Sackville's To All You Ladies Now At Land dates from 1942 and is scored for double male choir and premiered at Dublin's Clef Club that year. The first orchestral work, Ceol Mall Réidh (Slow Moving Music) was performed for the first time by the Dublin Orchestral Players in 1947 at the Metropolitan Hall. It was revised during 1972 - 3. The Walter de la Mare Suite of 1945 is scored as are the Three Christmas Songs but it was several years before another original composition appeared. This was Arranmore, a unison song with an optional descant by Joseph Grocock. The words are by Thomas Moore. It is simple, diatonic and very effective. In 1955, A Virgin

Unspotted for two voices and organ was premiered and Hymnus ante Somnum for three male voices and piano was given at the Clef Club.

A substantial work, Five Poets - Seven Songs, lasts about twenty five minutes and was broadcast on 4 July 1961 by the RTE singers and it was well received. A Pageant of Human Life has an interesting history ... the score was lost by RTE! It was originally scored for baritone and piano and premiered by Michael O'Higgins and Dorothy Stokes. When I asked Edgar how the work was received he replied in typical humour, "Very well. Michael is a popular baritone!" The work was later scored for orchestra and the score was lost. Edgar told me, "If I were younger I'd sue the RTE!".

Deale was a governor of the Royal Irish Academy of Music serving for twelve years and leaving in the 1950s. The governors would meet fortnightly and were responsible for the running of the academy to whom the director was answerable. He was also president of the Safety First Association of Ireland having been involved with this now non-existent society for over thirty five years. He was concerned about increasing road deaths mainly caused by the Irish obsession with alcohol. "Even in my young days, a pub existed behind many grocery shops and drinking went on all night." His work as a senior insurance officer is not linked with this concern. He was the vice president of the Irish Association of Civil Liberties. His philosophy was that lawyers and politicians should not predominate and that the 'common people' should be heard.

He was a respected man not only in his music but in his aims to improve and uphold civil rights ... and yet he is not a bellicose man although he has a sharp and cutting wit. Not understanding the hours the Irish keep I rang him up one morning at 9.45. "What time is it?" he asked. "A quarter to ten," I replied. "Yes," he retorted, "and it's a quarter to ten here, too!".

There is a lot we do not know about Edgar Deale. He has kept a detailed diary for years and it may be published ... "but only on my death," he says. He was a close friend of Arnold Bax before he was knighted and has told me some fascinating stories, not available elsewhere, which I am not at liberty to tell. Deale was a very honest and direct man. He stated that Bach, Mozart and Beethoven are the Divine triumvirate of music; that Brahms is the most under-rated; that Mahler is untalented and a bore and AS with Bruckner and Elgar, does not know when to stop ... and yet, he said with equal forthrightness, "Debussy never wrote a dull bar".

Music would benefit from such integrity but I doubt whether Edgar Deale's music will ever scale the heights although his vocal and choral music is very attractive.

He died on 19 December 1999

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