The Hibernian Catch Club: Catch and Glee Culture in Georgian and Victorian Dublin

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Abstract

The Hibernian Catch Club was the leading Irish club of its kind, setting the standard in terms of performance. It gained status as Dublin’s longest-standing music society, and must be credited with pioneering catch and glee culture in Ireland. Its existence appears to pre-date the foundation of the most renowned London catch and glee clubs, emphasizing its significance within the wider context of catch and glee culture. This article examines the contribution that the Hibernian Catch Club made to musical life in Georgian and Victorian Dublin, contextualizing how the Club’s activities and membership reflect aspects of Dublin’s wider social, political and cultural life during this period. The extent to which the Club reflects the traditions associated with the culture as established in England is evaluated, before the discussion turns to an exploration of the repertoire. The Hibernian Catch Club was part of a wide performing network, its singers possessing established connections with musical, social and religious organizations in Dublin, London and provincial England. The Hibernians engaged with and maintained the traditions associated with the culture (singing, dining and conviviality) while also representing the social and cultural partnership formed between Dublin’s amateur and professional musicians. Its singers, dominated by vicars choral, represent the religious and social divisions evident in private music-making circles in late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century Dublin. In fact, social, religious and musical exclusivity were inherent in its profile and are reflected by the overall lack of change in its aims and outlook. The Club’s activities and repertoire are comparable with those of the London and provincial English catch and glee clubs, illustrating the strong cultural connections between Britain and Ireland.

Author Biography

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Tríona O’Hanlon, violinist and musicologist, is a Research Associate of the Research Foundation for Music in Ireland. Her research interests include the historiography of music in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Dublin, source studies, historical performance practices and contexts, Handel scholarship and romantic national song. Tríona was a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Research Fellow in Music at the School of Arts, English and Languages, Queen’s University Belfast (2015–2017), researching the Horizon 2020 funded project ERIN (Europe’s Reception of the Irish Melodies and National Airs: Thomas Moore in Europe). Her other awards and research fellowships include the Muriel McCarthy Research Fellowship (Marsh’s Library, 2014), Royal Dublin Society Post-Doctoral Fellowship (Royal Dublin Society Library and Archives, 2015), Charlemont Scholar (Royal Irish Academy, 2016) and Carl H. Pforzheimer, Jr., Research Grant (Keats-Shelly Association of America, 2017).
The Hibernian Catch Club: Catch and Glee Culture in Georgian and Victorian Dublin. Bookmark. by Triona O'Hanlon. John Hilton’s Catch That Catch Can[7] is described as “A choice collection of Catches rounds and canons”. Inside there is a table of “catches and rounds in this book”, followed by “a table of the Sacred Hymns and Canons”. Music meetings had begun during the Commonwealth and Catch singing was much practised by displaced choirmen; and so the Playfords encouraged the formation of more catch clubs to buy and sing their music. Many other clubs existed under a variety of titles, including the Hibernian Catch Club (Dublin, late C17 and extant), harmonic societies, Anacreontic societies and so forth. The Canterbury Catch Club (1779 to 1865) has resurfaced as a website with transcripts and recordings of a selection of catches and glee's from the archives left in Canterbury.