

Variations on an Irish Folksong [1932] (1931)

Edward Joseph Collins, composer

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

Though the source scores are not clearly dated, the composer's journals indicate that the composition of *Variations on an Irish Folksong* was probably completed after the 1927 *Irish Rhapsody* and the 1929 *Hibernia (Irish Rhapsody)*. There can be little doubt that during this period Collins was following newspaper reports of "the troubles" in the land of his ancestors; perhaps these compositions are an expression of his solidarity with Ireland.

All three Irish works share the same sweetly melancholic tone painting, here in the last one even more subtly displayed. The lingering harp introduction holds the effect of tinkling crystal, leading unhurriedly to the entry of the orchestra. The multi-textured scoring is sophisticated: Collins's ability to conjure the atmosphere he intended seems entirely assured. The transitions among its varied moods unfold as easily as breathing.

These *Variations* and Collins's *Irish Rhapsody* are based primarily on "Oh! The 'Taters they are small over here!," the "potato famine" folksong that also is used by the composer, sparingly, in *Hibernia*.