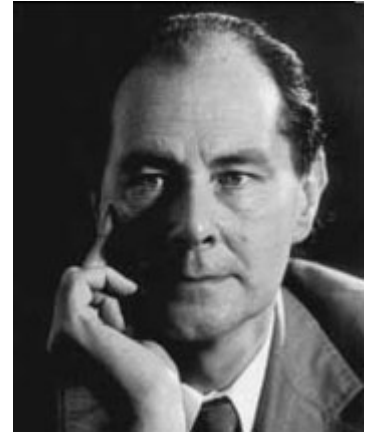


GERARD VICTORY

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Probably Gerard Victory has done more than anyone else towards making Ireland a partner in the European serious music cadre and in dispelling the curious notion that Ireland has only produced traditional music. While it may have been said that Irish serious music does not travel well perhaps this is because of the phenomenal success of its traditional music abroad with such groups as the Dubliners and the Chieftains and the appeal of Irish light and popular music from Thomas Moore through Balfe, Wallace, Victor Herbert to Jimmy Kennedy, Tommie Connor, U2, Enya and Clannad. There are also the extraordinary Irish successes in that very odd annual event known as the Eurovision Song Contest. These styles of music having fared so well, serious music in Ireland is thought to be non-existent. Of course, it is not the only country to suffer this misconception and, perhaps, there are countries such as Yugoslavia, which has a rich folk tradition, but its lack of popular success abroad has, in some quarters, allowed a measure of concentration on its serious composers.



However, the neglect of serious Irish music is partly due to the very high quality and, in some ways, the unique character of the best of Irish traditional music. For example, Gaelic art-song may have persuaded more thoughtful scholars elsewhere that this was in fact the Irish music much as one might similarly consider the classical music of India. Another factor is Ireland's preoccupation with Irish traditional music in its national propaganda. Again, the traditional way of arranging such music in a rather emasculated orchestral style which prevailed for some thirty years from about 1930 was misleadingly inferior to the real thing. In the late nineteenth century classical music in Ireland was principally the outcome of Protestant culture and followed the renewal of the English Renaissance. The tragic conflict over Northern Ireland has not helped. It has added, in some vague way, to some of the tendencies already mentioned that make serious Irish music of an international character less plausible.

In the middle ages, Ireland was described as the land of saints and scholars. One can only hope that through the highly attractive music of Gerard Victory, and others, and its wide circulation, this beautiful country will eventually be recognised as a land of serious music.

Victory was an eclectic composer but that does not mean that he was unsure of his personal musical idiom. He said that all composers of this century are, to some degree, eclectic since the repertoire of a thousand years is available as artistic influences albeit that such influences may be unconscious. Eclectic or not, here is a composer both gifted and versatile who can write disciplined serial music, although not strict in the Schoenberg tradition; highly entertaining and colourful scores which may be more enduring than some by the deservedly popular Malcolm Arnold; impressive symphonies and choral works as well as operettas and light music with a rare, distinctive quality and not, thankfully, like the bland and nauseating variety that Vienna has often produced. Victory is totally unashamed of his connection with Gilbert and Sullivan operas in which he took part when at school; nor is he embarrassed by his participation in the activities of amateur societies in his youth, performing musical comedy. In fact, he took the leading role in Kenneth Pakeman's *Land of Heart's Desire* in 1945 - the year which saw the first professional performance of his work - a revue entitled *Springtime Fever* in which he partly wrote the lyrics. Dr Victory admitted that among his works which gave him the most pleasure were the lighter ones, not only because of their worth but because he is less self-critical about them. Yet this same composer in demonstrating great facility in various musical forms, won the Oireachtas prize in 1960 for his *Short Symphony* (*Symphony no 1*) which covers a wide range of thought and has a finale of irresistible wit, recalling, perhaps, Kabalevsky's *The Comedians* which was popular at that time. The electronic score for *The Orphans* had a special commendation for the Italia Prix in 1957 and, twenty years later, he received another commendation for his opera *An Evening for Three* which the *Irish Times* acclaimed to be "a splendidly valuable piece that deserves to bring him fame". The present writer could add many other pieces worthy of that accolade including the Yeats song-cycle *Sailing to Byzantium* in which the song featuring the purple butterfly is one of the most successful marriages between a voice and orchestra; the *Symphony no 2*, which despite receiving some adverse written criticism, is a

brilliantly executed work; and the hugely enjoyable Three Irish Pictures which are not written in the emasculated manner of a previous generation. Of these, the third is completely original, the basic theme of the first is an Irish folk-song Ding Dong Dederó which is, in fact, a blacksmith's work-song which, in the Irish words, hints that his wife has run off with a tailor who is, apparently, an expert dancer. The composer has represented this situation in a kind of hysterical dance followed by a sad reprise. The second picture is based on a song called The Wounded Hussar dealing with some episode in the eighteenth century where an Irish soldier lies dying on the battlefield. Victory said, "the tune interested me because it seems to have some central European effects, for example, the mixture of tonic major and minor in places". The middle section which recalls the battle is original and throughout the whole work the orchestration is faultless. When Victory's music has travelled it has been the subject of critical acclaim; the Musical Times of December 1972 said of the String Quartet "it is intricately worked and well worth hearing, filled with glorious sonorities"; the Bremer Nachrichten in October 1967 remarked that the Overture Rapparee had "a beautiful natural flow – a striking but always well chosen posture".

Dr Victory was born Thomas Joseph Gerard Victory on Christmas Eve 1921 in Dublin at a time of crisis in Ireland. Three weeks earlier the Anglo-Irish treaty had been signed which gave the newly-formed Irish Free State the same constitutional position that Canada had at that time with control of its own military and internal affairs but subject to an oath of loyalty to the British Crown. Tensions ran high and eventually culminated in Civil War between the pro- and anti-Treaty factions of the IRA. Gerard's father, Thomas was a small shopkeeper, selling groceries, and in his spare time was a van-driver for the famous bakery of Johnston, Mooney and O'Brian which is now no more. He was very keen on the traditional music of Ireland and was the youngest son of a farmer in County Longford. His brother, James, was a Fianna Fail Dail Deputy, and a political activist. Although young Gerard saw his uncle often, had some admiration for him and was, in a limited measure, influenced by him, he was not to follow in his footsteps. Gerard Victory was not a party political activist but his nationalistic spirit is shown in his deep love for his country. His opinions in this direction were precise; he regretted that the Irish government has not standardized the Irish language for he believed that schools have a responsibility to transmit Irish, to encourage familiarity with the best of Irish literature, and to value the marvellous heritage.

Gerard's mother was born Delia Irwin. Her family was more secure, owning a Post Office shop in Galway. She had a good education, attending Loretto College in Balbriggan, which had good music facilities, and these became important in her life. So much so that she sent her son, at the age of six, to a Miss Lynam for piano lessons, there being no opportunities in his primary school. This teacher was a very sad individual and this melancholy affected the young student who, many years later, said that the teaching of music, particularly at lower levels, produces frustrations for the teacher which can cause feelings of failure, leading in turn, to a love/hate relationship with music. "However, this can be constructive", concluded Victory, "if it prevents complacency". This belief is shared by others including the German composer, Paul Hindemith.

Another boyhood influence was the weekly Monday night visits to the Olympia Theatre. Although the music was the variety type of the 1920s its novelty and brashness made a great impression. Listening to the radio was yet another influence and opera in particular - Wagner and Mozart were great stimuli. Even at the early age of seven Gerard was aware that serious music was obviously superior in character but not so immediate to ordinary people. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that all these aspects have produced a certain oscillation in his career and work which, he claimed, may reveal his personality which is typically Irish. He always wanted to write music that communicates, not merely to compose for the experts most of whom are self-appointed. He once told the present writer, "I feel that no amount of technical brilliance is of any use unless a fairly wide audience is convinced. I place great store on casual remarks made by ordinary people who can be more revealing than so-called experts. Of course, I value most sincerely the judgement of professionals and peers including yourself."

After attending private schools for three years he went to Belvedere College, Dublin from 1931 to 1939. For five years within this period he studied the piano with Louis O'Brien whose brother, Vincent, was Count John McCormack's teacher. Such a fine teacher, coupled with young Gerard's amazing memory, made for beneficial lessons, yet the student was told he would never make an expert pianist and that, perhaps, he

should give himself to composition. The greatest debt Victory owes to O'Brien is that music became so vital and important to him that it often excluded other activities which, from time to time, would otherwise have been more pressing. Avid listening to the radio continued, as well as collecting gramophone records and the joining of the Thomas Street public library which held scores. Here he studied Berlioz, Richard Strauss, Mahler and Stravinsky. Before reaching the age of ten he had taken out Wagner's *Meistersinger* and *Lohengrin* but not before his mother had signed a guarantee that these two scores would be returned undamaged. Victory had a high regard for Wagner saying, "he is very hard to beat, irresistible, and the best contrapuntalist since Bach."

In 1939 Victory went to University College, Dublin for four years, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Celtic studies. He also read French and German in which he had shown academic strengths from his school days. Naturally music was also pursued and in these teenage years he valued not only Wagner and Mozart but Verdi, Sullivan, Puccini and Gershwin. It was later that he developed a growing appreciation of the great symphonists. For seven years to 1946 he studied singing with Herbert Rooney who had enjoyed a good reputation in London around 1910 as a singing master. Rooney's chief interest was in plainchant and he was, for a time, an adviser to monastic institutions in Scotland. He composed children's cantatas such as *Slumberland* which may now be considered passé. His teaching methods would now be thought rather tame, especially his vocal exercises, but he was an inspiring person in other ways, rich in anecdotes about great singers he had known. He promoted the songs of York Bowen and Cyril Scott who, in the 1940s, were considered very *outré*.

It was in 1939 that Victory produced his first attempt at composition with his *Short Suite* for small ensemble which he entered for the Oireachtas prize. The Oireachtas was an organisation founded around 1905 for the promotion of the Irish language and culture, with special emphasis on traditional music. It was to its credit that it extended its awards to serious music which, at the time, was regarded as alien by many of the enthusiasts of this movement. The adjudicator in 1939 was none other than Sir Hamilton Harty who was kind about Victory's piece bearing in mind the *gaucherie* of it. Nonetheless a career in music had been determined in the mind of this eighteen year old. His parents were not in favour accepting his school's recommendation that he study law or enter the Civil Service. Their lack of enthusiasm was understandable given their financial circumstances and the cultural realities in Ireland at that time.

Other teachers alternated between Victory's periods of self-tuition. Firstly, Dr John F Larchet who was a dominant personality in Ireland from 1920 to 1950. He had tremendous energy and dynamism but could be somewhat autocratic. Apart from his classical outlook which, foolishly, made his resistance to modern composers like Stravinsky absurd, he otherwise had impeccable taste. His arrangements of Irish folk music were superior to what had gone before and he was a competent composer of song and short choral works such as the *Legend of Loch Leane*. He was the conductor of the orchestra at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin combining such duties with directing music to accompany silent films in cinemas. He was professor of music at University College, Dublin from 1930 and Victory studied with him for about a year around 1943 until his post in the Civil Service prevented this. Incidentally, Larchet has the distinction of being mentioned in James Joyce's *Finnigans Wake* in the *Feenichts Playhouse* scene, where reference is made to music by Larchet and Laccorde.

Victory's career was a slow and circuitous one in which he acknowledged his debt to amateur music societies and the Abbey Theatre for which he composed operas and revues. His first work performed in public, albeit by such dedicated amateurs, was the operetta *Nita* given by the Muckross Musical Society at Matthew Hall, Dublin, in December 1944. The libretto was written by a school friend, Patrick Delahunty and the plot owes something to Ivor Novello and concerns the romance of a well-bred girl with a gypsy, a mixture of *The Bartered Bride* and *The Gypsy Baron*. The composer told me, "I remember that, ironically, during the performances of *Nita*, Budapest was besieged by the Russian army so the plot seemed particularly removed from reality!"

The first work to receive a professional performance was a revue *Spring Fever* produced by the Brendan Smith Company in May 1945.

Upon leaving university, Victory became an administrative assistant in the statistics department of the Irish Civil Service. From 1948 he was variously an actor, freelance composer and arranger for Irish Radio, before becoming a talks producer in 1958, the year of what he regards his first public success, the opera *The Silent Wife*. His own wife was born Geraldine Herity and she married Gerard Victory on the 14 April 1948 at a Catholic church in Dublin. He was brought up as a Roman Catholic but his views on religion in recent years are somewhat perplexed and speculative. The Victories had five children: Alma who was born in 1950; Fiona, born in 1952 who is making a successful career as an actress; Isolde, born in 1955 who is currently a Senior clerk in the House of Lords; Raymond, born in 1958, who is a doctor, specializing in anaesthetics; and Alan, born in 1962, who is an accountant.

Victory's first broadcast was incidental music to a radio play, *Chinese Lantern Moon*, in 1946. The moon reappears in a musical play of 1949 and broadcast the following year. *Once upon a Moon* is influenced by Ivor Novello as, indeed, was *Nita*. "Novello's dominant influence is not as alien as it might appear," explained Victory. "Novello was a Welshman and his blend of central European sentiment is actually derived from a strong Welsh tradition of light opera forged in the last century so, perhaps, it has some fundamental link with us in Ireland."

In 1950 Victory submitted a ballet suite, *The Enchanted Garden*, for the Carolan Prize offered by Radio Eireann. There was only one other competitor, Havelock Nelson, who won the prize with his *Sinfonietta*. Two years later an orchestra tried out the ballet suite and, after a few minutes the conductor shouted, "Stop. We can't go on like this. When the Symphony Orchestra plays horrible discords like this everyone says how clever and how intellectual. When we, the Light Orchestra play them everyone says the players are all drunk."

For two years from 1951 Victory studied with Walter Beckett who was about six years his senior. Beckett graduated Bachelor of Music from Trinity College, Dublin, in 1939 and became a Doctor of Music in 1947. He possessed an unusually perceptive ear for good musical comedy and advocated the use of rarer harmonic devices. Victory says that Beckett "cut me down to size usefully in some ways". In his earlier years, Beckett wrote a lot of music. His *Suite for Orchestra* (1945) is impressive and the finale of his *Triple Fantasy* is strong in character. His works then tended towards a very extensive series of orchestral suites based on Irish airs in accordance with popular demand. After a spell of teaching in England he took up composition again, his new works including a string quartet. Like many Irish composers a quest for tastefulness and decorum was at the expense of tension in his music.

Victory had attended a Summer Music School in Dublin in 1950, in which the principal lecturer in composition was Alan Rawsthorne, whose critique of some of Victory's works helped the young composer and encouraged him to study further, choosing Beckett as his teacher. Rawsthorne spotted an Elgarian tendency, a weakness which was, thankfully, soon put right; on the other hand he praised the pupil's orchestration and was generally encouraging.

Until his retirement from Radio Telefis Eireann in 1982, as for many composers, composition was a spare-time activity. Around 1953 was a good time for Victory. He was encouraged by Professor Aloys Fleischmann, who produced Victory's *Elegy in Cork* in 1953, and it was also he who backed the overture *Charade* in 1956 against great opposition. The musical climate of the 1950s, combined with other factors, was discouraging and slowed up Victory's development. He sought further help by studying with Dr A J Potter who was born in Belfast in 1918 and had himself studied in London with Vaughan Williams. He served in the British Army during the Second World War, taking part in the Narvik expedition. He worked for a while in West Africa in the rubber industry before going to Ireland to become a vicar choral in one of the cathedrals in Dublin and then launching into a career as an arranger for the radio orchestras. He clearly had great talent and wrote much music including the television opera, *Patrick* (1962) about Irish immigrants in London; *The Scatterin'*, a sort of rock musical, but of superior quality. His chief symphonic works include *Sinfonia de Profundis* (1968) and a *Concerto for Orchestra* (1967). His comic opera, *The Wedding*, has a libretto written by himself. He enjoyed some measure of success in the USA who gave him several commissions. For some reason, since his death his music has been neglected and this may be due to his stylistic hallmarks being irritating to

current musicians. However, Victory found his help very important in 1959 while he was preparing to sit his Bachelor of Music examination which he successfully achieved at Trinity College, Dublin in 1960.

Another major event to advance Victory's progress was the advent of Tibor Paul as director of music at Radio Telefis Eireann who widened the horizons of acceptance of more modern idioms in Ireland and stimulated Irish composition. Victory had been studying the serial procedures of Schoenberg and in the space of a year or so he wrote four major serial works - the Prelude and Toccata for piano, Five Mantras for strings, Ballade for orchestra and the String Quartet.

In 1961 Gerard Victory became a television producer at RTE, Dublin and the following year, the deputy director of music. In 1967 he became director which prestigious post he held until he retired. Other honours came his way. France awarded him the Ordre des arts et des lettres in 1975. Germany awarded him the Verdienstkreuz Order of Merit that same year. The principal reasons given for these awards were Victory's use of French and German texts such as Verlaine, Rimbaud, de Vigny, August Stramm and others and, to some extent, his promotion of French and German music and performers. From 1981 to 1984 he was president of the International Rostrum of Composers for UNESCO in Paris. In 1975 he was awarded a Doctorate of Music from Trinity College, Dublin on the strength of his many excellent compositions. Important commissions came his way including three cantatas for the BBC music workshops between 1968 and 1971, namely *The Island People*, *Pennine Way* and *Hagoromo*; for the Cork International Choral Festival of 1965 the *Quartetto* for voices and narrator and, in 1979, the *Trois Chansons de Verlaine*; for the Heinrich Schütz Festival in Berlin in 1965 there appeared the *Hymnus Vespertinus*; the European Music Year of 1985 presented the attractive *Tableaux Sportifs* on French radio; and for the Dublin millennium in 1988 *The Land of Lilliput* for youth choir, narrator, piano and two percussionists, and the *Runic Variations* for flute and clarinet.

Dr Victory had a special affection for his orchestral work *Favola di Notte* which dates from 1966, the year following his visit to the Darmstadt Music School. Of all his works this one has received the most negative criticism and the composer believes it deserves a revival which would prove the critics' initial judgement to be wrong. It is a work of great atmosphere and high drama, and is in the style of a wordless drama rather than in a traditional symphonic manner. It includes a hectic bacchanale and a passage for twenty divided strings employing a variety of contrasting playing devices.

There are four numbered symphonies. The first which dates from 1962 probably established Gerard Victory as a composer. The *Symphony no 2*, which dates from 1977, is a splendid piece in three substantial movements. It is subtitled "*Il Ricorso*" (The Return) taken from the writings of the Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico who believed in three dominant elements in human social affairs. Firstly the theocratic principle; secondly the aristocratic idea as typified in the Renaissance period; and thirdly the democratic age which would dissolve in a Divine thunderclap to start the cycle again. Victory's symphony reflects these three principles. The first movement begins quietly and uneasily and leads to a climax indicating the primeval joy of man in the encircling dust of the beginning of things. Well-punctuated swirling music introduces a horn tune with a pronounced and impressive swagger; the percussion seeks to portray the march of time arriving at the age of discovery and achievement. It is music of controlled and persuasive primitivism. The character charges into a more expansive canvas with woodwind figurations and mysterious sounds as if one age were merging into another. More stirring music appears with a hint of the East and a sweeping tune which is to reappear throughout this incredible score in which orchestral colour is one of many striking features. There is also occasional grandeur and a tremendous coda with typical Victory swagger which is as infectious as it is exhilarating.

The second movement is an elegy but not a sentimental one. It is tragic, suggesting cries from the heart rather than tears. Cruelty is cleverly portrayed with appropriate discordance: there are echoes of Renaissance music skilfully woven into the musical argument suggesting the sorrow at the passing of an age of artistic and cultural beauty with the realization that it will never be recaptured with its original impact. The trombone is used for its more expressive qualities. The finale is impressive and sinister. It has a strong theme and a marvellously forward motion alternating an unforgettable march theme with a waltz, contrasting declamatory utterances reminiscent of Shakespeare's Jack Cade with whimsical entertainment. Mysterious music reappears

and an oboe theme suggests, to me at any rate, the lonely roads of Ireland. Spirituality returns with a flute solo of almost unbearable beauty heralding the repeated sweeping theme sometimes with formidable dramatic power and then with remarkable tenderness. The work ends with a spectacular coda.

As well as the Symphony no 2 the 1970s saw the production of several other compositions including Jonathan Swift, a symphonic study in two movements which was completed in 1971. It has an independent symphonic structure which illustrates the sequence of Swift's life. The opening motto, featured on the bass clarinet and horns sum up the tragic nature of Swift's personality and echoes in its rhythms the words of his own grim epitaph "Perish the day on which I was born". There follows an extended passionate section which describes his anguish in later years and the shadow of insanity which always haunted him. The next section describes Swift's success in the salons as a young man where his wit became famous; a parodied baroque dance illustrates the falseness of the world which for a time captivated him. The growing development of his great irony is depicted in a savage scherzando; the movement ends with a triumphal march as Swift is acclaimed by London society and as the genius before the Tory ministry of Queen Anne and the familiar of prelates and princes.

The second movement depicts the despair and gloom which followed Swift's downfall. Now Dean of St Patrick's he becomes aware for the first time of the terrible plight of most of his Irish fellow countrymen and finds a new outlet for his gifts in opposing tyranny and corruption with perhaps the most brilliant satires ever composed. The mysterious figures of his two great loves "Stella" and "Vanessa" portrayed by the solo violin and cello weave a pattern of alternating consolation and tragedy through his later life. Percussion introduces an episode illustrating the final breakdown of his great intellect and his death is mourned in a Celtic lament by the Irish people who had now taken him to their hearts. The epilogue which is in an exhilarated mood sums up Swift's life and work.

Victory's Piano Concerto no 2 dates from 1972, eighteen years after the first. It is in the conventional three-movement form and its harmonic and melodic language is based closely on the intervals of the opening theme, stated by the piano in octaves, which features wide leaps of minor ninths. The first movement is serious in style and relatively atonal in language; the second movement is basically a "blues"; the finale expresses a folk-music character and has a modal feeling in its melodic line and includes a set of variations and a vigorous cadenza.

The Seven Songs of Experience, completed in 1977, is one of Victory's finest choral works being settings of William Blake. The music is tonal in style which frequently displays progressions and chords built upon alternating major and minor thirds.

It was in the mid-fifties that Gerard Victory first discovered the Irish air known as An Carabhat or The Cravat. The tune itself was probably written in the eighteenth century; it was composed as an appeal for peace which is equally relevant to our day. Struck by the unique qualities of the tune Victory arranged it for clarinet and piano; then, around 1979 he wrote Nine Variations on The Cravat for orchestra which include a barcarolle, a stormy, savage movement, a nocturne, a funeral march and a scherzo.

The Cello Concerto of 1978 has not yet been performed. It presents a daunting but rewarding challenge to any soloist who possesses both the courage and technique to take it up.

For the centenary of the birth of James Joyce, which occurred in 1982, Victory completed his Six Epiphanies of the Author for orchestra which is a symphonic study of the dualities in the life of the writer. For example, the second epiphany contrasts the opposing voices in Ireland, the fourth, the intellectual versus the sensual. This impressive score is framed by a prologue and an epilogue and each epiphany is founded upon two contrasting tonal centres drawn from the basic twelve note-row. The prologue describes Joyce's infancy with cleverly-devised inchoate sounds. Reckless cynicism is well captured as, indeed, is the shadow of religious fear hammered out by the oboes in a relentless figure. The first epiphany is an ironic Haberna; the second is a march magnificently orchestrated as one has come to expect from Victory; the third oration and scherzo moves from moving whispers to a riotous bacchanale in which fragments of a music-hall song and

parodies of the liturgy are cleverly woven. There is a tremendous moment when the ghost of Joyce's mother appears. The tension and drama is compulsive. The fourth epiphany is, in turn, both tranquil and menacing. The cor anglais depicts Joyce's father singing affectedly the Irish melody *The Shores of Amerikay*. The fifth epiphany portrays the two sides of Joyce - the would-be man of the world and the artist. This is followed by the final epiphany, a *March Macabre* which echoes the earlier *Habanera* where the underworld, ribald laughter and menace are all portrayed with gripping realism. The epilogue echoes earlier ideas but now, for the first time, the full note-row is stated in its entirety by the solo trumpet as a tranquil arioso.

As with the *Symphony no 2* this work is a powerful utterance rich with its varied moods and colours, its rugged and exhilarating orchestration as well as some delightful and delicate sounds; the portrayal of the author's life, without the need of words, is achieved with lucidity which feature had been earlier displayed with Jonathan Swift.

The *Symphony no 3* was completed in 1984 and is subtitled *Refrains*. The first movement features exotic music contending with a more tonal posture. The second has Renaissance elements and is a neo-romantic cantilena, whereas the finale is an extended march in which parodies of various march styles are set against a minimalist style in which unchanging harmony is developed by added colours and dynamics. This fine work was very well received. The *Symphony no 4* is a succinct and effective work.

The large Symphonic work telling the history of Dublin has been opined as his *Symphony no.5*

On 2 March 1984 the National Concert Hall in Dublin witnessed the first performance of the mammoth ten movement *Ultima Rerum* which the composer described as a "global Requiem Symphony reaching beyond the traditional framework and covering a wide span of human thought on the subject of death and its aftermath". The framework is the traditional Requiem of the Roman Ritual with additional texts including the comments of non-Christian religion with quotations from the Koran, the Navajo Indians, the Norse Edda and the fantastic apocalyptic poetry of James Elroy Flecker, William Blake and Walt Whitman; elegiac writings from the ritualistic poems of the Italian sceptic Giacomo Leopardi to the poignant *In Memoriam* of Tennyson. Old Irish visionary literature appears in lines from *Tidings of Doomsday in Lebor na hUidhre*. The inclusion of such varied material may be worrying because it is unartistically unnatural and in any long work interest can be adversely affected by the diversity of material as well as the quality and changing styles of the music. For example, many admit that the symphonies of such figures as Mahler and Bruckner have superb moments but also passages that if they were not included would enhance enjoyment and overall continuity of such works. *Ultima Rerum* may be an unequal work but it is a magnificent achievement and concept. Many present at its first performance hailed it as "a sublime experience" even if it was sometimes a flawed rendering of the score. Perhaps the truly memorable moments of this work - and there are many - make up for the less-than-satisfactory passages. For example, some will prefer the superior power and drama of Verdi's *Dies Irae* to Victory's. Yet for all this it is a compassionate and human work receiving lavish praise in the Irish press.

The music of Gerard Victory occupies a very special place in Irish serious music and what is truly remarkable is that his light pieces such as the delightful *Capriccio* for violin and orchestra or the engaging short opera *The Music hath mischief* are not trite or banal. This composer has lifted such music out of the accusing depth of being not quite respectable to a higher level and set a higher standard in this field than ever before. Yet it is in his most serious works that there is a composer who can certainly compete with the best of contemporary composers while in a different but rewarding mode he rivals the exuberance of such figures as Malcolm Arnold.

What we have in Gerard Victory is a largely unknown but distinguished and prolific composer. He has nine operas, nine works for solo instrument and orchestra, much choral and vocal music, chamber music and songs to his name. Above all, he has a marvellous and unfailing capacity for communication to which all his works testify.

Dr Victory went into hospital in March 1995. A week earlier we shared our final long conversation. He sought to reassure me that his medical problem was a minor one but we both knew that it was not. He died on

14 March having bequeathed to the world a legacy of memorable music of many diverse kinds. In an obituary of this gifted composer Charles Acton wrote, "He was extremely widely read, deeply thoughtful and possessed an extraordinary ability to converse on any topic with every comma and subordinate clause impeccably in place". I can testify to that.

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