

A Forgotten 'Manx' Work

T. F. Dunhill's *Fantasia on Manx National Melodies*.

by

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The manuscript collection at the Manx Museum holds a fascinating piece of music with a number of significant Manx connections. It is a concert piece for violin and orchestra (violin and piano copy) based on Manx Melodies by Thomas F. Dunhill.¹ The full title page of the immaculately written score reads:

CONCERTSTÜCK

For

Violin and Orchestra

By

Thomas F. Dunhill

Op. 12

(Founded on Manx National Melodies)

For Violin and Piano²

The score of the *Fantasia* is in the form of a reduction for violin and piano with a separate violin part. There is no orchestral score nor orchestral parts in the collection,³ nor has it been published, despite being allocated an opus number. Unknown and forgotten today, the *Fantasia* was written for Haydn Wood, who first attended the Royal College of Music in 1897 at the age of just fifteen years, and met Dunhill during his time there.⁴ The first reference linking the would-be young violin virtuoso from the Isle of Man with Thomas Dunhill, the would-be young pianist and composer from Hampstead, North London, appeared in the *Isle of Man Examiner* in 1897 where they were both named on the short-list of candidates for the free scholarship examination to the College.⁵ In March 1905 a brief report of recent engagements in London undertaken by Haydn Wood appeared in the *Isle of Man Times*,⁶ and tells us that on March 9th he gave the first performance of 'a new and most scholarly *Fantasia* for violin and orchestra in G minor' in the concert hall of the Royal College of Music at a Patron's Fund Concert 'for the encouragement of young composers and executive artists. Mr. Haydn Wood . . . played it (the *Fantasia*) with remarkable firmness and brilliancy and four recalls to the platform testified to the delight of the audience'. The much-admired Canadian soprano Madame Emma Albani was present at the concert and wrote to him shortly afterwards: 'I must congratulate you on your beautiful playing last evening. Your Manx melodies and cadenza were delightful'.

Further details of the work's origins appeared in the *Isle of Man Times* in April 1905⁷ in a letter from W. H. Gill to the editor dated 29th March, which included a substantial extract from a letter from Dunhill to Gill during which the composer states that it was '... a good many years since Haydn Wood showed me your book⁸ and the tunes at once took hold of my imagination, and I was quickly desirous of bringing them out in some form which should present them strikingly before the public. This form ultimately resolved itself into a concertstuck (*sic*) for violin and orchestra for my friend himself to play'.

Dunhill further confirmed that the *Fantasia* was completed 'about four years ago' but was not performed until the concert in March 1905 referred to above, a delay he maintained that was because 'of the difficulties placed in the way of would-be English composers in the matter of gaining public hearing for their works'. Dunhill's intention from the outset was to make the tune *Illiam Dhone* the main theme of the piece, 'being very struck with the opening bars'. He was certain it was an authentic old Manx melody, had intended to write to Gill for confirmation of this, but neglected to do so, and therefore apologised for not mentioning Gill's part in the origin of the work in the programme.

The following year Haydn Wood commenced a series of international concert tours with Madame Albani, and may have taken the *Fantasia* with him, for the next documented performance took place in October 1925,⁹ when Kathleen Rydings,¹⁰ the Laxey violinist and pupil of both Harry and Haydn Wood, was engaged by the Cruinnaght Committee to perform it at a Hollantide Day Concert at the Villa Marina, styled 'A day with Manx Things'. The reporter at the event wrote of the *Fantasia*: '... it is modern in spirit, but not excessively so, and contains some brilliant writing for the solo instrument'. Dunhill was identified as 'a prominent member of the younger British School'.

Here is a brief description of the *Fantasia*:

Lento maestoso (quasi recitative); G minor; 32 bars including an introduction of 7 bars based on the opening of W. H. Gill's arrangement of *Illiam Dhone* from *Manx National Songs*.

Allegro; G minor; 51 bars in a resolute march style including 16 bars introduction presenting *Illiam Dhone* based on the tune *Drogh Vranne*.

Piu tranquillo; Bb major; 6/8 time; 53 bars based on *Gwendolen*, to the tune *Sooree*.

Lento maestoso, tempo primo (quasi recitative); 21 bars leading to:

Allegro; G minor; 49 bars based on *Illiam Dhone*, developing into:

G major; 6/8; 39 bars based on *Gwendolen*, leading to:

Cadenza: con fuoco – cantabile – poco lento – pesante; 37 bars replete with double stopping, trills, *glissandi* and harmonics, leading to:

Vivace – poco allargando – piu allargando – vivace assai; 57 bars; 2/4; G major based on *The Cruise of the Tiger* and concluding with a *Coda* and final flourish, and the final appearance of *Illiam Dhone*.

The *Fantasia* is a fine piece, a real ‘show-stopper’ in fact, and perfectly matched the virtuosity of the young Haydn Wood, who already had in his extensive repertoire concert pieces by Vieuxtemps, Wieniawski, Saint-Saëns, Paganini, Sarasate, Bazzini and several pieces of his own composition. Maybe someday one of our fine local violinists will seek out the *Fantasia*, confront the challenges it offers, and perform it again on the Island.

Notes

1. Thomas Frederick Dunhill (1877-1946). A composer and writer on musical matters, who studied composition at the Royal College of Music with Sir Charles Villiers Stanford. He became the music master at Eaton College and later a professor at the Royal College of Music; his prestigious Thomas Dunhill Chamber Music Concerts in London (1907 – 1919) introduced many important chamber music works by young English composers into the repertoire. His own compositions included a symphony, several chamber works, the song cycle *The Wind Among the Reeds*, an opera *Tantivy Towers*, and numerous piano pieces for children. The young Haydn Wood played the violin in the first performance of his Quintet for horn, 2 violins, 2 violas and ‘cello, op. 6 in June 1900.

2. MS 01350.

3. A full orchestral score and orchestral parts for the *Fantasia* may eventually have become part of the music library of Haydn Wood’s brother, Harry Wood, the musical director of the Palace and Derby Castle Company, but the entire library disappeared soon after Harry Wood’s death in December 1938, and no trace of it has ever been found.

4. *IoMT* March 2nd 1897.

5. *IoME* April 3rd 1897.

6. *IoMT* March 25th 1905.

7. *IoMT* April 8th 1905.

8. *Manx National Songs*.

9. *IoME* October 23rd.

10. See Maurice Powell, *A Very Gifted Manx Lady, the Life of Kathleen Rydings*, Wibble Publishing, 2012.

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