

Romance in The Land of Heart's Desire

by Ben Janken

My first trip to Great Britain was in 1984, a gift to myself before I started to face the prospect of building my business as a professional photographer. I thought of England, especially at that time, as my spiritual home. It was the place for which I had been yearning for my entire life, probably due to the vast quantities of English and Irish authors, poets, philosophers and composers I consumed. In addition, I had made something of a study of Gaelic mythology and folklore, Arthurian legends and their inter-twinings with each other and Christian mythology, especially legends of the Holy Grail. To visit this land where these things had once been real gave them a substance they didn't have before.

How did England become my spiritual home, at least as a young man? It probably started when I was four or five. There was a program on TV, filmed in England: *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, starring Richard Greene. Greene was very handsome and manly, at least to my young eyes, and Robin Hood was of course a figure of great romance, even if I didn't really understand what he was about, or for that matter, what Romance was about. Although Superman was also heroic to me, as with other children at that time and place, and I would tie the requisite towel around my shoulders and pretend to be him, Superman lacked capital-R Romance. Obviously, though, there was something even then about men in tights!

The romance I didn't understand, but only felt, was certainly part of Robin Hood's appeal. And Robin Hood, both the character and the TV show, were intensely, quintessentially English. But Robin Hood also had something else: music. And even when I was a young child, music would demand my attention and absorb me like nothing else. This music was in a pseudo-English folk music/troubadour style, vastly different than the trumpets-blaring, martial bombast of Superman's paean.

This English music required something else of me: that I not only notice it, but that I feel it. I began to appreciate beauty: its beauty, its very proper rightness in expressing an emotional state, for its own sake. That was a new thing for me entirely. To this day, the very English songs of Vaughan Williams, Moeran, Finzi, Butterworth, Venables, Howells, Gurney and many others, setting the proper English verse, can bring me to tears. The music is lovely, on a par with the very best songs of Strauss, Grieg or Debussy. When the songs are in English, it is often a marriage of music and words that I have found in few other songs and composers, no matter how beautiful the music or wonderful the poetry. The music becomes the poetry itself through a kind of artistic transubstantiation, meaning in music what the poetry means in words. It can even take the repetitive scansion and ever more awkward, even tortuous syntax of Housman's "A Shropshire Lad", and turn it into poetry of deepest meaning, wisdom and feeling.

The only other music that really moved me as a boy, that also appealed to that as-yet unknown quality of romance, was the muscular masculinity of Spanish music, especially that with the *cante jondo* of flamenco in its soul. But I didn't discover that until I was nearly ten, nor did I hear the music of Granados, Turina and Albéniz until I was in my teens. Romance was the force of gravity that drew me inexorably into it.

When I was around eleven or twelve, I discovered FM radio, with Los Angeles having something like four full-time classical music stations. My musical world suddenly opened up beyond the two twenty-volume sets of LP classical records my mother had bought me. The stations often played Ralph Vaughan Williams's *English Folk Song Suite* and his *Fantasia on Greensleeves*. There was that unearthly, beautiful music again! I was able to find other recordings of English folk songs, including RVW's sterling arrangements. When I was 14 or 15, I came across a recording of his Ninth Symphony, which was far advanced in musical complexity and modernity over anything I was listening to at that point. That, along with my simultaneous discoveries of Gershwin and Copland (in his Americana mode), opened up the entire world of 20th century classical music to me, especially 20th century

post-Romantics. By the time I was 16, I was leaving the relatively easy sound-worlds of Mozart, Haydn, Bach, and even Beethoven behind me. I had discovered Holst, Bartók, Britten, Rachmaninoff, Kodály, Prokofiev, Ravel, Janáček, Debussy, Persichetti, Hanson and many, many more. I started spending the money I had so carefully saved, and buying whatever records I could afford at whatever record stores I could get to.

At the same time, I discovered, or in some cases, rediscovered English writers such as Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and others. (I read so much Lewis that I very nearly became a Christian when I was 19, but that's another story). I began haunting bookstores as I did record stores, and somehow found my way to Irish writers like the inimitable James Stephens and W. B. Yeats, both arch-Romantics. And of course, there were many more.

While all of this musical and literary ferment was a-bubbling, I discovered Renaissance music, which I loved both singing and listening to, especially the English madrigalists, and the exquisite lute songs of Elizabethan composers like John Dowland. This, along with Vaughan Williams and Benjamin Britten, in turn led me further into English Renaissance poetry, which I had already begun to explore as soon as I discovered Shakespeare.

More Vaughan Williams introduced me to more English poets like Hardy and Housman, and the mystical poets like Herbert and Donne, whose verse, emotionally powered by RVW's music, and intellectually powered by C.S. Lewis, began pushing me towards Christianity, and interestingly enough, back to King Arthur. The Arthurian cycle, along with the liquid prose/poetry of James Stephens, sent me further and further afield, and eventually to the worlds of Irish and Welsh mythology. These Gaelic gods were far more interesting than the usual run of deity, and for their own sakes. They were the most human gods of all, far more so than the effete gods of Greece, or the grim gods of the northern lands, whom I had avidly been reading about as soon as I was able to go to the library on my own.

In short, my two chance encounters, as a small boy with English pseudo-folk music, and with the music of Vaughan Williams as an adolescent, grabbed me in such a way that they forced me to move, opening up entire worlds of music, literature, poetry, mythology, architecture, philosophy, religion and history that I might never have encountered otherwise, or at least, would not have pursued with the intensity and vigor that I did. Every new discovery was a gateway to so many more, with my whole cultural world expanding at near the speed of light, or at least, enlightenment. So, going to England on that first trip meant to me that I was finally going to find the fountainhead of all of this emotional, musical, literary and intellectual Romance which I had been swimming in for two decades.

Despite three or four trips to Great Britain, and every desire and good intention, I somehow never made it to Ireland. Something would always come up. Two years ago, when I finally arranged my trip and purchased my tickets, I was hit with a health catastrophe, and had to cancel it again. But I was determined to go, and when my health allowed, I made the trip.

People have asked me why I would want to go to Ireland, some sincerely wanting to know, some incredulously asking for justification, as if going there was on a par with visiting not my crazy aunt that no one talks about, but theirs. My reasons were entirely personal, highly eclectic ones: little byways of music, literature, photography and mythology that appeal to me and no one else. Even food: Irish Stew is practically legendary, and Cork has a Museum of Butter! That's the reason why I did not ask anybody to go with me. Such an unlucky traveler, in this land where luck was born, would simply be bored out of his mind. But for me, I was scratching a lot of itches, things that absorbed me or seized me since I was a little boy.

There were four musical reasons for this trip to Ireland, as always, the wind that moves my emotional wave. The smallest reason, if that's the right word, was to go to the Aran Islands, the

scene of John Millington Synge's play, "Riders to the Sea", a landmark play of the Celtic Twilight movement. Vaughan Williams, my all-time favorite composer, set it as a one-act musical drama, very stark, emotional, and for RVW, almost dreary. It is the only one of his operas that is not either meltingly lyrical and/or comic. I had always been curious about it for that reason: it was not his typical work, but the play obviously moved him.

It's the story of a fishing family in Inismaan, one of the three Aran Islands. The mother, Maurya, lost her husband and five of her sons to the violence of the sea. The story ends with the death of her sixth son, swept off his horse by the waves, and her resignation as a woman to the narrow life of the wives and daughters of the fishermen.

Her final speech is grief itself, and in Vaughan Williams's setting, beyond sad: "They're all gone now, and there isn't anything more the sea can do to me I'll have no call now to be up crying and praying when the wind breaks from the south, and you can hear the surf is in the east, and the surf is in the west, making a great stir with the two noises, and they hitting one on the other. I'll have no call now to be going down and getting Holy Water in the dark nights after Samhain, and I won't care what way the sea is when the other women will be keening." Having seen that violence up close in Doolin— I've never seen waves like that in my life, easily climbing 50 to 60 feet up the sides of the Cliffs of Moher, rebounding off those forbidding, black fastnesses, exploding in white, cold fury— I truly get it.



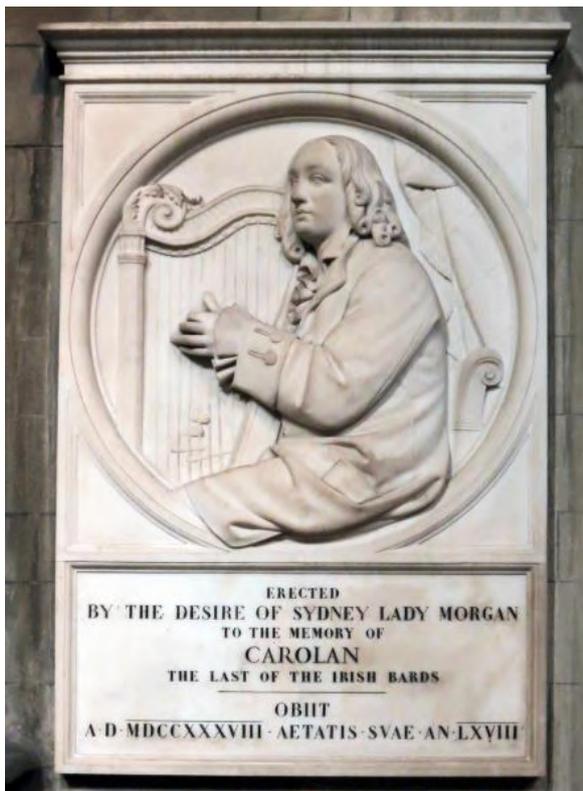
Waves at the Cliffs of Moher

In the event, the trip to Inismor and the Aran Islands, though interesting from the standpoint of what inspired Synge and Vaughan Williams, was the only somewhat disappointing part of the whole Irish trip. It is every bit as bleak as Synge portrayed it. There just isn't a lot of "there" there, and its bleakness is, well, bleak. Two days were plenty.

A second reason is Irish traditional music, which is very much a living tradition in Ireland, and one of the draws for people like me. I have already written about how I found English folk songs as a child, and how this lovely music led me onwards and upwards in terms of my interests in classical music, literature, history, poetry and mythology. But there weren't just English folk songs, as beautiful as they were. There were also Scottish songs and even music for bagpipes - that ill wind that no one blows good.

And then there were the Irish songs, often more lovely than even their English counterparts, perhaps indicating the contrast between the cooler, more pedestrian and complacent English character, and the ever-lamenting, but wistfully imaginative, Gaelic Celts. It's nonsense, of course, and the sort of thing Yeats would say, but it doesn't matter if it's actually true. It's sufficiently romantic to sound true. And, well...Romance!

What a lot of people don't know is that many prominent continental composers, most notably Haydn and Beethoven, also contributed to the admixture of Irish folk music. Both made arrangements of traditional tunes that were huge sellers at the time, which was why they wrote them. To some extent, these Germans shaped how the folk music was used and adapted in both classical and popular music, and ultimately, how it has come down to us. It left the country for the salons of the city, much as did the Hungarian Dances of Brahms, or Enescu's Romanian Rhapsodies.



And as strong and beautiful as the folk songs is the harp music of Ireland. The harpers in ancient Ireland were not merely musicians, but poets, bards, composers, story tellers, representatives of justice and right action and, best of all: magicians! The harp is so important in Ireland even now that it is featured on the coinage, and on the flag of the President. Traditional Irish harp music had very nearly died out when it was revitalized about 300 years ago by the blind harpist and composer, Turlough O'Carolan. His music is still performed. As with Beethoven and Haydn, his music is so intertwined with Irish folk music as it is heard even today, that I am fairly certain many musicians do not know the total provenance of the music they are performing. I even asked a couple, and it was clear they had only heard the name, but didn't know they were playing the tunes.

I am familiar with many Irish folk songs from having listened to them since I was a boy. I have heard many, many pieces of Irish harp music, especially the music of O'Carolan, for almost as long. I have also listened to many arrangements and interpretations of those songs by folk song collectors, such as Thomas More and Marjory Kennedy-Fraser, and classical composers. I've also listened to Appalachian music on and off for years, and can recognize the elements of Scottish and Irish folk music, especially the fiddling that must have been brought to those mountains by Gaelic settlers. Thus, I came to Ireland armed with a fairly good, if intuitive, knowledge of what must form the basis for the "Irish traditional music" that is performed everywhere now. But I actually don't know where the dividing line between "real" or "authentic" and "ersatz" or "nouveau" lies, or even if there is one. All of my exposure to that which is called "Irish traditional music" is based upon what has crossed over: the Clancy Brothers, The Chieftains, and a

few others. So this is a major reason to go: to complete my knowledge. My plan was to listen to a lot of it.

A third musical reason to go to Ireland is the music of an Englishman, Ernest John Moeran. He was among the best of the second tier of English composers who were writing in the years between the two World Wars. His music followed the style of Vaughan Williams-- lyrical and tonal. But he is mostly unknown beyond England to anyone except those who love post-romantic British music. He might have been among the very first rank of those composers, had not so much gone wrong in his life. He suffered from a head wound he received in World War I, which may have caused or exacerbated his weakness for alcohol. I have reasons to suspect he was gay, though he is usually pink-washed with a vague reference to occasional bisexuality, if it is mentioned at all. He married a cellist late in life, but it didn't last. This did inspire his Cello Sonata and Cello Concerto, so it wasn't a total loss.

His other misstep was falling under the spell of Peter Warlock, the somewhat sinister composing non-de-plume of scholar and critic Philip Heseltine. He lived with Warlock for three years, and drunken, naked motorcycle rides through a quiet English village were then, especially, a thing that people would notice. Warlock had a prodigious capacity for alcohol, riotous living and extremely concentrated work as both scholar and composer. Nevertheless, he was not a good influence on himself, let alone Moeran. He was manic depressive, bisexual, very talented and bright, and chose to end his life at age 36, although the coroner's verdict really wasn't definitive as to whether it was an accident.

My guess is not. I suspect that the burden of being the notorious, wastrel, and acerbic Peter Warlock was just too much for that scholarly lover of beauty, Philip Heseltine. Warlock wrote only one first class work, without doubt a masterpiece: *The Curlew*, to poetry by Yeats. To the extent that art is autobiographical, I believe that this line, repeated several times, holds the key to the dual nature of Heseltine/Warlock: "No boughs have withered because of the wintry wind. The boughs have withered because I have told them my dreams." One must wonder about the depths of darkness in those dreams!

Moeran was actually Anglo-Irish, raised and trained in England, and had most of his successes there. He didn't write a lot, but it was all of very high quality—beautiful, pastoral in the best sense of the word, folk influenced, and unfortunately, behind the times and eventually out of style. As he got older, he returned to Ireland again and again, falling in love with it, finding the inspiration in the landscape and the people for so much of his music. Not surprisingly, a lot of his music is overtly Irish-sounding in melodic line and rhythm, like his quite beautiful Violin Concerto and Cello Concerto, but without simply being pastiche. No "Fantasy on Irish Folk Songs" for him! He died in 1950 at the age of 56 in Kenmare, County Kerry. He is buried in Killowen Churchyard, now abandoned, outside Kenmare.

Until a few years ago, there was a drinking establishment— of course!— in Kenmare called Moeran's Pub. I believe it had some memorabilia and a plaque. Kenmare is now a big tourist destination, so I wrote to the tourist office there to see what information could be had. The earnest young man who responded had never heard of Kenmare's most famous, even if only adopted, son. He naturally referred me to a few websites.

So, this was one of my reasons to go to Ireland. I wanted to see what moved Moeran to write the music that he did, music that has always moved me in the nearly 50 years since I first heard it. I wanted to go to his grave, make sure it was well tended, and inform the tourist office if not. In the event, it was one of the few that was tended at all.

And I wanted to lay some flowers there to say "thank you" to him, to say to anyone who might care or understand that this man is not forgotten. I didn't know why that was important to me, but it was. Perhaps it was because music, his music, has always been important to me. That might have to do with another book I read as a child. I don't remember the name or anything else about it, except its basic premise: the ghosts of the dead only stick around as long as someone remembers them and who they were. That notion has always affected me strongly.

A fourth musical reason to go to Ireland was yet another English composer whose spiritual home was Ireland: Sir Arnold Bax. He was also one of the most important British composers writing between the wars: Vaughan Williams's modernist, acidic Fourth Symphony is dedicated to him. He was known in his youth as a phenomenal pianist, able to sight-read from full orchestral scores, but he didn't play publicly. His own music, more frequently so than that of Vaughan Williams, intermixed the lushly beautiful with the stunningly forceful. His abilities with orchestral color have found few equals in any other composer. He took the best of Strauss and Debussy, then the avant-garde, and made it his own.

Moeran's musical world was mostly inspired by Irish landscape and people, infused with the aesthetics of the folk music of Great Britain and Ireland, and motivated by a desire to create not just art, but beauty. Bax was also inspired by landscape, but influenced by folk music to a far lesser extent. He claimed not to be influenced by it at all, but that wasn't true; that was just Bax being Bax, and he didn't want to be associated with the composers of numerous rhapsodies on a folk tune from somewhere or other. These are as easy to listen to as they are to write, but hard to make interesting or original. It's clear from his autobiography that he had more respect for talent than he did for workmanship.

Bax also wanted to create beauty as much as art. But I think his major motivator was emotion. He said that he was "a brazen romantic-- by which I mean that my music is the expression of emotional states. I have no interest whatsoever in sound for its own sake, or in any modernist isms or factions." What interested him as much as strong emotion was youth and human beauty, and a keen sense of their temporality. (Some might call that capital-R Romance)! The title of his autobiography, "Farewell My Youth", is a good indication. It was written when he was 60, and youth had definitely fled, the ascetic-looking young and middle-aged man replaced by a somewhat stodgy corpulence later in life. There were also healthy doses of Celtic and Norse mythology. But darker, stronger, fiercer emotions also fill his music, especially in his seven symphonies.

It is the heady mix of mythology, passion, power, orchestral color and lyrical beauty, coupled with his intense love of Ireland, its history, and its culture, which has always led me to characterize Bax's music as having Faerie interwoven with, or perhaps flowing through it. It has a special Magic that elicits a strong response from the romantic in me. I feel much the same about the music of Vaughan Williams, but rather than Faerie, there one finds spirituality, with nature at its very core.

Though considered one of the most important British composers of his time, Bax composed very little of either interest or consequence after 1939. He was honored by both a knighthood and appointment as Master of the King's Music. Unfortunately, by the time of his death in 1953, his style of music, highly romantic in intention, yet modern in idiom, had, like Moeran's, largely gone out of fashion. I'm also fairly certain that he didn't care. He didn't need the money or the recognition from performance and, like Sibelius, who also wrote very little after age 60, he had pretty much said all that he had to say musically.

Bax also fell in love with Ireland as a young man, and found in it his spiritual, literary and musical home. Under the pseudonym of Dermot O'Byrne, he wrote poems, short stories, and plays, as Irish as James Stephens, but unfortunately, lacking his wit and invention. I gave up half-way through one of

his books of short stories, Wrack. It seemed that his intent was to be so thoroughly Irish that the stories didn't actually need to be about anything; in short, lots of atmosphere, but little to breathe.

His autobiography is not at all like his "Irish" work, but brilliant, witty, gossipy and fun. I highly recommend it just for the pleasure of reading it, even if you don't know who the musicians and composers are that he talks about. He knew many of the people who belonged to the Celtic Twilight movement of Yeats. He described how "The Celt within me stood revealed" upon first reading Yeats in 1902. Near the end of his life, he also wrote that the poetry of Yeats "meant more to me than all the music of the centuries". He and Moeran were friends, and shared a mutual friendship with the two Aloys Fleischmanns, father and son, both important to music in Ireland. He also knew James Stephens, whom he termed "an intellectual, leprechaun of a man."

He knew some of the leaders of the Easter Uprising, sympathized with their political aspirations and plight, and was shocked and outraged by their executions. He wrote his *Elegiac Trio* for flute, viola and harp as a lament for them. It is a deeply moving, yet ultimately peaceful piece of music that I never thought I would hear live, but was fortunate enough to hear in Dublin on this trip. I couldn't think of a more appropriate piece of music to listen to there. To get to the concert hall, I had to walk through nearby St. Stephen's Green, lending the piece an especial poignancy.

I suspect that although Bax found his inspiration in Ireland, his Ireland was perhaps not merely reality, but the wilder Ireland of his imagination, a large part of that centered around the Celtic Twilight movement of Yeats and many others. This was mostly a literary movement, and not a musical one, though it did affect the other arts in Ireland. I think this potent blend of reality and imagination is what energizes a romantic soul to be enraptured by a foreign place. This is something I can understand, because when I was 19, about Bax's age on his first trip there, I did exactly the same thing about Hawaii. It's something that romantically-tempered young people would do. They— we— especially are highly susceptible to the romantic charm of distance, whether of time, space, art, imagination or culture.

I think that for Bax, Ireland was a country where he at last felt comfortable, with a sense of belonging to and being part of something older, larger, more intense and more interesting than being himself: an upper-middle-class scion of privilege, very talented, incurably romantic but very ordinary otherwise. Going on my own experience as a suburban white boy in Hawaii, or an American awash in English music and literature, it gave him an emotional enlargement he couldn't find consistently in the quotidian life of an Englishman. You could say that it was an enchanted land to which he could repair, in all senses of the word, whenever he needed it.

His responses to Ireland were strong, but its inspiration was primarily literary and emotional, not specifically musical. He was the bard of the Celtic Twilight, but he was not relevant to Ireland as a first-rate musician, and vice-versa. As necessary as Ireland was to spark his creativity, both literary and musical, I don't think it inspired him in the same sense it did Moeran. I doubt the reality of Irish life, perhaps more accurately portrayed by James Stephens than by Bax, was ultimately his reality. Ireland provided the backdrop for Dermot O'Byrne, not Arnold Bax. It's telling that most of the Irish who knew him had no idea he was the celebrated composer, Bax. Likewise, many who knew him in England didn't know that he was the published and occasionally somewhat politically subversive Irish writer, Dermot O'Byrne. He clearly preferred it that way.

Bax died in southern Ireland of a heart attack at age 70. He lies buried in St. Finbarr's Cemetery in Cork. So, although I did want to get at least a taste of Cork, the main reason for going was to visit his grave and, as with Moeran, lay some flowers on it. It's highly sentimental and romantic, but it's what we old romantics do.



I thought I would try it on my first day, leaving my only full day there to pop the Cork (sorry!) on that city's scenic wonders. That's an exaggeration; it says something about Cork that one of its star attractions is a statue of a temperance advocate! In Ireland! I knew he was buried at St. Finbarr's, but it turned out that it's not the cathedral OR the church, but a separate cemetery a few miles away. Surely, I would be able to find his grave without much difficulty, and surely, someone would know. Wrong! I saw dead people: tens of thousands of them, in another vast necropolis at least as crowded, and possibly bigger, than Père-La-Chaise. After wandering around for an hour, hoping against hope, I even said a prayer to Gladys, The Parking Goddess. I figured if she could help me find a parking place in crowded San Francisco, a resting place in equally crowded St. Finbarr's should not be out of her purview. But after an hour, I had to give up. Of the few people there, no one even knew who Bax was, much less his resting place.



I returned the next morning, and the friendly groundskeeper was able to take me directly to it. He had been there for decades, and I had not been the only searcher. It turned out that the graves of all the Fleischmanns were right behind Bax's, as well as those of other long dead musicians whose names I didn't know. So that was a bit of an added bonus, because I also enjoy the music of the younger Fleischmann.

My intention was to lay the flowers, sit a bit, contemplate, and listen to some of his music. I had chosen three of my all-time favorites, not only of Bax, but of music generally: the *Elegiac Trio*, the forceful-then-peaceful finale to his Third (and best, in my opinion) Symphony, and the middle movement to his Viola Phantasy, the most Irish and serene music in his output. I thought of my friend, John, who died last year; John was probably the sole person in my life who would not only have known Bax's work, but would have said, "Sure. Let's sit by his grave and listen to his music." John was quite the romantic as well.

As I listened to these three lovely pieces, I marveled at their complexity, at how all of the different ideas and motifs, and strands of melody, rhythm and harmony, developed over centuries of artistic endeavor, came together in the mind of the composer to create a unified whole, a piece of art that makes sense. This is what classical music is to me -- surely one of the greatest cultural achievements of our civilization. I thought of W.H. Auden's poem, "The Composer".

"All the others translate: the painter sketches / A visible world to love or reject; / Rummaging into his living, the poet fetches / The images out that hurt and connect

From Life to Art by painstaking adaption, / Relying on us to cover the rift; / Only your notes are pure contraption, / Only your song is an absolute gift.

Pour out your presence, O delight, cascading / The falls of the knee and the weirs of the spine, / Our climate of silence and doubt invading; / You, alone, alone, O imaginary song, / Are unable to say an existence is wrong, / And pour out your forgiveness like a wine."

And then, I found out why it was important to me to visit the graves of Bax and Moeran, and to lay those flowers down. Tears, unbidden and unexpected, started to flow. Certainly not grief, by any stretch of the imagination — no emotion so unkempt and unruly as that, especially for someone I didn't know, though I suspect from reading his autobiography that I would have liked him very much. The key is here: "Only your notes are pure contraption, Only your song is an absolute gift." These were tears of gratitude for this particular music, so beautiful, so resonant with all my aesthetic sensibility, so meaningful to me in such a wordless, undefinable, and spiritual way. These were tears of gratitude for all of the beauty and the art that music has poured like wine into my life -- the absolute gifts that music has given me ever since I was a little boy, and my parents gave me my own 78s that I played, over and over. Not just the gift of the music itself, but the gifts of art and poetry, and imagination, and all of the places in performance, books, history, mythology and culture in the broadest sense, that it led me to. It was that which brought me to explore my spiritual and intellectual depths. It was literally education, from *e duco*, to lead out of. I would be nowhere near the man I am today without that gift.

And for that reason, the tears flowed. I was not ashamed of them, but grateful again that I had so managed to undo the emotional repression, so common to the men of my family, that they could flow. That was indeed an "absolute gift", and it surely poured out forgiveness like wine.

My hour with Bax, and recomposing myself — sorry again! — were quite the right thing to do, the perfect antidote to the paludal dullness of Cork.

I next went to Killarney. Because it was raining the first 24 hours I was there, I took the opportunity my first morning to go to Kenmare to see the grave of E.J. Moeran, and to lay flowers there as I had planned. He is buried in the near-derelict graveyard of Killowen Church, itself long abandoned. Naturally, two gardeners were at the church graveyard for the first time in six months, using gas-powered weed-whackers. Of course! They could see that I was there to visit someone, and very courteously moved as far away from me as they could. After about 15 minutes, even more

courteously, they turned off their machines entirely, even though they had told me they had to work through until 3:00. That famous Irish courtesy did not fail me!



The epitaph reads "He rests in the mountain country which he loved so well"

I chose four pieces to listen to. First, there was the first movement to his Symphony in G minor, probably his most well-known work, if not his best. It's not peaceful music by any means, but exciting and not just a bit aggressive. It represents what he could have achieved, were it not for his war wound, alcohol and the spell of Peter Warlock. Next, I chose my favorite of his songs, a setting of Housman's "The Lads in Their Hundreds", which ends with the poignant line, "the lads who will die in their glory, and never be old." It always reminds me of the many friends and loved ones, especially Larry, that I lost to the plague so many years ago.

The third piece was the final movement of one of his most Irish works, his Violin Concerto, finished on Valentia Island in Kerry. This movement begins in great anguish, like the voice of that solo singer in that Gaelic lament that I heard at a pub in Cork. (More about that anon). The anguish makes a transition into an almost mystical duet between the harp and English horn, resolving further into what can only be called an Irish love-song, for lack of anything better to label it, before concluding in peace and serenity.

The last piece I listened to was "Lonely Waters", a short but intense orchestral meditation on a folk song from Norfolk, where Moeran had grown up. It's lovely and tragic at the same time, and represents in some way, a key to Moeran's life. Though he was apparently well-liked by everyone who knew him, he was nonetheless by all accounts a lonely man. He died alone, late at night in a storm, of a cerebral hemorrhage on the Kenmare pier, dead before he hit the water. It seems somehow fitting that he met his end there: lonely waters indeed. The piece ends with a heretofore unheard solo voice, singing the last verse of the song:

So I'll go down to some lonely waters.
Go down where no one shall me find.
Where the pretty little birds do change their voices
And every moment blow blustering wild.

Though I didn't have quite as intense a reaction as I did at Bax's grave -- I had gotten that mostly out of my system -- I nevertheless definitely felt it, and dropped a few tears, once again in gratitude for his music, for what music has given me for my entire life, and for the fact that I was able to feel that emotion at all. So altogether, it was a satisfactory pilgrimage.

I was also able to satisfy a good deal of my curiosity about Irish traditional music. I had a lengthy conversation with the owner of a CD store, an enthusiast of that music. He confirmed what I had already surmised, that the traditional Appalachian music was a direct descendant of it, looking and sounding an awful lot like its ancient grand-daddy. What was really interesting was his statement that a lot of what is considered traditional Irish music was in fact imported to Northern Ireland by Scottish Protestants some hundreds of years ago when religion, politics and conquest were busily and happily fornicating together. It spread to the rest of Ireland from there, and was brought over to Appalachia by the descendants of those Scottish Protestants. So it is no surprise at all that Appalachian fiddling and Irish traditional fiddling are so related in style, rhythm, performance and melodic outline. You can also see the connections in the similarities of Irish folk dancing and American square dancing. At my hotel in Dublin, which featured Irish music every night, a quartet of older— by that I mean much older than me — Irish from the appreciative audience "tripped the light fantastic". It was fun to watch, and the relationship was obvious.

I heard a lot of Irish traditional music throughout the trip, going to pubs where it was played most nights. Though I'm basing my observations on those relatively few experiences, it seemed to be changing as I moved both South and West. I think this is a reason for what I am about to say. The West is much more rural, the part of Ireland where Irish is still spoken, and where traditions and traditional ways of life are, subject to the constraints of the modern world, more alive than in cosmopolitan Dublin.

I think this affects the music that is performed, even though it all still comes under the heading of 'Irish traditional music'. In Dublin it was a more traditional band, usually comprising some combination of guitar, button accordion, fiddle and penny whistle. There was no singing, nothing I would call Irish folk songs or ballads, though if you know those tunes, you can recognize them on occasion and untangle them from all of the ornamentation, variations and fine filigree played on the fiddle and the pennywhistle. The instrumentalists were usually, at worst, extremely competent and at best, amazing virtuosos. One woman I heard outshone even Joshua Bell in his recordings of Appalachian fiddle music; she was a genius and I told her so. The music she was playing was also influenced by popular music and jazz, but not to its detriment. It's what keeps the life in traditional music.

The music was mostly quickly played, highly repetitive jigs (in 6/8 time with straight rhythm...Dah'-dah-dah Dah'-dah-dah) and reels (in 4/4 time, with lots of dotted rhythms...dum-dah-dum-dah-dum-dah). Apart from the guitar, which provided most of the harmony, the melodies were usually played more or less in unison. First one musician would start to play, and then the others would join in.

For a lot of people, I think the music sounds very samey-samey. It does even to me, and I can hear the differences between the tunes, as well as the different kinds of music. However, my suspicion is that this is the music that is most easily dispersed throughout Ireland, the music most easily heard, understood and appreciated, because it is very much "feel good" music. It's rhythmic, tuneful and happy. You might think of it as the "pop genre" of traditional Irish music.

In Cork, the bands were larger, including up to four fiddles and two accordions, plus pennywhistle and guitar. One experience stands out: for the first time, someone sang. The rest of the players stopped playing, and the guitarist sang unaccompanied, which was unusual in and of itself. I haven't heard that since. It was some sort of Gaelic lament, and the look on his face was as if he were singing of all of the sorrows of all of the ages of Ireland. It was beautiful, but it was also like nothing else the band had played for the previous hour. Gradually, all of the talking in the bar subsided, except for the few boors who were so busy yak-yak-yakking that they didn't notice that everyone else in this small, crowded, very noisy bar had stopped talking. It amazed me that they didn't, perhaps even couldn't, notice this. For myself, I was enthralled. This was what I came to hear. I just didn't know it until I heard it.



When I moved on to Killarney, further west, the character of the music changed again. There was much more vocal music, probably half. It wasn't all jigs and reels. I recognized folk songs and ballads I knew. For the first (and only) time, someone played the Irish pipes-- played with a bellows pumped by the arm, rather than a bladder kept filled with air by constant blowing, like the Scottish bagpipes. They lacked as well the drone and the annoyance. There was also an alto pennywhistle, closer in tone to a regular flute; I'm sure there is another name for it, but I had no one to ask. I felt I was getting closer to what I wanted to hear.

In Doolin, both nights when I went to the pub, it was mostly vocal music, folksongs and ballads I knew already, or that I could deem authentic simply because the usual conventions were observed in the words: "when I walked out one May morning", "She had a black and roving eye", "I once had a sweetheart, I loved her so well", and so forth. The usual instruments were there, in addition to a regular transverse flute. Not a

pennywhistle, and made of wood, not silver. In Inismor, I heard only one evening's worth, due to bad weather and a lack of desire to go out in it. This man sang a lot of folk songs, but mostly, I'm pretty sure, his own music.

So musically, in most of the ways I had anticipated and hoped for, I was well satisfied. The only things lacking were harp music and more of the songs I was familiar with. But there was music every night. Ireland is wonderful for that: music everywhere.

It was a wonderful trip in every other way as well. I will go back.

Ben Janken