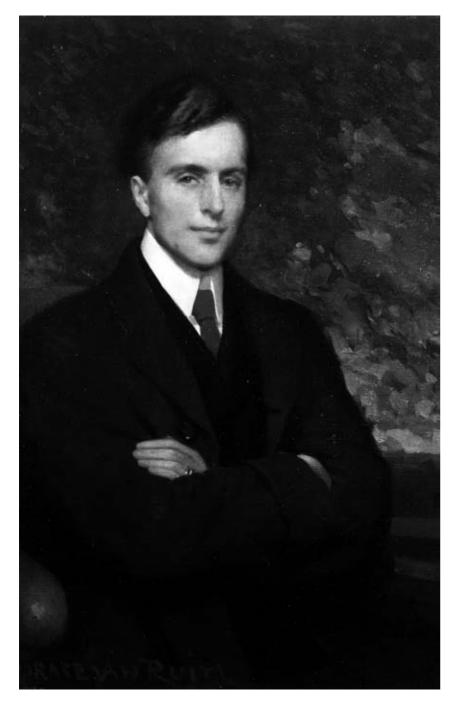
DEREK HUDSON

NORMAN O'NELL ALIFE/ USIC



Norman O'Neill, circa 1900, by Horace van Ruith (reproduced by kind permission of the Royal College of Music / ArenaPAL)

Foreword

FOREWORD

'I cannot refrain from writing you,' wrote Percy Grainger to my father Derek Hudson, from 'in the train', somewhere in America, 19th June 1948, 'to tell you how grateful I am to you for having written such a masterly & heart-warming tribute to our dear genius-friend, & historically-significant record of his life, in which your skill as an author balances with your inspired insight into & sympathy with the subject.'

This wonderful endorsement from Grainger would have delighted my father as he carefully placed the letter into his copy of *Norman O'Neill: A Life of Music*. But it is possible that at this date he was a little less certain of its 'historical significance'. In fact, it was fortuitous that the book – begun in the middle of World War II – had been written at all. My grandfather had died suddenly in 1934, and many of his friends and colleagues were thus still alive to bear testimony to his life and work. His pianist-wife Adine supplied background that would otherwise have been lost with her death in 1947 – and my father's recent marriage to Norman's daughter Yvonne instilled an intimacy unusual in biographies of this kind. My father drew all these varying strands together – allowing each their own voice – so that when we read Norman's own talks and lectures that occupy the end of the book, the genial, thoughtful spirit found there comes as no surprise at all. In a few short years however, all this precious material would have passed away unrecorded.

Nevertheless, O'Neill's legacy was at that time difficult to judge. In 1945 his music was still performed regularly and would be for the next fifteen years; furthermore, he was then chiefly remembered as the composer of incidental music for the theatre, with such delicate and mysterious scores as *The Blue Bird* by Maurice Maeterlinck and J.M. Barrie's *Mary Rose*. It was no secret that at the time of his death Hollywood had beckoned. ('Can you dig up the music score ... called *Mary Rose*. Need this promptly if we can get it', urged Hitchcock in vain, at the outbreak of war, for his film *Rebecca*.) In the following years, performances of Norman's works, as with many of his contemporaries, became less and less frequent as the small orchestras he wrote for disappeared, and musical tastes changed and polarised. It seemed that here was a composer so identified with the theatrical mood of his day

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that his entire output had been lost except to a loyal band of scholars. Then an unexpected thing happened.

The true artist is adaptable, and in recent years a new generation, without preconceptions, has discovered the music of Norman O'Neill. They have found a thoroughly useful composer who can write as masterly a piece for double-bass and piano as for a romantic piano trio. His songs for children's choirs are superb in schools, and the miniatures for small orchestras are ideal for professionals and amateurs alike. In a wider perspective, the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge has used the incidental music to *The Blue Bird* for the website of its exhibition, *Chasing Happiness*; the BBC National Orchestra of Wales performed O'Neill's *Hornpipe* to warm applause: and following an acclaimed performance of the *Piano Quintet in E minor* at the English Music Festival, EM Records produced a CD of this and other chamber works that has been a revelation. Small forces are always welcome and with these Norman – for 22 years musical director of the Haymarket Theatre, London; spent his working life. As one young musician said to me: 'He is such a good composer.'

The biography's 'historical significance' has become clearer too. A then ground-breaking chapter on O'Neill and his great friend Delius remains especially interesting, and the part O'Neill played in the development of British theatre-music has become historical fact. The ongoing musical importance of the Frankfurt Group (Percy Grainger, Roger Quilter, Balfour Gardiner, Cyril Scott and O'Neill) is now well established – but in this book their joint story was told for the first time.

Norman O'Neill: A Life of Music is testimony not only to a lost world, but to the special contribution it made to English music. Indeed the passage of 70 years allows a new perspective on its artistry – and of O'Neill's in particular – to emerge. Delicacy, charm, tenderness and atmosphere are timeless qualities, not weaknesses to be shunned, and when craft and musicianship hold them together there is no knowing where their ship may sail.

Katherine Hudson

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INTRODUCTION

The year 1934 was a year of tragic loss for British music. On 23rd February, Sir Edward Elgar died. Norman O'Neill died on 3rd March. On 23rd May died Gustav Holst; and on 10th June Frederick Delius. Biographies of three of these outstanding figures in the musical life of the nation have already appeared. As a composer, Norman O'Neill worked on a smaller scale than Elgar, Holst, or his great friend Delius, but in many ways his life lends itself more easily to biography – there was in it more incident and variety than commonly fall to the lot of composers.

Although many of his concert works were heard at the Queen's Hall from 1901 onwards, and although he wrote chamber music and a large number of songs and piano pieces, it is for his work in the theatre that Norman O'Neill is chiefly remembered. His compositions for *The Blue Bird*, for Lord Dunsany's plays, for *Mary Rose* and *A Kiss for Cinderella*, and for *Kismet*, are only a few that stand out in the stream of theatre music that came from his studio over a period of more than 30 years. He wrote music for several Shakespeare plays, and at the time of his untimely death he was about to concentrate on this branch of his art – which, as a lover of Shakespeare, particularly appealed to him. In all his work he never forsook the high standard of craftsmanship which was associated with his name.

No-one has done more in this century to raise the level of our theatre music than O'Neill, and it follows that his influence on the general musical taste of the country has been considerable. This influence he also brought to bear, less obviously but no less actually, through his work as treasurer of the Royal Philharmonic Society; while as a teacher at the Royal Academy of Music he sought to pass on to a new generation those secrets of the technique of composition which he had so thoroughly mastered. His marriage with a distinguished pianist and teacher resulted in a musical partnership unique in our day. If these are not in themselves sufficient reasons for this biography, there is a further justification that must be decisive: that many will be glad to have a memorial of one of the most charming and best loved men of his time.

Many thanks are due to my mother-in-law, Mrs Norman O'Neill; to my wife, Norman O'Neill's daughter; and to Mr Frank B. O'Neill, his brother, for all

the help they have given me. The list of Norman O'Neill's friends and acquaintances who have helped in one way or another is a long one, but I should like particularly to express my obligation to Mr George Baker, Mr Ernest Irving, Mr Balfour Gardiner, Mr J. Mewburn Levien, Mr Frederic Austin, Mr K.A. Wright, Mr Francis Toye, Miss A.E. Keeton, Colonel Stanley Bell, Mr Charles La Trobe, Mr Ernest Milton, Mr Leslie Bridgewater, Mr Archie de Bear, Mr Ashley Dukes, Mrs Margaret Vessey, Miss Margaret Drew, and the late Sir Henry Wood who, in the last months of his life, wrote to me, 'I assure you I held Norman O'Neill's work in the greatest respect, and admired him as an artist and colleague.'

I am also grateful for their consent to the publication of letters or extracts, to Mr Eric Fenby and Messrs G. Bell (publishers of *Delius as I knew him*, by Eric Fenby); to Messrs Putnam (publishers of *Poems*: 1918–1923, by E. Temple Thurston); to Mr Herbert Asquith and Messrs Heinemann (publishers of *Pillicock Hill*, by Herbert Asquith); to the executors of the late Sir James Barrie, Frederick and Jelka Delius, and Sir Edward Elgar; to Mrs C. Elgar Blake; and to *The Times, Punch, The Tatler and Bystander, The Birmingham Post* and *The Star*.

Finally, for any omission in this list of acknowledgments, I should like sincerely to apologise to those concerned, and to assure them that no discourtesy has been intended.

D.H.

I am indebted to Em Marshall-Luck for suggesting the republication of *Norman O'Neill: A Life of Music* by EM Publishing. In the editing I have benefited from the learning and expertise of Stephen Lloyd, who has created additional Indexes and a Bibliography, and the assistance and advice of Dr Lionel Carley, President of The Delius Society, who has supplied transcripts of the letters from Frederick and Jelka Delius: this correspondence has been restored to its original state independent of house-style. New footnotes have been added to set the narrative in context and fresh illustrations have been found from the O'Neill family archive. In every other respect, apart from some small adjustments and the correction of a few minor errors, the original text has been allowed to stand.

Yes, he was a strange mixture. I can see and hear him now in the Savage Club doing his impish best to shock the somewhat humourless and gigantic figure of a man, the late Aubrey Hammond, with Rabelaisian extravagancies, to the great delight of his fellow members. The same Norman (or was it the hidden Norman?) was with me one day in the Club during the last few weeks in the life of that distinguished writer and grand fellow, Basil Macdonald Hastings. Hastings, who was in the same room, knew that his own days were numbered, but there he was, putting up a brave show to his friends with his pungent witticisms and genial camaraderie. I remarked upon the magnificence of Mac's courage, whereupon Norman, who was visibly affected, said quietly, 'It is the power of Jesus Christ.'

Truer words could not have been uttered, for Macdonald Hastings was a member of an old Roman Catholic family, and he awaited his end with Christian fortitude.

This was the real Norman, the one I knew and loved. I speak what is in my heart when I say that of all my many departed Brother Savage companions there is none I miss more than the great artist, the merry-eyed charmer and the staunch friend — Norman O'Neill.

GEORGE BAKER

CHAPTER I

FAMILY HISTORY

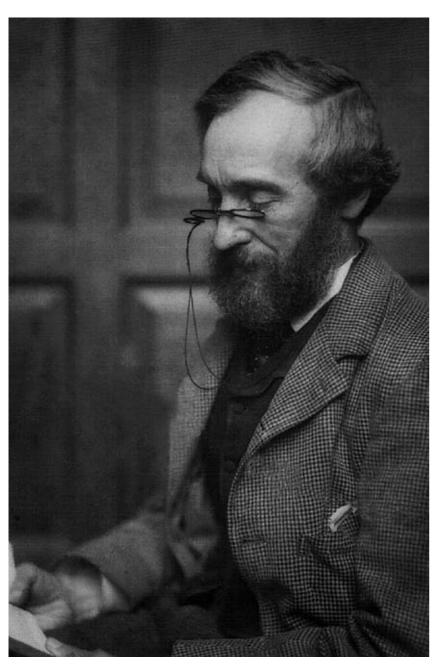
The first chapter of a biography is greatly assisted by some interesting ancestors. Norman O'Neill had an almost embarrassing number of them. He was a remarkable example of inherited talent, which came especially from his mother's side.

His great-grandfather, Arthur O'Neill, was a manufacturer of gold and silver watch-cases in the city of Dublin, at a time when the making of watch-cases, with its attendant chasing and engraving, was one of the fine arts. He seems to have been prosperous, for he owned a private house in Hoey's Court and a country cottage facing the green at Harold's Cross; but by the end of his life the boom in watch-cases — like Dublin trade in general —was on the decline, and when his son Bernard, a clerk in the Board of Ordnance at Dublin Castle, tried to carry on the factory in his spare time for the benefit of his mother and sisters, he found the task too much for him. In the winding-up of the business, Bernard O'Neill was saddled with a load of debt which was to prove a constant source of anxiety. His salary was small, and by his marriage in 1815 to Sarah Gower, daughter of a Dublin solicitor, he had 15 children. The ninth of these, born in 1828, was Norman's father, George Bernard O'Neill.

In 1837 the staff of the Dublin Ordnance Office was cut down and Bernard O'Neill was among those threatened with a pension. Luckily, he had a friend at Court in London¹ who had sufficient influence with the Master-General of the Ordnance to procure him the appointment of storekeeper in the carriage department at Woolwich. This proved a turning-point in the family history. The new storekeeper hurried over to Woolwich to find a suitable home, and his wife and children, travelling more sedately, joined him after a five days' voyage round Land's End.

Arriving in England at the age of nine, G.B. O'Neill went first to a school in Rectory Place, Woolwich, and then to another on the Common, where General

 $^{^{\}rm 1}\,$ Sir John Conroy, Comptroller to the Duchess of Kent, mother of the future Queen Victoria.



G.B. O'Neill (Norman O'Neill's father), date unknown

Gordon was a schoolfellow. Soon he began to study art at the Royal Academy schools, winning the Gold Medal and other medals; when he was 19 his first picture was hung in the Academy, and from 1851 he exhibited annually.

A little notebook, recording 'G.B.'s' income and expenses for nearly 30 years, is still in existence². From it we know that in 1851 he made £50, and in 1852, £150, while in 1853 he jumped to a higher level by earning £525. Having acquired an excellent general technique, he was already specialising in genre painting — a popular and profitable form of art in Victorian days — and the chief success of that year was represented by £63 'received from Mr Colls for picture of *Excursionists*'. Two of the pictures that made his name were *The Foundling*, later acquired by the Tate Gallery, and *The Obstinate Juryman*. Yet his total income for 1854 was barely £400, and the next year it was below £300. A less sturdy character might have hesitated before the responsibilities of matrimony, but 'G.B.' felt that, despite temporary reverses, he was fairly established in his profession, and at about the age of 27 he married Emma Stuart Callcott, who was 10 years younger than himself.

With this marriage a set of new traditions, the heritage of a talented family, was grafted on to the history of the O'Neills, and the influences affecting Norman O'Neill particularly declare themselves. Miss Callcott's father was William Hutchins Callcott (1807–1882), the composer and arranger, and her grandfather, Dr John Wall Callcott (1766–1821), was a still more eminent musician, who ranked as one of the ablest composers of his day. Dr Callcott is best remembered for his glee writing, and to a certain extent for his church music. Though he was taught by Haydn during his visit to England in 1791, he never had much skill in orchestral composition. He toiled ceaselessly on various literary works and lost his health because of them; his musical grammar was published, but he never finished his musical dictionary, the material for which is now in the British Museum³. Dr Callcott's brother — Emma's great-uncle — was Sir Augustus Wall Callcott RA (1779–1844), the landscape painter, whose second wife wrote Little Arthur's History of England. Both men were handsome, Sir Augustus being called 'the handsomest young man in Kensington', and Dr Callcott's daughters were all good-looking. Basing their affections on the two old houses in the Mall where they were born, the brothers were staunch Kensingtonians. A less likely volunteer than

² Now in the V&A National Art Library. Art Expenses – G.B. O'Neill – Ref. Number: MSL/1972/4395.

³ The British Library.

and the public would remember that and treat it with more gentleness than they sometimes do. Nothing seems to me more absurd than to run down the great master-works of the present or past. I do not mean to say that anybody is not perfectly entitled to say: 'Beethoven, Wagner or Stravinsky do not appeal to me.' He may be tired of them, or not in touch with them. But for all that, a great work of art remains a great work of art, however hackneyed it may become, and in spite of fads and fashions should be 'a joy for ever'. I trust our country always may be 'Blessed England, full of melody.'

LIST OF COMPOSITIONS

Abbreviations:

A – Avison Edition (Cary) I – International Music Company

Arn – Edward Arnold JW – J. Williams

Au – Augener Keg – Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner

A-F – Anglo-French KP – Keith Prowse

AHC – Ascherberg Hopwood and Crew LGB – Leonard Gould and Bolttler

B – Boosey and Hawkes O – Oppenheimer Bros.

Bos – Bosworth OUP – Oxford University Press

C – Cramer R – Ricordi

Ch – Chappell Ro – W. Rogers

E – Elkin S – Schott

F – Forsyth S & B – Stainer and Bell

FDH – Francis, Day and Hunter W – A. Weekes

G – H.W. Gray (New York)

I am grateful to many of these publishers for their help in preparing this list. D.H.

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| Date | Opus | Title | Publisher | Date | Opus | Title | Publisher |
|------------------|------|---|------------------|---|--|--|-----------|
| ORCHESTRAL WORKS | | ORCHESTRAL WORKS (continued) | | | | | |
| 1893-7 | 3 | Suite for Strings | | 1926 | | Alice in Wonderland | |
| 1901 | 8 | Overture: In Autumn | | 1927 | | Festal Prelude | Bos |
| 1903-4 | 11 | Overture: Hamlet | | | Published for piano and for full and small orchestra | | |
| 1904 | | Dirge from Hamlet | | | | С | |
| 1904 | 14 | Miniatures for small orchestra | | 1928 Two Shakespearean Sketches Published for full and small orchestra: (i) Nocturne; (ii) Masquerade | | C | |
| 1905-6 | 21 | Overture: In Springtime | | | | | |
| 1908 | 25 | Miniatures Six pieces for full orchestra | | 1934 | | Pastorale for strings | |
| 1910 | 29 | Theme and Variations on an Irish Air (orchestral version of op.17 for two pianos) | version of op.17 | | CHORUS AND ORCHESTRA | | |
| 1911 | 30 | A Scotch Rhapsody for full orchestra | | 1905 | 19 | Waldemar Fantasy for solo voices, chorus | |
| 1913 | 43 | Introduction, Mazurka and Finale | | | | and orchestra | |
| | | (from A <i>Forest Idyll</i>) | | 1909 | 34 | Eight national songs arranged for | |
| 1913 | 47 | Overture: Humoresque | | | | unison, chorus and orchestra | |
| 1916 | 48 | Hornpipe Published for piano and for full and small orchestra | Bos | SOLO | SOLO VOICE AND ORCHESTRA | | |
| 1923 | | Irish Jig for chamber orchestra | | 1904 | 12 | Death on the Hills | |
| 1924 | | Punch and Judy | AHC | | | Ballad for contralto and orchestra | |
| | | Published for piano and for full and small orchestra | | 1908 | 31 | La Belle Dame sans Merci for baritone and full orchestra | |
| 1925 | | Three Exotic Dances for full orchestra (from Kismet) | | 1930 | | The Farmer and the Fairies Words by Herbert Asquith. | |
| 1925 | | Fairy-Tale Suite (from Through the Green Door) | | | | A recitation with orchestral or piano accompaniment | |

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Add 53717 – 53720. NORMAN O'NEILL: incidental music; 1909-1922. Autograph unless otherwise stated. Excerpts published. Paper. Four volumes – full scores: *The Blue Bird, Mary Rose, Merchant of Venice, Julius Caesar*. Also: 53717 A & B.

71456-71472. O'NEILL PAPERS: correspondence and papers of Norman O'Neill, composer, and of Adine O'Neill (née Ruckert), pianist and teacher; 1895-1942, n.d. The major part of the O'Neills' correspondence pre-dates their marriage in 1899. Paper. Seventeen volumes. British Library arrangement.

MSS Mus. 930-942. O'NEILL PAPERS: correspondence and papers of Norman O'Neill, composer, and Adine O'Neill (née Ruckert), pianist and teacher, and of other members of their family; 1895-1979, n.d. Supplementing Add. 71456-71472. Partly typewritten, partly printed. English, French and German. Many letters are from other members of the 'Frankfurt group', Henry Balfour Gardiner, Cyril Scott and Roger Quilter. All identifiable correspondents are included in the index to this catalogue. Fourteen volumes. British Library arrangement.

MS Mus. 1744. Cuttings book of Adine Ruckert, later O'Neill; 1894-1912

1 RPS MS 272 – 417. O Neill (Norman) composer; Treasurer, Royal Philharmonic Society.

Royal Philharmonic Society Archive. Official papers, etc. of the Royal Philharmonic Society; 1813-1968, n.d. Formerly British Library Loan 48. The Society was founded in London in 1813, and granted the prefix 'Royal' in 1912. The larger part of the archive was placed on loan in 1962.

2 RPS MS 306 – 307. O Neill (Norman) composer; Treasurer, Royal Philharmonic Society

[formerly Loan 48.9/14-15] Account ledgers; 1908-55. Income and expenditure, arranged under headings such as subscriptions, guarantees, broadcasting fees, recording royalties, etc. and orchestra, conductors and soloists, rent of halls, printing, etc. Two volumes. $317 \times 205 \, \text{mm}$. RPS MS 306. 1908-34.

Royal College of Music

Hand list online RCM Web-site (Library)

O'NEILL, Norman

A collection of 83 manuscripts of incidental music to plays – either full scores or piano conductor scores, and some with parts – together with misc. MSS of songs and chamber music. RCM MS 4351 to 4433.

Manuscripts of Norman O'Neill, chamber music and songs, presented by his granddaughter, Mrs Katherine Jessel, March 1996. RCM MS 7334 to 7374.

1 item from collection of Leslie Bridgewater presented RCM 1973. RCM MS 7378.

Songs RCM MS 7433 to 7462.

N.B. The manuscripts at the RCM include a considerable number of works (incidental music, chamber music and songs) not included in the List of Compositions reproduced on pp.177-191, that was chiefly restricted to published works.

Surrey History Centre

Deposited by Mrs Katherine Jessel, Derek Hudson's daughter, in September 2009 and February 2011.

8593 Derek Hudson (1911-2003), journalist and author: Papers, including correspondence, photographs, cuttings and papers, 1854-2006.

Material relating to Norman O'Neill.

8593 L192/1-2, L193-L196, L197 Correspondence relating to Norman O'Neill.

Press and public cuttings 1871-1996.

8593/1/2 C156-C200 cuttings relating to lectures, recitals, letters and comments by Mrs Norman O'Neill; see also M207-M208.

Works by F.B. and relating to G.B. and Norman O'Neill.

8593/33/34/35/36/37/38.

Personal material 1862 – [1960s].

8593/3 Box 1-2 Letters from Adine O'Neill.

The Delius Trust Archive

26 letters from the Deliuses to the O'Neills and 35 letters and postcards from the O'Neills to the Deliuses.