



Solstice and Choral Scholars of University College Dublin Recording Session. Photo by Sanda Semeika.

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Chamber Music by James Joyce: A Choral Commissioning Project

Jo-Michael Scheibe and
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James Joyce (1882–1941) was one of Ireland’s most influential writers, with major works including *Ulysses* (1922) and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). Though not as well known for his poetry, in 1907 he published a collection of thirty-six poems titled *Chamber Music*. A fine tenor himself, Joyce hoped the collection might one day be set to music.¹ Desmond Earley, the founding artistic director of Choral Scholars of University College Dublin, is working to realize Joyce’s dream in a decade-long project to commission thirty-six composers from around the world to set these poems. Recordings of half the newly commissioned works were recently released as *Chamber Music by James Joyce Vol. 1* on the Signum Classics label. The group has eight more commissions completed, which were recorded in February 2026. In this interview, Desmond and Jo-Michael Scheibe discuss the scope of this major project, the selected composers, the voicing and instrumentation, and the recording process.



Jo-Michael Scheibe: Was James Joyce a graduate of University College Dublin?



Desmond Earley: Yes, Joyce was a graduate of University College—now known as University College Dublin—where he studied French and English literature and languages. Although he spent his later years abroad, Dublin was his primary paradigm and the fountain of his inspiration.

His works give voice to the idioms and the sounds that Dubliners make... the Hiberno-English speech patterns, idioms, twists, and sounds of Dublin. He presents what it is to have that Dublin speech pattern and sounds the pattern in his texts, and I love that. In many ways, we are still intimately connected to Joyce through the music of spoken speech. I like to think that some of the phrases we use today (and their music) connect us to an older Dublin and to Joyce himself.

Joyce left Ireland in 1904 at the age of twenty-two and lived the rest of his life abroad (Trieste, Zurich, Paris). Yet his literary imagination remained fiercely tethered to Dublin, and he wrote about the city with such clarity. After the publication of *Ulysses*, he famous-

ly said: “For myself, I always write about Dublin, because if I can get to the heart of Dublin, I can get to the heart of all the cities of the world.”²

Some may consider it deeply ironic that James Joyce wrote so extensively, and so exactly—with an almost forensic precision—about Ireland after leaving her. Joyce’s Dublin was quite a vibrant city (and still is), and the Joyce family enjoyed theatre and opera at Dublin’s Theatre Royal and the Gaiety Theatre.

Scheibe: I read that Joyce was a singer, so it seems music was quite important to him.

Earley: Yes, it’s not widely known, but Joyce was a fine singer. He won a bronze medal for solo singing in 1904 at the Dublin “Feis Ceoil” competition, which is a music festival competition that started in Dublin in 1897. According to a review of the competition in the *Irish Daily Independent*: “Mr. Joyce showed himself possessed of the finest quality voice of any of those competing.”³

We know Joyce was exposed to quite a lot of music in his early life. His use of language was itself musical, but certainly, references to music appear throughout Joyce’s literature. For example, in the story “The

Listening Links

Sample: Track 3, “O cool is the valley now,” poem XVI. Composed by David Walters.



Sample: Track 12, “Silently she’s combing,” poem XXIV. Composed by Desmond Earley.

Sample: Track 17, “Lean out of the window, Goldenhair,” poem V. Composed by Jocelyn Hagen.



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Dead” from his short story collection titled *Dubliners*, his characters enter a deep discussion on the health of the opera scene in Dublin.

Scholars find evidence that Joyce could very well have investigated musical sources at the National Library of Ireland. I find it useful to peek into *Ulysses*, where he specifically mentions John Dowland, William Byrd, Thomas Tompkins, and John Bull. What’s interesting in relation to Joyce’s knowledge of these English Renaissance composers is that some of their music (and Elizabethan lyrics for songs) were available at the National Library of Ireland. It is thought that he probably read the poetry of some of Dowland’s lute songs there.

Instrumental music was also available: an edition of the *Fitzwilliam Virginal Book* was found there, hence such references in *Ulysses*. This connection to old music—and specifically older English music—is confirmed in a letter Joyce wrote to Irish composer Geoffrey Molyneux Palmer: “The book is in fact a suite of songs and if I were a musician, I suppose I should have set them to music myself.”⁴

Scheibe: Are there any other composers and projects you have found that answered Joyce’s invitation to set movements from *Chamber Music*?

Earley: There are multiple projects where composers set *selections* from the collection. I believe Geoffrey Molyneux Palmer was the composer closest to setting the collection: he produced thirty-two of thirty-six in composition. Joyce himself held Palmer’s settings in high regard. In a 1934 letter to his brother, Joyce wrote: “Thirty or forty composers at least have set my little poems to music. The best is Molyneux Palmer. After him are Moeran and Bliss.”⁵

Scheibe: Luciano Berio also set music to some of these poems. Are there other settings of *Chamber Music* we might wish to mention?

Earley: Irish composer Brian Byrne’s project with the RTÉ Concert Orchestra (Raidió Teilifís Éireann: Ireland’s National Television and Radio Broadcaster) *Goldenhair*, where he brings an orchestral sound and the solo voice of Kurt Elling to twenty-one settings from

the collection is a substantial project that showcases a diverse range of musical styles, including jazz, classical, and folk.

Scheibe: What drew you to this particular book of poetry?

Earley: Looking at the poems of *Chamber Music*, I drew immense inspiration from the fact that Joyce refers to “choirs” and “singing” quite often. There are particular references to choirs, for example “the soft choring of delight” from poem XXVI, or “the wise choirs of fairy” from XV, and “for many a choir is singing now” from XVI. It seems that Joyce had some conception of voices together making harmony, and I thought to myself, as far as I know, there has not been a choral project of this magnitude attempting to set all of these Joyce poems in one project. And so the journey began.

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The Composers

Scheibe: In Volume 1 of the recording, I noticed that the poems are not in the order they appear in Joyce’s 1907 published collection by Elkin Mathews. It’s clear to me that you had a thought process in the way you laid that album out—that the poems would not be presented numerically 1, 2, 3, etc., but rather there was a sonic aspect to the order of the program, much in the way that a conductor would program a concert. Can you tell us about that?

Earley: Well, here is my confession: the project evolved organically and not in numerical order of the poems included in the 1907 edition. The works included in Volume 1 are settings of poems that were chosen by each of the eighteen composers involved rather than assigned. When it came to choosing an order of tracks for the album, the works have been organized to take the listener on a stylistically contrasting sonic journey. I hope Joyce would be pleased.

As we embark on Volume II, we have now recorded eight poems, including those set by Kristina Arakelyan (UK), Oliver Davis (UK), David Downes (IRL), Paul

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Frost (IRL), Kim Porter (UK), Kenneth Edge (IRL), Judith Ring (IRL), and Caterina Schembri (Columbia). I have commitments from the following composers: Michael McGlynn (IRL), Caroline Shaw & Danni Lee Parpan (USA), and Bill Whelan (IRL). We plan to record and release the remaining eighteen tracks on a second album by the end of 2027 so that we have *Chamber Music*, all thirty-six poems! Asking thirty-six different

composers to join the project brings a unique compositional and stylistic voice to each of the poems, with the consistency provided by the artists—and Joyce’s poetic voice—throughout. I thought this approach was stronger than inviting one composer to set all thirty-six poems.⁶

Scheibe: All the works are accompanied in some form

Table 1. *Chamber Music by James Joyce Volume 1*

Track	Title	Poem	Composer	Nationality	Voicing	Instrumentation
1	From dewy dreams, my soul, arise	XV	Matthew Emery	Canada	SATB	as
2	When the shy star goes forth in heaven	IV	Tim Stephens	USA	SATB up to SSAATTBB	as, bc, fag, hn, hp, v, vc, cb, tutti
3	Oh cool is the valley now	XVI	David Walters	USA	SATB up to SSAATTBB	hn, v, vc, cb
4	Winds of May, that dance on the sea	IX	Mark Armstrong	Ireland	SATB up to SSAATTBB	cl, hp
5	Rain has fallen all the day	XXXII	Eoghan Desmond	Ireland	SATB (with S solo passage) up to SATBarB	clar, as, fag, hn, hp, v, vc, cb +guitar
6	All day I hear the noise of waters	XXXV	Andrej Makor	Slovenia	SMsATB (with S solo passage)	as
7	Gentle lady, do not sing	XXVIII	Damien Geter	USA	SSAATTBarB (splits are only temporary)	cAng
8	Oh, it was out by Donnycarney	XXXI	Owen Brady	Ireland	SSATBarB (S split is for a few measures)	cl, fag, hn, hp, v, cb +guitar
9	The twilight turns from amethyst	II	Ivo Antognini	Switzerland	SAATBarB	cAng, as, fag, hn, hp, v, cb

by members of the Solstice Ensemble, noting that the full Solstice Ensemble was used at times. Can you tell us more about the ensemble and why it is so prominently featured on the album?

Earley: At Choral Scholars of University College Dublin, we have a history of collaboration with professional groups on previous releases with Signum Classics. Solstice Ensemble is a professional group comprising instrumentalists and singers. And, you know, some of

my own graduates are doing work with that group now, which is meaningful to me.

Another reason it is useful to include instruments is that the responsibility for motoric and harmonic elements of the music can be removed from the choir. Accompaniment aids singers with intonation, which can help keep a recording session dancing along, which is great! In an unaccompanied piece, the harmonic and motoric responsibility is solely on the shoulders of the singers, but when working with the combined colors

Track	Title	Poem	Composer	Nationality	Voicing	Instrumentation
10	Sleep now, oh sleep now	XXXIV	Natasa Paulberg	Australia	SSAATBarB (sometimes SATB)	as, bc, fag, hn, hp, v, vc, cb
11	Dear heart, why will you use me so?	XXIX	Dale Trumbore	USA	SSATTBarB (often SATBarB)	bc
12	Silently, she's combining	XXIV	Desmond Earley	Ireland	SS soli (duet), SATB coro	as, bc, fag, hn, hp, v, vc, cb +harp
13	In the dark pinewood	XX	Elaine Agew	Ireland	SSAAATTBarB (*A splits into three parts)	hn
14	Because your voice was at my side	XVIII	Kevin Whymys	Ireland	A solo, SATTBarB coro	hp, cb +guitar
15	Now, oh now, in this brown land	XXXIII	Laura Shells	Ireland	SSAATTBarB	as, bc, fag, hn, hp, v, vc, cb +guitar
16	My love is in a light attire	VII	Ēriks Ešenvalds	Latvia	SATBarB	vc
17	Lean out the window, Goldenhair	V	Joceyln Hagen	USA	SSATB	v, vc, cb
18	My dove, my beautiful one	XIV	Seán Doherty	Ireland	SSAATTBB	clar, fag, hn, hp, v, vc, cb

of the instrumental group, more possibilities present themselves for textural contrast and variation of timbre.

Scheibe: Did the composers choose the instruments? Did you give them a palette of instruments, or did you add instruments to what they wrote?

Earley: Each composer was offered use of the entire palette of Solstice Ensemble's lineup. Some composers chose the entire group: alto saxophone, oboe, cor anglais, clarinet, bass clarinet, bassoon, horn, harp, guitar, and three strings (violin, cello, and contrabass). It's a nice combination to add the full instrumental ensemble to the choral timbre, providing an "untexted" expression.

Other composers picked one or more instruments rather than the full ensemble. Dale Trumbore's setting of "Dear heart, why will you use me so?" (Poem XXIX) uses the bass clarinet. The text is dark and shadowy, and to have the sound of that darkness represented by the bass clarinet worked extremely well, evoking a serpentine element in a poem about a "shadowy garden."

Scheibe: I noticed several scores had a new date, so it was apparent you had revised the scores. Were those revisions done after you'd worked with the ensemble? Were you revoicing to make things stronger for the ensemble you had in front of you? Was there ever a need to contact a composer about their writing for the voices or instruments?

Earley: My training as a baroque musician has taught me to think about who the exact player (person) is sitting at the music desk. For example, questions such as, *who* was the instrumentalist who played for Handel or *who* played for Bach? These composers—being acclaimed instrumentalists in their own right, composer-musicians—thought about the musician's capabilities for whom they were composing at the time. It's the same thing here. For this project, I continually asked myself, who will play this line? When the capability of the player and the sound that they make is known to you, you can introduce change and flourishes that

bring the piece to life even more.

With a living composer, it really is so exciting to collaborate, to have the piece really sparkle. I asked every composer at the outset if they would be happy enough for me to come back if there was anything that might require revision or tweaking for this specific ensemble; I wanted to be respectful. It might only have been a single note or a phrase, or it might have been significant, but each time we agreed to a change, I produced a new edition with new parts. These were dated accordingly and printed on a different colored paper so that we could identify them easily and make sure everyone was using the same edition in a rehearsal or recording session.

Scheibe: You did some rewriting as well in some of the choral writing, adding in baritone lines or some second soprano lines where you needed a little more... voice, I think, in there. And you had no problem with any of your composers saying, oh, I don't like that?

Earley: I was very fortunate. Every composer was open to collaborating, even those who had never worked with us before. For one composer, this kind of collaboration was a new experience, and I think—at first—they were a little defensive until they realized that we were really working to have their incredible piece fit our ensemble like a glove. Then I think they were happy. As a composer myself, I understand why any composer would be protective of their work. I appreciate all of it.

Scheibe: Do you think the Irish composers have a different view of Joyce—reading the poems with an understanding of their cultural heritage—and that perhaps those you've commissioned from, for example, Latvia or Australia or the United States do not? Is there a different writing?

Earley: As to whether non-Irish and Irish composers treated the texts differently from each other, I would say they all treated the texts with consideration, particularly when thinking of questions of inflection or syllabic stress or in musically painting the direction of a poetic line.

Joyce had deep Irish roots, but as I mentioned ear-

lier, he also had a life lived outside Ireland. This is why I ensured for the first volume release that half of the composers were Irish—so that they could speak to the Irish sensibility—and the other half were from beyond our shores. I like to think Joyce would appreciate this decision.

I had been working on this project for years, researching and planning. As a composer myself, I had set a couple of Joyce’s poems. I thought, why not kick off this project by commissioning a well-known international composer? So we invited Ēriks Ešņvalds, and out of the thirty-six poems, he chose “My love is in a light attire” (Poem VII).

Scheibe: Did the other composers you selected follow that same process when choosing a poem to set?

Earley: Typically, I offered three texts and asked each composer to pick one. That seems to have worked well, but as we go through the project, it’s going to become more difficult as the number of available poems decreases.

Scheibe: Can you tell me about one of the composers you invited from the United States?

Earley: It was a great delight to have American composer Jocelyn Hagen write a piece for the project. Jocelyn’s setting of “Lean out of the window, Goldenhair” (Poem V) creatively captures the vibrant spirit and playful romanticism inherent in Joyce’s poem. She told me that she aimed explicitly to convey “the sensation of a cool wind blowing through their hair and the joy and excitement of meeting someone new,” and her composition beautifully realizes this vision. She employs sophisticated scoring for string trio (violin, cello, and double bass) and integrates elements reminiscent of energetic American folk music—to my ear, at least—creating a spirited and engaging atmosphere. Her intimate understanding of both vocal and string-writing techniques allows her to craft intricate passagework and lively rhythmic patterns. Jocelyn describes “Goldenhair” as a “delightful dance,” and her string instrumentation significantly heightens the playful exuberance (Figure 1 on the next page).

Additionally, her setting subtly acknowledges Joyce’s sophisticated intertextuality, particularly the potential reference within Joyce’s poem to Dante’s *Inferno*, *Canto V*:

- Dante (Inf. V. 137–138): *Galeotto fu ’l libro e chi lo scrisse: quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante.* “Galeotto was the book and he who wrote it: / that day we read there no further.”
- Joyce (Ch. Music. V. 5–6): “My book was closed, / I read no more.”

The numeric alignment—this poem being the fifth in Joyce’s collection and Dante’s fifth canto—invokes a literary and symbolic resonance, echoing Dante’s epiphanic treatment of courtly love literature. Jocelyn enriches the listening experience, not only capturing the immediate joy of romantic encounter, but also embedding a deeper, reflective dimension that resonates with Joyce’s own complex literary allusions. (Listen to a sample of this track by scanning the QR code on page 8.)

Scheibe: Are there other composers from the United States involved in Volume 1?

Earley: David Walters chose “O cool is the valley now” (Poem XVI), Dale Trumbore chose “Dear heart, why will you use me so?” (Poem XXIX), Damien Geter set “Gentle lady, do not sing” (Poem XXVIII), Tim Stephens composed music for “When the shy star goes forth in heaven” (Poem IV). All of these composers connected with the music in Joyce’s text. I really appreciated their willingness to dig into and understand the text.

Scheibe: Can you speak about David Walters and his setting?

Earley: Atlanta-based composer David Walters chose strings and French horn for his setting (Figure 2 on page 15). A slow-burning cello solo introduces David’s atmospheric miniature, immediately evoking a profound sense of longing and nostalgia. Joined gradually by violin, double bass, and horn, this instrumental introduction gently envelops the listener. When the choir enters, its homophonic texture emerges softly, heightening the

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8

S *mf*
Lean out of the win - dows, Gold - en -

Vln. *f*
mf

Vlc. *mf* pizz. *mp*

Cb. *mf* *mp*

10

S
hair,
A *Tutti mf*
Lean out of the win - dow, Gold - en - hair,

Vln. *mp* *mf* 3

Vlc. *mf*

Cb. *mp*

12

S
I hear you sing - ing Ah...
A
I hear you sing - ing Ah...
T *mf*
I hear you sing - ing A mer - ry air.
B *mf*
I hear you sing - ing A mer - ry air.

Vln. 3

Vlc. *mf*

Cb. *mf*

Figure 1. Jocelyn Hagen, *Goldenhair*, mm. 8–14.
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♩. = ca. 55, with wistfull affection

Piano *pp*

4

♩. = ca. 65

7 **A**

S *p* *still* *mp* *pp*
 O cool is the val - ley now

A *p* *still* *mp* *pp*
 O cool is the val - ley now

T *p* *still* *mp* *pp*
 O cool is the val - ley now

B *p* *still* *mp* *pp*
 O Cool is the val - ley now

A *ppp* *p*

♩. = ca. 65

Figure 2. David Walters, *O Cool Is The Valley Now*, mm. 1–11.
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sense of melancholy. The instrumental accompaniment momentarily recedes into an organ-like timbre, reinforcing the reflective quality. David then strategically foregrounds the cello and violin once more, intensifying the piece's emotional depth before the choir's dramatic proclamation—"for many a choir is singing now"—pierces the introspection. His music thoughtfully mirrors the poem's tension between memory and loss, deliberately resisting resolution. (Listen to a sample of this track by scanning the QR code on page 8.)

Scheibe: I note as well that you were inspired to set one of the poems yourself. Can you tell us about Poem XXIV "Silently, she's combing, combing her long hair?"

Earley: This poem evoked an image of the Rapunzel story for me, with an imagined mirror (in my mind's eye), suggesting a duet structure about the choir: one soprano line the person, the other the reflection.

Silently she's combing,
Combing her long hair,
Silently and graciously,
With many a pretty air.

I wanted to create a sonic mirror that suggests two selves: a literal reflection and a metaphorical introspection. Hopefully the vocal interplay mirrors this duality, enhancing the reflective atmosphere. Joyce's poetic reference to "witchery" later in the poem gave me the idea to include a harpsichord. In this context the sound of the harpsichord—other than the fact that it is my primary instrument—evokes a magical ambiance.

Another reason I included the harpsichord is because an engraving of one appears on the half-title page of the Elkin Mathews first edition (Photo 1). Because I used the entire Solstice Ensemble (plus harpsichord), I could introduce a tonal shift during an instrumental interlude, which features a lyrical French horn solo, momentarily shifting the piece's emotional center to add harmonic contrast and depth.

The Recording Sessions

Scheibe: How do you plan the recording sessions?

Earley: We typically schedule five three-hour sessions each recording patch, starting on an evening, which allows for sound balance, fixing the mics, etc. This is usually followed by two full days of recording. You know, the tradition—or the way we do it anyway, certainly in Ireland and in the UK—is a three-hour session with a twenty-minute break included in the middle of the session. This is then followed by lunch, then another three-hour session with a break in the middle. There

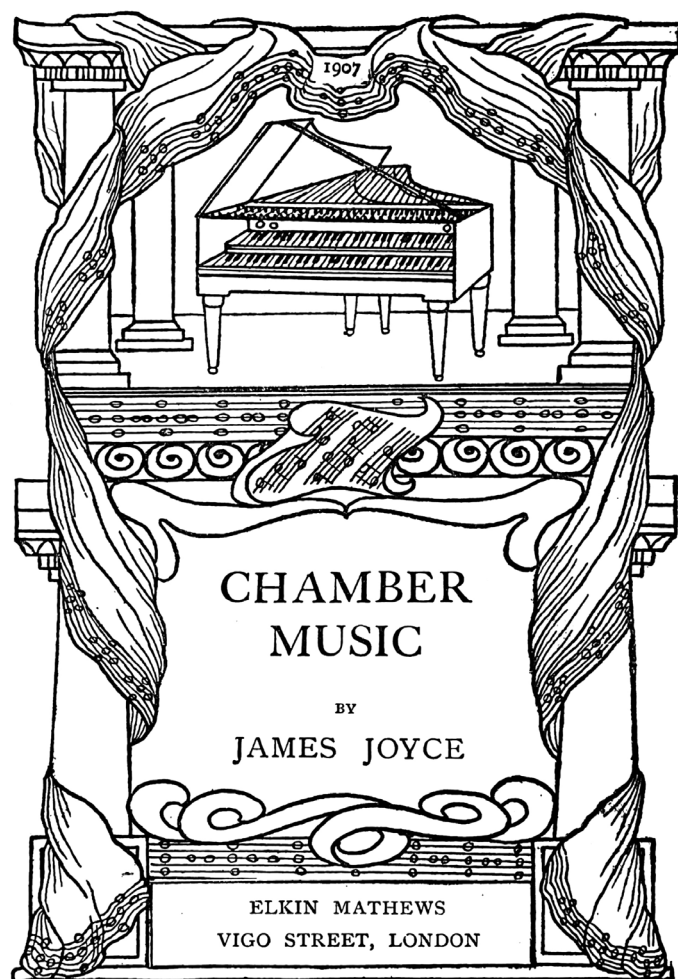


Photo 1. Title page of the original Chamber Music collection.

are generally two three-hour sessions per day. You could have three sessions if you wanted, but you have to pace it so that the singers are not burnt out by the next day.

The whole experience is great for the students, as they're learning from the professionals. They're listening and collaborating with the engineer, the producer, with me. They get to hear the questions from the professionals and watch the action in real time. They seem to value the experience.

Scheibe: Watching your students work with the pros, as you said, and not only the instrumental pros, but a few of the choral singers in the ensemble as well, was quite wonderful. A number of your students in the session were off-book, and so it was terrific to watch and observe their “buy-in,” if you will, to this entire process and project. And, it seemed to me that you're offering students a window into the professional world of choral music, which is much more difficult, I would think, in Ireland than it is in the States. In many cases in the States, we're trying to establish a choral professional where you walk in and do a concert maybe in Pennsylvania, and then you go to Texas, and then you go to San Diego. This seemed to me like a great experience for a choral singer at the university level in Dublin to reflect and see what they might do when they walk out of university.

I also enjoyed watching Nick Parker and Andrew Mellor, the producer and the engineer, who were positive when they spoke to you, the students, and when they spoke to the instrumentalists. It became a symbiotic relationship, and the students understood that. Have you recorded albums with Nick and Andrew before?

Earley: Every single Signum Classics album I have recorded was with Andrew Mellor, so that amounts to more than a decade of working together. We have a great relationship. He is also the sound engineer for

the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Metropolitan Opera of New York. He has recorded many UK choral groups as well. In the past he has commented that we have a warm, open sound that's quintessentially Irish. He truly cares about our sound.

Add our producer, Nick Parker. I mean, these two guys are like recording royalty, you know? Nick Parker



Rehearsing in Blackrock College Chapel.

has produced I'd venture over a thousand albums. Recording is in his DNA, as his father worked for EMI, etc. Nick once told me that the Beatles sang him “Happy Birthday” when he was four years old in Abbey Road Studios! I love Nick's approach: like me, he's into an organic sound and wants to hear that the music has been internalized and is being emoted. He also strives to make as few edits as possible.

Scheibe: I want to discuss the recording space. I loved the space where you recorded the album in Blackrock College Chapel.

Earley: The Blackrock College Chapel is small. It is narrow, so it should probably come with a warning sign for an acoustician. It is extremely beautiful for unaccompanied repertoire, but it becomes more challeng-

ing as more instruments are added. Thankfully, Andrew Mellor was able to handle the complexities of the space.

Scheibe: Yes. It is a smaller rectangular space. It has an anteroom, or a foyer, in the front. And I love the fact that your recording engineers were not in the room, and they were able to be outside in the back of the sacristy.

Earley: If the engineer and producer are in the same space as the musicians, it becomes muddy in their headphones. They need that isolation so they know if what they are hearing—what the mics are doing or what’s happening in the room—is accurate and clean. Personally, I don’t think anybody should ever record anything with the engineer and producer in the same space as the microphones and musicians.

Scheibe: I agree with you one hundred percent. Not always possible in some venues, but it certainly was there, and it was a great place to sit in back with them and listen to them and hear their banter of what needed to be addressed. What do you believe is the role between conductor, producer, and engineer?

Earley: We all know that a conductor’s job is to get the best out of the performers, both by rehearsing them really well and by gesturing on the night in a way that offers them what they need. Leading up to a recording, of course, the conductor’s job is to rehearse, put an artistic shape on the music, provide nuance, and prepare the musicians.

When you get into the recording session itself, it becomes important to trust your producer, because the producer becomes your ears. They’re on the other side of the microphones and ideally in a different space. The conductor might have the instinct—because of the conductor’s role in rehearsal—to want to say, “No! Let’s just do that again!” or “Let’s not!” It can be challenging for some conductors to trust the producer when they get into a recording studio. Trust is the most important aspect of the producer/conductor relationship, and if you can achieve this, your entire process is elevated.

Scheibe: Who decided where the instruments should

be and the mic placements? Is that all done by your engineer and producer?

Earley: Yes, mostly by the engineer. However, we do collaborate with the players, who sometimes ask to move their position for a particular piece or reason. And it’s always best to accommodate the players and singers if possible. At Blackrock College Chapel, it turned out best to have the instrumentalists face the choir. This demonstrated Andrew’s expertise in managing the space. He folded the space in on itself, in that way.

Scheibe: You’re working primarily with the university ensemble, which changes year to year. So, you had the 2020, 2021, 2022 group, and then you had the 2022 and 2023 group. You basically had a two-year window with COVID in there, but you’ve managed to keep the quality. When you listen to the album, you can’t tell it’s a different group from one piece to another.

Earley: It was essential that there was consistency over the life of the project. Central to my sound-concept of this predominantly student choir is a warm, open, relaxed technique, and this is something that has been cultivated over our twenty-plus years of existence. Vocal coach Síle [pronounced “Sheila”] McCarthy has been instrumental in helping to achieve an identifiable sound. Our approach to teaching the technique of the Choral Scholars to each new class, year after year, also involves having alumni come back to sing with the younger singers. They slot into the sound with ease. It’s also advantageous that Solstice Ensemble includes stellar singers.

Scheibe: I met Síle in the recording session. Desmond, you opened up such a window of opportunity to see the choral conductor and voice teacher cooperating together to produce a great choral recording.

Earley: Yes. Síle has been involved, and the students have been going to her for vocal lessons for the better part of two decades. She is a phenomenal singer in her own right and a renowned educator. She has a very clear sense of performance and how to motivate

students to incorporate emotions in their singing. Síle is usually at our recording patches and has become our shining mother figure in the sessions. She works to get the students to limber up and to relax into the sessions, and it is always wonderful to watch.⁷

The Permissions

Scheibe: Back to the James Joyce *Chamber Music* project. Did you secure licensing to publish these new compositions in print?

Earley: The right to record was woven into the agreement with each composer, so having them with us and Signum Classics was no issue. Some of these composers have their own publishers. I am with Seolta Music as editor of their College Choral Series, and Seolta's executive, Mark Armstrong, is working with the composers so that we might be in a position to release a limited-edition commemorative book of the music. Depending on how those negotiations progress, Mark is making many of these scores available in octavo format.⁸

Scheibe: In closing, can you summarize why you took on such a major project?

Earley: This is really a special project, a once-in-a-lifetime project. The poems are entertaining and musically thrilling, and the new settings are beautiful but also challenging in some cases. As I write in the liner notes of the album, the artists are proud of our unique connection to Joyce's Dublin story. Not only do we hear and create the accents and speech patterns of his literary characters, but we also understand their cultural history. Hopefully, other directors will see fit to include selections in their future programs. It is a pleasure and honor for us to be the first choral ensemble to wrap James Joyce's "suite of songs" in an Irish choral voice. □

NOTES

- ¹ James Joyce in conversation (often cited from a 1953 remark to Claud Sykes), quoted in Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce: New and Revised Edition* (Oxford University Press, 1983), 505. See also: Adrian Paterson, "After Music," in *The Poetry of James Joyce Reconsidered*, ed. Marc C. Conner (University Press of Florida, 2012), 127.
- ² This quote is well noted to be attributed to Joyce, although there does not appear to be a specific citation reference for when or to whom he said this.
- ³ *Irish Daily Independent* (May 17, 1904). As quoted in: James Joyce, *James Joyce: A Brief Life*, ed. Richard Ellmann (Oxford University Press, 1982), 16.
- ⁴ James Joyce, *The Letters of James Joyce*, ed. Stuart Gilbert and Richard Ellmann, Vol. 1 (Viking Press and Faber & Faber, 1966), 67. Letter written July 19, 1909.
- ⁵ James Joyce, *The Letters of James Joyce*, ed. Stuart Gilbert and Richard Ellmann, Vol. 3 (Viking Press and Faber & Faber, 1966), 340. See also: Axel Klein, "The Influence of James Joyce on Irish Composers," paper presented at the Contemporary Music Centre's ReJoyce in Music Seminar (June 2004), <https://www.cmc.ie/features/distant-music-mournfully-murmereth-influence-james-joyce-irish-composers>.
- ⁶ This project was funded over many years from some operating budget taken from each year, from some special internal university funds for which the ensemble applied, and with some help from private donors. See album liner notes for more specifics on the funding acknowledgments.
- ⁷ There were two composers present during the recording sessions: Tim Stephens traveled from Oregon. Kevin Whyms played on his own composition.
- ⁸ Seolta Music, <https://www.seoltamusic.com/collections/chamber-music-james-joyce>. The website also refers anyone interested in these settings to the composers or publisher's websites for this project so that all scores can be found by the reader for purchase.