An Irish-American in Paris:
Swan Hennessy (1866–1929)

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Swan Hennessy is relatively familiar to many chamber musicians by virtue of his short and attractive pieces for a wide variety of instruments, most of which were published. His musical language was formed by his German education, French residency and Irish heritage and developed from a late-Romantic idiom into a moderately impressionist style in a career spanning some forty years. However, apart from contemporaneous reviews and newspaper articles, there is little secondary literature about Hennessy and hardly any recordings. He has an entry in the first edition of Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart and in recent editions of Baker’s Dictionary but does not appear in any edition of the Grove dictionaries.

Hennessy’s father, Michael David Hennessy, was born in 1837 in Cork and emigrated from Ireland to the United States via Canada, probably in 1853, becoming a naturalized American citizen in Somerset, Perry County, Ohio in 1858. He crops up with his young family in two population censuses: in 1865 in Rockford, Winnebago County, Illinois where Swan was born on 26 November 1866, and in 1870 in Chicago. Swan’s

1 Only the Trio, Op. 54 for two clarinets and bassoon is currently available (Trio d’Ance di Bolzano, CD, Rainbow RW 98107, 1999 and Trio Pleyel, CD, bremen radiohall records brh 1305, 2013). The complete string quartets (Opp. 46, 49, 61, 65, 75) and the Petit trio celtique, Op. 52 were recorded in October 2017 by the RTÉ ConTempo Quartet for commercial release (forthcoming).


4 Hennessy’s rediscovery came too late for inclusion in Harry White and Barra Boydell (eds), Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland (Dublin: UCD Press, 2013).
actual Christian name was Edward but he was called Swan after the maiden name of his mother. Michael Hennessy became a very successful businessman and was secretary, treasurer and president of the Chicago City Railways (1868–74), subsequently working as a lawyer in the city until 1889.\(^5\)

Swan Hennessy left the USA in 1878, apparently for an education in England (of which there is no record apart from a suggestion that he was at Oxford,\(^6\) but which turns out to be a brief public-school education rather than a university one), and he then studied music for seven years in Stuttgart (c1879–86) at the Conservatory of Music\(^7\) where he had composition lessons with the American-born Percy Goetschius (1853–1943).\(^8\) His first compositions were published in Germany: his Op. 1 with Breitkopf & Härtel in Leipzig (1885) and Opp. 2, 3, 5 and 6 with G. A. Zumsteeg in Stuttgart (1886–7). By the second half of 1886, Hennessy had probably moved to England\(^9\) and in 1888 he married Lucy Roper, the descendant of a family of Anglo-Irish landowners from County Roscommon. They had two children, a daughter (born in London in 1889) and a son (born in Dublin in 1890).\(^10\) The marriage was, however, short-lived and they were divorced in 1893.\(^11\)

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5 He lost many of his personal papers in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. The rebuilding of the city will have increased the wealth of established businessmen such as Hennessy.

6 See Ferchault, 152 and Chevaillier, 791.

7 He appears in a list of pupils of the ‘Künstlerschule’ published in ‘Zöglinge der Künstlerschule am Schluss des 50. Semesters, den 15. April 1882’, Festschrift für das fünfundzwanzigjährige Jubiläum des Conservatoriums für Musik in Stuttgart (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, n. d. [1882]), 12. I am grateful to E. Douglas Bomberger of Elizabethtown College, Philadelphia, for pointing out this source to me. The archives of the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst in Stuttgart, successor to the conservatory of the nineteenth century, were destroyed during World War II.

8 ‘Mr. Swan Hennessy’, The London Musical Courier, 4 January 1913. This article contains some first-hand information, suggesting that the writer received the information directly from Hennessy. Hennessy may have known Dublin-born composer Victor Herbert who played cello in the Stuttgart court orchestra from 1881–6 and studied composition at the Conservatory during this time.

9 In 1887 a critic mentions Hennessy ‘whom we are glad to have met, and hope to meet again’. The Monthly Musical Record, 17:197 (May 1887), 111.

10 The marriage and the places and approximate dates of the births of the children have been surmised from ancestry research and records from the General Register Office, Roscommon.

11 A detailed biography of the composer by the present writer is currently in preparation, in which the various episodes in his life, including the circumstances surrounding the divorce, will be explored thoroughly.
Ten years of travelling followed, accompanied by his father who had come to Europe looking for medical treatment. Hennessy later explained, in his interview with Chevaillier in 1929, that Italy had been his main residence during this time, living probably near Viareggio or Livorno. He gave a piano recital at the Théâtre de la Monnaie in Brussels in 1903 where he met his second wife, Claire Przybyszewska, and must have moved with her to Paris soon afterwards. There they lived initially at Rue Chalgrin, in the 16th arrondissement of Paris and were married in London in July 1909. Their son Michel Patrice (for the American authorities: Michael Patrick) was born the following year. They then lived on the Boulevard Raspail in the Montparnasse quarter which, apart from being fashionable among artists, was also home to a community of Breton composers.

Around 1906 Hennessy made the acquaintance of the prestigious music publisher Eugène Demets who became his exclusive publisher from 1912. The circumstances of the First World War compelled Hennessy to leave Paris and he took his family to Switzerland where they resided in Veytaux on Lake Geneva from 1915 to 1919, a five-year period during which he composed almost nothing and had no works performed.

12 Chevaillier, 791; that he was probably resident in the area of Viareggio is deduced from the divorce records.
13 Claire Przybyszewska (1883–1947), born in Plusnitz (now Pruznica), grew up in Brussels where her mother was employed in the household of King Léopold II.
14 On the cover page of the manuscript of his Violin Sonata, Op. 14 (c1902–4) Hennessy gives his address as 4 rue Chalgrin. Bavarian State Library, Munich, Schott Production Archive (archived under plate no. 27497).
15 The date of the move to the Boulevard Raspail is not yet certain. The earliest proof of the new address found so far is a letter dated April 1911 to the music publisher Schott, Staatsbibliothek Berlin, Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Schott Safe Archive, file no. 56040.
16 As documented by annual passport renewals.
Michael Hennessy died in Veytaux in 1919 and Swan inherited his father’s fortune, giving him financial independence for the rest of his life. After the war the family returned to their apartment in Paris. He died there on 26 October 1929.

Illustration 2: Swan Hennessy in c1925, a portrait by the society photographer Boris Lipnitzky. Reproduced with kind permission of the Hennessy family.

Hennessy’s first compositions date from the mid-1880s and resulted in his first published works including a piano trio (Op. 10), the vocal works Opp. 3 and 5, and eight piano pieces. (These and all other known compositions by Hennessy are detailed in a

*JSMI*, vol. 13 (2017–18), p. 50
worklist at the end of this article.) Apart from the last work of this period, the Miniatures, Op. 11 for piano, published in Paris by Durand et Schoenewerk, they were all published in Germany or England and have, with one exception, German or French titles. They are written in a late-Romantic musical language that has often been described as Schumannesque in their melodiousness and lyricism and which is also reflected in some of the works’ dedications, such as those of Op. 7 (to Theodor Kirchner) and Op. 8 (to Clara Schumann). This early-work phase is, however, notable for the absence of any of the Irish or Celtic elements that were to become such prominent features of his later music.

Hennessy’s Lieder an den Mond, Op. 10 (1888) is his first collection of chamber music. The Monthly Musical Record called them ‘well-felt compositions, poetic and interesting, whose romanticism has its roots in Schumann’, while The Musical Standard considered them ‘fantastically constructed, and bizarre rather than melodious’. The three short movements are titled Um Mitternacht (‘At Midnight’), In der Frühe (‘Early in the Morning’) and Am Abend (‘In the Evening’), and suggest the different moods and locations of the moon’s course. The Romantic theme presented by the violin in the opening largo is characteristic of his early style: see Example 1.

After a barren ten-year spell between 1892 and 1901, Hennessy began composing again and it is perhaps during this phase of his development in which he is, arguably, at his best in terms of quality, originality and stylistic proximity to contemporary French music. His first Irish-inspired compositions (Opp. 12 and 14) were probably written in or around 1900 and published in 1902 and 1904. By 1906, his musical language had absorbed some of the modern music of Paris, and this is reflected in a number of contemporary reviews. One critic—one of the many at the time who viewed musical impressionism with suspicion—wrote of two pieces of Hennessy’s Nouvelles feuilles d’album, Op. 27 (1907) that he was less taken with the impressionism (lacking sufficient melodic lines, a few bundles of notes) of Montrouge le matin [but that] the last piece (Sortie de midinettes) is a composition full of spirit, of rare distinction, a true gem.

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17 The composer’s early career was followed closely in The Monthly Musical Record, which published brief reviews of all works between Opp. 1 and 10. See the issues of May, July, August and October 1887, and April and May 1888.
18 The Monthly Musical Record, 18:209 (May 1888), 106.
20 ‘J’aime moins l’impressionnisme (sans ligne mélodique suffisante, un peu en paquets de notes) de Montrouge le matin. La dernière poésie (Sortie de midinettes) est une composition pleine d’esprit, d’une rare distinction, un vrai bijou.’ ‘S’, La Revue musicale, 10:21 (1 November 1910), 479. Unless otherwise stated, all translations in this article are by the author.
Another, similarly, noted the significant artistic value of the collection, Hennessy’s diversity of modes and rhythms and his picturesque effects in *Valses*, Op. 32 (1909). The composer and conductor Gabriel Grovlez remarked of the *Valses caprices*, Op. 41 and *Gitaneries*, Op. 42 (both of 1911) that

Monsieur Swan Hennessy revels in good-natured impressionism [and that] the numerous short pieces by this composer are not particularly difficult and should win everyone over with their charming musicality.22

Whereas French critics hesitated to ascribe particular musical influences to Hennessy, English and German critics were quick to identify his indebtedness to Debussy. In one concert review, *The Daily Telegraph* remarked of *Eaux fortes*, Op. 24 (1906) that its ‘three pleasantly-written little pieces betokened here and there the influence of Debussy’.23 Another surmised that *Croquis de femmes*, Op. 33 (1911) was written by a composer ‘who every now and then finds delight in the innovative endeavours of the young French and the picturesque and uneven, as it were, impressionist style of Debussy and his followers’.24 And in a review of a number of piano works influenced by Debussy, Hennessy’s *Sieste en chemin de fer—*No. 5 of *En passant ... (Études d’après nature)*, Op. 40 (1911)—was hailed as ‘a little work of art of modern pianistic mood painting’.25 When his reputation reached Ireland in the 1920s, a 1922 portrait in *The Dublin Evening News* noted that Hennessy joins in a quaintly charming manner the old and the new. Without any doubt, he is a modern musician. Debussy has had no inconsiderable part in forming his style, though he himself thinks he has not come much under French influence.26

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25 ‘ein kleines Kunstwerk moderner pianistischer Stimmungsmalerei’, *Die Musik*, 11:17 (June 1912), 308.

Hennessy himself acknowledged the general influence of Debussy on his generation, stating that he ‘has revealed possibilities undreamt of by anyone else before him [and that] we all benefit more or less.’

Hennessy’s humorous side is reflected in many works. For instance, the individual titles of Croquis parisiens, Op. 47 (1912) appear to describe the course of a day that Hennessy himself enjoyed in Paris, beginning with a morning stroll through the park (1: Promenade matinale au Jardin du Luxembourg), enjoying his lunch in a restaurant (2: L’Américain qui a bien diné) and then visiting his tailor for a new suit (3: Dans un atelier de couturiers), all featuring appropriate onomatopoeia such as a walking motion in No. 1 and the rattling of sewing machines in No. 3. His light-heartedness is also apparent in his earlier Petite suite (sur les notes mi, do, mi, fa, si, mi), Op. 34 (1909) which alludes to the three cats of Eugène Demets, who were named after the musical intervals Mi-Do, Mi-Fa, and Si-Mi.

Ravel was, however, perhaps a more significant influence on Hennessy than Debussy, at least in terms of titles, inspirations and forms. For instance, Ravel’s Valses nobles et sentimentales (1911), first performed in May 1911, with its seven short waltzes followed by an epilogue, is mirrored in Hennessy’s Valses caprices, Op. 41 (written in October and November 1911) with its six short waltzes followed by a seventh, ‘Encore une valse’. Both Ravel’s Sonatine for piano (1905) and Hennessy’s Sonatine, Op. 43 (1911, published in 1912) feature a three-movement structure with a minuet in the middle. Ravel’s pastiche works in the style of other composers, entitled À la manière de … Borodine and À la manière de … Chabrier (1913), were later successfully followed up by Hennessy in a series of five volumes of À la manière de … of his own (published 1927–8, but begun around 1917).

Hennessy was personally acquainted with Ravel and also with George Gershwin, whom

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27 ‘Je comprends que Debussy a révélé des possibilités insoupçonnées jusqu’à lui: cette gloire ne lui sera pas enlevée et nous en profiterons tous plus ou moins.’ Chevaillier, 793.

28 The Courrier musical of 1 October 1927 shows a photograph of Hennessy with the pianist Marthe Le Breton, with Hennessy holding on his arms the son of Si-Mi, ‘le chat bien connu du regretté éditeur Demets’ (‘the well-known cat of the late publisher Demets’).

29 They also include pastiches of Ravel, Debussy and many others. Contemporary critics responded overwhelmingly positively to these thirty works. Ravel himself may have been inspired by a series of À la manière de … by Alfred Casella (1883–1947) comprising Wagner, Fauré, Brahms, Debussy, Richard Strauss and Franck (Paris: A.-Z. Mathot, 1911). The inspiration for these was a literary model: the three volumes of À la manière de … by Paul Reboux and Charles Müller (Paris, 1908, 1910 and 1913) with two more by Reboux (1925 and 1950).
he met when the latter was in Paris (1926 and 1928), meeting in the bars on the Boulevard du Montparnasse near where Hennessy lived in the 1920s.

Hennessy’s early reputation (i.e. before c1911) was based more on reviews of his published works than on performances of his music. From the time he settled in Paris around 1903, it took about four years before his music was publicly performed (and reviewed) there in May 1907. It was not until 1913 and his appearance with the Association des compositeurs bretons that his music received a wider public reception.

The Association was founded in 1912 by five composers: Maurice Duhamel (1884–1940), Paul Ladmirault (1877–1944), Louis Vuillemin (1879–1929), Paul Le Flem (1881–1984) and Jean Laporte (dates unknown). A year after its formation, it also included Guy Ropartz (1864–1955) and Paul Martineau (1890–1915). They sought to establish a Breton identity in contemporary French music by using Breton material such as folk-

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30 Members of the Hennessy family recall that, when Gershwin sought tuition from Ravel, Ravel referred him not only to Nadia Boulanger but also to Hennessy. However, the acquaintance with Ravel cannot have been a very close one as, according to Ravel’s biographer Arbie Orenstein, Hennessy’s name does not even appear in Ravel’s two personal telephone books (e-mail from Orenstein, 15 May 2017). In Gershwin’s first public appearance as a concert pianist in New York, in a recital with the Franco-Canadian singer Eva Gauthier in 1923 at the Aeolian Hall, the programme included two of Hennessy’s Trois chansons espagnoles accompanied by Max Jaffe on piano (the playbill of the event is reproduced at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eva_Gauthier).

31 The Sonate en style irlandais, Op. 14, for violin and piano, was performed at the Palais des Beaux Arts on 7 May 1907. The concert was reviewed in Le Guide musical (19 May and 2 June) and Le Monde musicale (30 May).

32 Laura Watson acknowledges Hennessy’s connections to Breton composers without explicitly mentioning the Association des compositeurs bretons in her article ‘Ireland in the Musical Imagination of Third Republic France’, in Una Hunt and Mary Pierse (eds), France and Ireland. Notes and Narratives (Bern: Peter Lang, 2015), 91–109: 96. However, her assertion of an ‘absence of Parisian press commentary on any of Hennessy’s music’ (97) as an indicator of little interest shown by French critics in Hennessy is not supported by numerous reviews of both his publications and concerts of his music and occasional portrait articles.

33 These five names figure as founders of the association in Comoedia (8 February 1912), 3, as signatories to a long critique of the opera La Lépreuse by Sylvio Lazzari (1857–1944), a work written in 1899 but premiered on 7 February 1912, that featured a highly controversial Breton plot. The founding date of the Association (1 January 1912) can also be found in the Revue française de musique, 1 March 1912, 60. See also Paul-André Bempéchat, Allons enfants de "quelle" patrie? Breton Nationalism and the French Impressionist Aesthetic (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, Center for European Studies, Working Paper Series No. 106, 2003), and the same writer’s Jean Cras. Polymath of Music and Letters (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

34 La Revue musicale S.I.M., 9 (15 January 1913), 58.
song, dances, poetry, dialects or minority languages and legends, and they had frequent recourse to folk melody in compositions that were often coined as ‘celtique’, thereby creating a spiritual unity with other ‘Celtic’ nations including Ireland. Ladmirault described the Association as an organization ‘where integral Celts, Celts by inspiration and native Celts form a harmonious and varied community’, Hennessy’s own connections with Brittany were tenuous—his mother had died in a boating accident off Roscoff in 1880, and during the 1920s he often retreated to the region for a few summer weeks to compose. He was the only member of the group who was not French. Nonetheless, their inaugural concert in Paris on 6 March 1913 featured his Pièces celtiques, Op. 45 (1912) and his works appear regularly in all of their subsequent concerts. The Association was disbanded with the outbreak of World War I (but was resurrected after the war as the Société artistique et littéraire de l’Ouest). A number of their concerts took place at Le Caméléon, a café notable for its literary connections and cabaret, situated straight across the boulevard from Hennessy’s apartment:

Brittany, in Paris, is bordered to the north by the Gare Montparnasse, to the west by the Rue Lecourbe, to the south by the Rue de Vouillé and to the east by the Boulevard Raspail. The Caméléon, therefore, finds itself in Brittany, and no locality could be better chosen in which to hear Celtic music. The atmosphere contributed greatly to the appreciation of the works that were offered to us, all by Celtic composers.

Musical regionalism in France has received some scholarly attention in recent years although, curiously enough, not in relation to Brittany. Barbara Kelly argues that ‘at the root of much of France’s disunity was the issue of identity and what constituted the true France. This tension was apparent not only between Left and Right political polari-

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35 ‘où Celtes intégraux, Celtes d’inspiration et Celtes de naissance formaient un ensemble harmonieux et varié’. La Revue musicale S.I.M., 10 (1 May 1914), 57.

36 ‘La Bretagne, à Paris, est limitée au nord par la gare Montparnasse, à l’ouest par la rue Lecourbe, au sud par la rue de Vouillé et à l’est par le boulevard Raspail. Le Caméléon se trouve donc en Bretagne et nul endroit n’était mieux choisi pour entendre de la musique celtique ; l’ambiance contribua pour beaucoup à goûter les œuvres qui nous étaient offertes, toutes de compositeurs celtés’. Comoedia, 7 November 1925, 2.

zations but also over the issue of centralization’. What she calls the ‘internal exotic’ had as much legitimacy as Asian and other musics that so influenced the course of twentieth-century Western music since the Paris Exposition universelle of 1889. Applying it to Ravel’s southern French and partly Spanish heritage, she writes that ‘the “internal exotic” is a useful term for musical and other products that focus on the periphery of France and attempt to capture the “otherness” of that region through language, subject matter, instrumentation, and modal writing’.

A factor that may have hampered the contemporaneous (and indeed modern) reception of Hennessy is, perhaps, that he does not seem to have been a member of one of the more prestigious musical societies in Paris such as the Société nationale de musique de France or the Société musicale indépendante. As a foreigner, he may not have had access to the Société nationale, whereas the Société musicale indépendante did at least play music by composers such as Bartók, de Falla, Schoenberg and Stravinsky. The members of the Association des compositeurs bretons, on the other hand, shared a dislike of the atonal avant-garde and, in this regard, Hennessy was one of the most outspoken opponents. In several published letters to journals in England and France, Hennessy argued that Schoenberg was a mere attention-seeking charlatan. In 1912 he wrote to the editor of The Musical Standard as follows:

Referring to Mr. Heseltine’s question whether Schönberg is a madman, the ‘arch-humorist’ of music, or a colossal genius(!) many years ahead of his time, may I venture to suggest an alternative? Is it not possible that he is merely desirous of attracting attention to himself at any cost? It is a sad fact that in these sensation-loving days, such absurdities as Schönberg’s ‘Drei Klavierstücke’, Op. 11, are more likely to excite curiosity than a sincere work of art!

Ferchault notes that, in contrast, ‘he was no opponent of modernist musical language and was well-disposed towards the aspirations of his contemporaries, yet personally he

41 The Musical Standard, 38:979 (5 October 1912), 218.
rejected an over-refined style.’ Hennessy argued that even ‘in the hubbub of a large town, even an industrial one, there is always some kind of harmony, some coherence of tone. You never find continuous dissonance anywhere.’ He identified reasons for the trend towards atonality, suggesting that it results from a lack of musical ideas and creativity:

Incoherence

How does one explain the ever-increasing fad of incoherence among certain composers of the avant-garde? It is simply the paucity of musical ideas. It becomes more and more difficult to find something that has not already been said. Now, whereas the absence of ideas is cruelly felt in an orderly composition that respects principles that have hitherto prevailed, such absence of ideas cannot be perceived in an incoherent work, of that there can be no question.

Hennessy’s friend Paul Ladmirault described how Hennessy was nonetheless seduced by Pierrot lunaire when he heard it in the first Paris performance of the work in October 1921: ‘Hennessy, who was very much warned against him, returned quite enthralled by Schönberg’s Pierrot lunaire.’

He was happy to parody the atonality of Schoenberg and his followers—for example in No. 16 of À la manière de … (in volume 3, 1927), not named after a specific composer but entitled Jeune génie de l’avant garde. Instead of presenting an atonal piece in music notation, he merely inserted two lines as follows: ‘Mettez beaucoup de notes, n’importe lesquelles, sauf celles qu’il faut’ (‘Put in any old notes, no matter which, except the required ones’). An actual atonal composition is his six-bar Bébé prend sa medicine, No. 6.
of *Impressions humoristiques*, Op. 48 (1912): Example 2. In the manuscript, this aphoristic satire features the following note (omitted from the printed version, apparently by the publisher): ‘Malgré les apparences, l’enfant n’habite pas Vienne’ (‘Despite appearances, the child does not live in Vienna’).46


Although Hennessy’s music can be regarded, in France, within the general context of French regionalism, his case is rather different, as his music is Irish-influenced. What connected Hennessy with his Breton colleagues was celticism, which is not confined to a specific region and yet has many parallels with both musical nationalism and regionalism. Mostly published after 1920, Hennessy’s music in an Irish (or ‘Celtic’)47 style remained consistent in its features throughout the rest of his career, with a more complex harmonic language developing over time. A key element of his unique *style irlandais* is the employment of a melody that is modelled on the melodic characteristics of Irish traditional music, but without actually quoting a folk-song or tune. Most composers attempting to create an Irish style around 1900 did so by quoting folk-songs or dances, using them as thematic material in instrumental music, or by arranging folk-

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46 In Manuscript Book III, No. 3, in the possession of the Hennessy family.

songs for voice and piano. But consciously to create an original Irish-style melody and write variations on the theme—as Hennessy began to do in his *Variations sur un thème original dans le style irlandais*, Op. 12 for piano and his *Sonate en style irlandais*, Op. 14 for violin and piano—was unusual.


The eight-bar theme of the *Variations* Op. 12 (Example 3) is inspired by Irish traditional music—for instance, the melodic downward movement at the beginning, the outline of the melodic line, the ‘breathing space’ in bar 4 and the phrase endings. However, though rhythmically in the manner of a polka, a polka would be played considerably faster than the *Andante* marked here; the semiquaver leap C#–E in the middle of the first bar would usually move by step (C#–D–E) in a traditional tune; and the allusions to a Scotch snap in the second half of the theme are more reminiscent of Scottish than Irish music.\(^48\) The *Variations* are dedicated to Carrie Townshend, an Irish

\(^{48}\) I wish to acknowledge Irish traditional music expert Adrian Scahill for his analytical advice.
pianist (probably from Cork) who gave many recitals in London and Dublin around 1900 and who later appeared as one of the few Munster members of the Feis Ceoil Association.\textsuperscript{49} They were first performed by her in London’s Bechstein Hall on 2 February 1903\textsuperscript{50} and she provided the fingering for a second edition of the work (London: Schott & Co., 1903).

Another relatively early piece in Hennessy’s Irish repertory is the \textit{Bláithfhleasg bheag, d’fhonnaibh arsa Gaedhealacha as leabhar Petrie or Petite suite irlandaise, d’après des airs anciens de la collection Petrie}, Op. 29 for piano duet, written and published (without opus number) in 1909. This appears to be the earliest example of a composition published in Paris with a title in Irish. The composer’s name also appears in a Gaelic version (Suan Ó hAonghusa), and the title-page (see Illustration 3) features a Celtic ornament, in Hennessy’s handwriting, inspired by medieval Irish manuscripts.


\textsuperscript{49} See, for example, the Feis Ceoil syllabus for 1926, 41.

\textsuperscript{50} \textit{The Times} (3 February 1903) merely described them as ‘well-wrought and effective’.
The work consists of four pieces, each using a tune from the Petrie Collection of Irish music as arranged by Stanford. The pieces correspond to the Petrie/Stanford numbers 983, 903, 1089/1247 and 902, although Hennessy does not reference them. In his suite, they are called ‘Ancient Clan March’, ‘Cork Reel’, ‘Sagairt tar teorach’ and again ‘Cork Reel’ — the latter better known as ‘Molly on the Shore’. Hennessy’s approximately eight-minute ‘suite’ presents arrangements of these four folk tunes in an order and tonal sequence corresponding, more or less, to the movements of a classical suite. The introductory march is marked allegro, the first Cork reel allegretto, ‘Sagairt tar teorach’ is a slow air, adagio, and the finale, the second Cork reel, vivacissimo. The arrangements are transposed to different keys than the originals but remain mostly true to their models, with the exception of the opening march where the tune is fragmented across the piece after the first eight bars. The other movements begin by stating the folk tunes in full before proceeding to vary them.

In Ireland, the suite was enthusiastically received:

The arrangements of these are without doubt some of the best that have hitherto been published. They are brilliant and clever and are entirely free from the extravagance of finger work, which is generally found in arrangements of the ‘fantasie’ type, and both parts are evenly balanced. Mr. Hennessy has made a happy selection, and has displayed considerable skill in his arrangements. The ‘suite’ should prove immensely popular.53

A writer in *The Dublin Evening News*, who came across the above article many years later, wondered:

Who could this Franco-Irish musician be that, in a foreign country, sent forth his music burdened with a title in a language almost unknown in its own land, and among its own people? The comment of the *Irish Nation* of September, 1909, that ‘this suite should prove immensely popular,’ has a more than ironic significance in view of the fact that the name of Swan Hennessy is as yet unknown to more than a few dozen persons in Ireland.54

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52 One of many editorial mistakes in this edition is that this particular piece appears twice.

53 ‘Irish Music and Irish Enterprise—Petite Suite Irlandaise’, *The Irish Nation*, 11 September 1909, an unsigned review included in the first of Swan Hennessy’s press books. Entitled ‘Programmes et Critiques’, these are four large volumes into which were pasted reviews of recitals and publications as well as concert programmes, beginning from 1903 and later continued by his widow until the mid-1940s. The press cuttings of reviews do not include page references. The books are still in the family’s possession and have generously been made available to the present writer.

54 Ua Braoin (1922).
The earliest public performance of the suite was probably the one given in Paris at the Salle Érard on 23 April 1914 by Andrée Gellée and Paul Martineau. An Irish performance was broadcast live from 2RN (the predecessor of RTÉ) on 12 September 1931, played by Frederick Stone and Edna Beaven. An arrangement of the *adagio* movement, by G. Meyer for cello and piano, was a test piece at the Father Mathew Feis, Dublin, at Easter 1923. In the United States, Victor Herbert arranged the whole suite for orchestra and conducted it at Carnegie Hall, New York, on 23 March 1913. In France and Germany the technically easy, yet attractive composition of the piano original was admired.\(^5\) Hennessy reused the basis of the finale of the suite in his first string quartet, simply entitled *Suite*, Op. 46 (published in 1913). Here, the first three of the four movements are rather more French or German than Irish in character, whereas the fourth is entirely Irish.

Of particular significance in an Irish context is the Second Quartet, Op. 49 (originally Op. 53), completed in late 1920 when Hennessy learned of the death, by hunger strike, of Terence MacSwiney, the Lord Mayor of Cork, to whose memory the work is dedicated (see Example 4). Hennessy and MacSwiney may have known each other personally since at least 1910.\(^5\) The first movement is particularly solemn, played with muted strings throughout. In a review of the first performance, *The New York Herald* characterized the work as follows:

... [it] begins slowly and sadly in a manner suggestive of the patriot’s long self-imposed martyrdom. His gradual weakening and final death are indicated by a subtle progressive change of rhythmic values. In the three movements which follow the effort is to glorify Ireland, and both the more sombre and the gayer sides of the Celtic genius are indicated. There is a clever counterfeiting of the notes of the bagpipe, the occasional introduction of a bright theme from the popular ballads. The triumphant finale acclaims the glorious future of the new Ireland.\(^5\)

The second movement, a forceful *allegro* in C minor (with many modulations), forms the core of the work. It begins in the cello with three solo bars containing the Scotch snap, sometimes using intervals uncharacteristic of folk music. It is followed by a brief, meditative interlude in A major, a beautifully pastoral and elegantly contrapuntal movement. The fourth movement is mostly joyful, mainly *allegro* but alternating with sorrowful

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\(^5\) ‘… *une amusante et facile petite suite*, *La Revue musicale S.M.*, 7 (15 January 1911); ‘*Interessant und leicht spielbar …*’, *Allgemeine Musikzeitung*, 31 March 1911.

\(^5\) There is a story in the Hennessy family that MacSwiney was the godfather of Hennessy’s son Patrice, born in July 1910. The baptismal record of 29 September 1911 in Saint Pierre de Montrouge, Paris does not prove this, but the late date may indicate that this was once planned.

andante passages, and a cello tune drives the piece to its close. The thematic material is used economically throughout and is, for the most part, quite convincingly structured. The quartet does not make use of existing Irish folk tunes, but we are told, in a review of 1924, that the material of the concluding movement is derived from a Scottish folk-song (not identified), to which the first two bars allude. Here, Hennessy intended to create a pan-Celtic atmosphere.58


The quartet was first performed in a concert at the ‘World Congress of the Irish Race’ (an event to muster support for the establishment of the Irish Free State) that took place at the Hotel Continental, Paris, on 25 January 1922. The concert was attended by Éamon de Valera, Countess Markievicz and Mary MacSwiney, sister of the quartet’s dedicatee; the Irish ad hoc quartet was led by the prominent violinist Arthur Darley, with Terry O’Connor (violin, later the leader of the Irish String Orchestra), George H. Brett (viola) and Joseph Schofield (cello). The programme opened with Hennessy’s quartet, included a number of vocal items sung by Gerald Crofts and concluded with another quartet, this one a medley of Irish folk tunes by Henri Bast (1856–1907, a German-born cello professor at the Royal Irish Academy of Music). Schofield became quite an advocate for Hennessy’s music in Ireland, performing a number of his chamber works with cello. The

58 ‘… un thème débutant par les deux premières mesures d’un air populaire écossais … évoquant ainsi le panceltisme.’ Le Guide du concert, 12 December 1924, 286. I suspect that many of the reviews of Hennessy’s works in this journal were written by the composer himself.
same Irish ensemble also played the quartet in Dublin on 3 February 1922, and the work was later heard in Berlin (by the Kulenkampff Quartett, 3 May 1922) and again in Paris (by the Quatuor Loiseau, 18 December 1924). In Ireland, the quartet was last heard at the Feis Doire Colmcille in Derry in April 1939 and remained forgotten until its first Cork performance on 5 November 2016. Hennessy’s String Quartet No. 2 is notable as one of the very few works by a classical composer that directly responded to the political events that eventually led to Irish independence.

Schofield’s commitment to Hennessy’s music included the first performance of the *Petit trio celtique*, Op. 52 (1920) for string trio, premiered on 30 March 1922 at the Engineer’s Hall, Dawson Street, Dublin, together with John Moody (violin) and George H. Brett (viola)—the only premiere of a work by Hennessy in Ireland. This is one of Hennessy’s most frequently performed pieces, together with the Trio, Op. 54 for two clarinets and bassoon. Both works were first published in 1921 with Demets, and when Eugène Demets died in early 1923 they entered the catalogue of Max Eschig & Cie.

The *Petit trio celtique* is in four movements, alternating between one ‘dans le style irlandais’ and the next ‘dans le style breton’. The work is dedicated to Paul Le Flem, the Breton composer who was among Hennessy’s closest friends in Paris. Regional allusions are clearly indicated in his motivic ideas, but with one short exception, he does not use themes from actual traditional music: the first of the two Breton movements has a theme that Hennessy had received from Le Flem. The work convinces by its well-crafted counterpoint, evident in all four movements. In the two Irish-style movements—a quite substantial allegro at the beginning and a short andante—the viola plays a prominent role in agitated ostinatos. The Scotch snap occurs in the cello towards the end of the third movement (see Example 5), music reminiscent of the contemporary pastoral style of the British Isles. While that style is itself somewhat indebted to French impressionism, the trio sounds rather more British than French, and perhaps this was a key component in Hennessy’s interpretation of musical celticism? In fact, it is a feature of his ‘Celtic’ works generally that he is somewhat less adventurous harmonically in comparison to his pre-war piano music. It is almost as if the Irish identity that he fostered so assiduously

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59 Performed by the RTÉ ConTempo Quartet at the Triskel Arts Centre, Cork.
60 Notably *In memoriam* (1916) and *Elegiac Trio* (1916) by Arnold Bax.
62 Watson notes, in relation to Hennessy’s early *Variations sur un air irlandais ancien*, Op. 28 (1908), that ‘forays into the more opaque impressionist sound-world are rare, with the exception of the tenth variation’. Of his *Rapsodie gaélique*, Op. 63 for cello and piano (1925) she writes that ‘it was becoming dated as French images of Ireland changed’. Watson, ‘Ireland in the Musical Imagination’, 97. There
during the 1920s now acted as a balm to the loss of his pre-war existence. The closing Breton movement in F minor is the most energetic part of the work, with a brisk approach in 5/4 metre that is the basis of some Breton folk-dances.


The reception of the trio was quite positive. Comparing the *Rapsodie celtique*, Op. 50 for violin and piano (1915), the *Petit trio celtique*, Op. 52 and the Second String Quartet, Op. 49 the prominent French music critic Henri Collet wrote that ‘there is always a subtle and meticulous simplicity, an elegant and fine implementation of original ideas, evocative because of their rhythm, their deep or naive, dreamy or ironic feelings towards green Ireland.’

A critic in *The Sackbut* described the trio as ‘a charming little work suitable for amateurs’, and the *Allgemeine Musikzeitung* applauded the work’s

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63 ‘… c’est toujours le même parti pris de simplicité subtile et minutieuse, de mise en œuvre élégante et fine d’idées originales mais évocatrices, par leurs rythmes, des sentiments profonds ou naïfs, rêveurs ou ironiques, de la verte Irlande.’ Henri Collet, ‘La Musique chez soi. XCVII: Œuvres de Swan Hennessy’, *Comoedia*, 5 December 1921, 4.

64 *The Sackbut*, 2:9 (March 1922), 35.
‘folkloristic sounding melodic idiom’ as ‘very pleasant’.65 The Irish Times, reviewing the first performance in Dublin, considered it extraordinarily rich in musical feeling and most definitively original. So much so that attention is gripped and held from start to finish. And it is not so much by the novelty—though that exists—but by the real music and character of the work.66

Apart from Townshend, Darley, O’Connor and Schofield, other Irish musicians who knew Hennessy personally included the London-based pianist Michael Kavanagh and the Cork-based musician Denis Breen.67 Darley and Breen recommended Hennessy’s music as test pieces for the Father Mathew Feis in Dublin at Easter 1923 and the Oireachtas festival in Cork in May 1924, respectively. It is likely that Hennessy attended the latter occasion. Breen is the dedicatee of the Huit pièces celtiques, Op. 51 (1922) and Kavanagh of the Epigrammes d’un solitaire, Op. 55 (1923). Hennessy also met a young Frederick May (1911–85), most likely during this 1924 visit.68

A lesser-known piece of Hennessy’s is the last that he wrote in an Irish style for piano solo, the Rapsodie irlandaise, Op. 67 (1924), dedicated to his then fourteen-year-old son Patrice. It was published in Album celtique (1929) that also includes the Variations, Op. 12, Huit pièces celtiques, Op. 51 and the Sonatine celtique, Op. 53. As in several of his Irish works, the score has a footnote to the effect that it contains no ‘piece of folklore’. Like the Sonatine celtique, it presents some quite demanding passages. The Scotch snap occurs again, more than once, but another rhythmic figure consisting of a dotted quaver, a semiquaver and quaver triplets is a more striking element, although not borrowed from traditional music. Example 6 shows those features and the most recognizably Irish-style melody, which appears twice in the piece:

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65 ‘volkstümlich anmutende Melodik … sehr erfreulich’. Allgemeine Musikzeitung, 21 April 1922.
66 The Irish Times, 31 March 1922.
67 Kavanagh lived and taught in London and performed some of Hennessy’s music there. He is the copyright owner of Hennessy’s Opp. 51, 53, and 55 and is also named as the honorary secretary of a short-lived ‘Irish Society of Composers’, mentioned in The Musical Times, 1 June 1920, 419, whose members included Robert O’Dwyer. Denis Breen (c1886–1950), also known as Donnchadh Ua Braoin, was a primary school teacher of music in Cork and, from 1932, an ‘Organising Inspector of Musical Instruction’ at the Department of Education. Hennessy took care that some Carolan arrangements by Breen were published by Eschig in Paris (dutifully dedicated to Hennessy): the Six Irish Pieces of the XVIIIth and XVIIIth Centuries (Six morceaux irlandais des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles), for harpsichord or piano (Paris: Max Eschig & Cie., 1924).
68 There are two pieces by Hennessy (Opp. 51 and 55) with handwritten (and undated) dedications to May in the Frederick May collection at Trinity College Dublin. I wish to thank Mark Fitzgerald for drawing my attention to them.
When Hennessy died in 1929, the French media hailed him as the ‘bard of Ireland’ who had ‘saved the ancient Celtic melody’\textsuperscript{69} and applauded his ‘original and fine writing because of his exquisite Celtic taste’.\textsuperscript{70} The Irish Times noted that ‘during the last few years he had devoted his attention specially to Irish national music, and sought in his latest compositions to express somewhat of the Celtic spirit’.\textsuperscript{71} In 1931 a substantial article about him and other Franco-Irish relations in music appeared in The Irish Press:

‘What is there in his music that is Celtic?’ asks a lecturer introducing a performance of his works. ‘The atmosphere, the general impression … the expression now deep, now naïf, now dreamy or ironical, now sad, now gay, of the Irish mentality of which we know so little but which attracts us instinctively.’ In a lecture at the Sorbonne last year M. Lucien Chevaillier, speaking of the Celtic

\textsuperscript{69} ‘… aura été le barde de l’Irlande; il aura ressuscité l’ancienne mélodie celtique’, L’Européen, 12 February 1930, 3; the article is signed ‘A.D.’, probably Hennessy’s friend André Delacour.

\textsuperscript{70} ‘Musicien sensible et délicat, il laisse, surtout dans le domaine de la musique de chambre, des œuvres nombreuses et sincères, caractérisées autant par leur écriture originale et fine que par leur délicieuse saveur celtique.’, Le Guide du concert, 1 November 1929, 123.

\textsuperscript{71} ‘An Irishman’s Diary’, The Irish Times, 21 December 1929.
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element in Swan Hennessy’s music, said: ‘Its sadness and its gaiety have one characteristic in
common: a kind of moderation, discretion, a restraint, amounting almost to reticence.’
One feels that the best of our old traditional music would be a revelation to these sympathetic
critics whose knowledge of Irish melodies is probably limited to modernised forms of our airs.
And one regrets, for the sake of modern Irish music, that a composer like Swan Hennessy did not
come into closer contact with Ireland and with the rich inspiration that lies hidden in our music.
In Paris, his chosen home, his very personal art found appreciation largely on account of its
original, Celtic flavour. The painter-musician, Georges Migot, who made a funeral oration at Swan
Hennessy’s graveside at Montparnasse cemetery two years ago, spoke of him as ‘an Irish bard
who had been received with welcome by the Troubadors and Trouveres of France’.72

Six months before his death, in an interview for Le Guide du concert, Hennessy had
expounded on his Celtic personality:

It is very difficult to respond to you. I don’t have a story or even an anecdote to recount about this
revelation. I just realized it one day. How it came about, I don’t know. Some latent atavism was
dormant within me. One fine day it arose, it emerged, and I had to yield to the idea: I was a ‘Celtic’
composer. The Ireland I had seen so little of in my life stirred within me and guided my ideas. In
fact, I have never stopped writing ‘Celtic’ music, and I acknowledged this explicitly by using the
word ‘Celtic’ in a great many of my titles.73

Hennessy thus found a spiritual and creative home in musical celticism which provided
him with his personal artistic solution among the contemporary issues of musical
modernity and identity.


73  ‘Il m’est assez difficile de vous répondre. Je n’ai aucun drame, aucune histoire, pas même une anecdote
à vous compter au sujet de cette révélation. Je me suis aperçu un jour que j’étais tel. Comment cela
s’est-il fait, je n’en sais rien. Un atavisme sommeillait en moi, latent. Un beau jour il a surgi, il s’est
imposé et je dus me rendre à la vérité : j’étais un compositeur « celtique ». Cette Irlande que j’ai si peu vue
dans ma vie s’est agitée en moi et elle a conduit mes idées. De fait je n’ai plus cessé de faire de la
musique « celtique » et d’ailleurs je l’ai reconnu explicitement en accolant le mot « celtique » à un grand
nombre de mes titres.’ Chevaillier, 792.
Towards the end of his life, Hennessy compiled a worklist by genre of 86 of his compositions (81 with opus numbers, and more than half for solo piano), arrangements for other instruments and five volumes of pastiches for piano. This handwritten manuscript is preserved, together with a typed copy, among his papers in the family’s possession. However, the list is not fully accurate: some of the dates it mentions contradict information in the manuscripts; it does not include some juvenilia and pieces that Hennessy had earlier withdrawn; and it does not give details of the individual items within an opus that is a collection of pieces. It has been used to clarify opus numbers where these are not given in the publications themselves and for information on unpublished music. Otherwise the comprehensive list below has been compiled by the present writer with reference to all available sources: manuscripts, published works and library catalogues.

Works listed with an asterisk are currently (i.e. in 2018) available for free download at http://imslp.org; likewise, works marked with a plus sign are currently (2018) available at http://gallica.bnf.fr.

I. Piano music


An Irish-American in Paris: Swan Hennessy (1866–1929)


   Theme of eight bars, followed by eight variations: 1. Maestoso; 2. Allegretto con grazia; 3. Canon;


   1. Fussreise / En route / On the Road; 2. Das Wirthehaus / L’Auberge / The Inn;


*Variations sur un air irlandais ancien*, Op. 28 (1908). Mainz: B. Schott’s Söhne, 1908.*

Theme with twelve variations.


1. [no descriptive title]; 2. Espagne; 3. Suisse; 4. [no descriptive title].


*Petite suite sur les notes Mi Do Fa Si Mi*, Op. 34 (1909). Mainz: B. Schott’s Söhne, 1911.


1. Fête de village au XVIIIème siècle; 2. Fête populaire dans la banlieue de Paris au XXème siècle.


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   1. Promenade matinale au Jardin du Luxembourg; 2. L’Américain qui a bien diné; 3. Dans un atelier de couturiers.


À la manière de ... 18 Pastiches (1917–26), in three volumes. Paris: Éditions Max Eschig, 1927.


À la manière de ... (1927), vol. 5. Paris: Éditions Max Eschig, 1928.


**II. Vocal music**


An Irish-American in Paris: Swan Hennessy (1866–1929)


1. Là-bas! (Joséphin Soulary); 2. Le Revenant (Charles Baudelaire).


1. Annie; 2. La Fille aux cheveux de lin; 3. Nell.


1. Fluthenreicher Ebro / Sur les rives fleuries (Geibel); 2. Auf den Wällen Salamanksas / Sur les murs de Salamanque (Heine); 3. Neben mir wohnt Don Henriquez / Mon voisin est Don Henriquez (Heine).


1. Le Mort joyeux (Dans une terre grasse et plein d’escargots) (Charles Baudelaire); 2. Les Grands jasmins épanouis (Albert Samain); 3. Il était une fois. Chansonnette (Jean Ajalbert).

*Trois mélodies sur des poésies d’André Delacour et de Leconte de Lisle*, Op. 66, for voice and piano (c1921). Paris: Max Eschig & Cie., 1926; Nos 2 and 3 also issued as a supplement to the *Courrier musical* of 15 November 1925.

1. Si la distance nous sépare (Delacour); 2. Paysage (Delacour); 3. Jane. Chanson écossaise (Leconte de Lisle).


1. Le Chanson du rouet (Charles Leconte de Lisle); 2. Berceuse d’Armorique (Anatole le Braz); 3. Le Départ des pêcheurs (Pierre Scize). The MS reveals that each of the songs represent a Celtic region: No. 1 Scotland, No. 2 Brittany and No. 3 Ireland.


1. Le Chasseur noir (Paul Gérardy); 2. La Chanson du vent de mer (Anatole le Braz).

1. Il était une fois (Jean Ajalbert); 2. Vers traduit de Goethe (Louis de Ronchaud); 3. Panis angelicus ([St Thomas Aquinas]).


1. La Lune (Paul Verlaine); 2. À deux (Prosper Blanchemain).

III. Duos with piano


1. Theme (Allegretto), four variations and epilogue; 2. Andantino; 3. Allegro appassionato.


1. Pièce celtique; 2. Jazz.


An Irish-American in Paris: Swan Hennessy (1866–1929)

   1. Danse écossaise; 2. Pièce celtique

   1. Allegro appassionato; 2. Allegro amabile; 3. (d’après un air irlandais).


IV. Trios

   1. Um Mitternacht; 2. In der Frühe; 3. Am Abend.

   1. Allegro (dans le style irlandais); 2. Moderato (dans le style breton); 3. Andante (dans le style irlandais); 4. Allegro (dans le style breton).


V. Quartets


   In one movement, with 16 variations.

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