

Hibernia (Irish Rhapsody) [1929]

Edward Joseph Collins, composer

Notes by Erik Eriksson (1940-2008), the composer's biographer

Hibernia is the longest of several Collins compositions written between 1927 and 1932 that make use of the Irish[-American] folksong "O! The 'Taters they are small over here!"

In *Hibernia*, the composer's imagination, his gift for orchestral tone painting and his ability to establish a reflective mood are all lovingly in evidence. No doubt Collins's Irish heritage manifested itself, permeating the nineteen-minute work with an atmospheric mixture of present gaiety and wistful melancholy. While it reflects all the technical facility Collins had gained from his musical training, it is the antithesis of an academic piece.

Scored for a large orchestra (including three oboes and English horn, three Bb clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons and a contrabassoon, six horns and two harps), *Hibernia* is varied in texture. It steals into the listener's imagination, the opening measures voiced for just English horn and two harps. Only gradually, do the other instruments join. When the piece breaks into dance, the full orchestra alternates with sparser statements from strings, winds and brass.

In this fantasy, Collins achieves a level of virtuosity in altering the timbre, sometimes strong and concentrated, at other times light and diaphanous. He passes the melody from section to section, often in mid-sentence, without allowing the transition to sound disjointed.

His climaxes can be tremendous, gathering themselves cumulatively, not merely by increase of volume; the composer piles instrument upon instrument, section upon section until the senses are assaulted. At the critical moment, Collins releases the tension and, clearing away the dancers, allows the listener to focus once more on the breathtaking landscape.

Hibernia is quintessential Collins.