



- [audio](#)
- [biography](#)
- [chronology](#)
- [forum](#)
- [mailing list](#)
- [music: chamber](#)
- [music: orchestral](#)
- [music: solo](#)
- [music: vocal](#)
- [people & links](#)
- [site map](#)
- [what's new](#)
- [writing](#)

[home page](#)



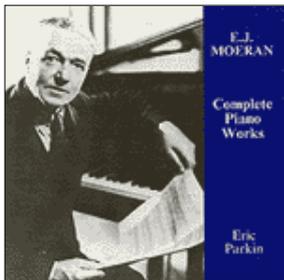
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### Solo music

There is of course a certain degree of overlap between this and other sections of Moeran's output - with the exception of the piano pieces he did not write for unaccompanied solo instruments. It is therefore in the interests of helpfulness that all works where there is an identifiable instrumental soloist involved have been included in this category.

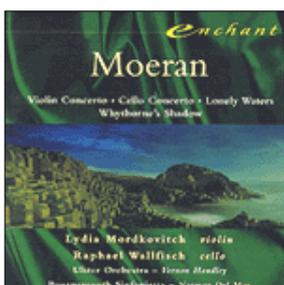
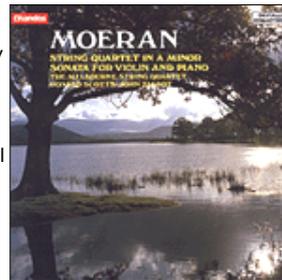


### Piano Music

Written during what is roughly the first half of his career, Moeran's music for solo piano is just about sufficient to fit onto a Compact Disc - indeed an excellent recording of these works has been made by Eric Parkin. Several of the pieces were published grouped together, and these have been presented here in those original groupings. The works span the years 1919 to 1933, and vary from relatively playable two or three minute pieces to the technically challenging fifteen minute Theme and Variations. In addition he wrote a Piano Trio in 1920, and much later on, the Third Rhapsody for Piano and Orchestra, completed in 1943.

### Sonatas

Moeran's three sonatas often seem to explore areas untouched by his other works. The better known of the three, those for Violin and Piano and for Cello and Piano both offer a starkness of voice not often apparent in Moeran's other work. Of great interest to historians and true Moeran nuts is the Sonata for Two Violins. Written largely from his hospital bed, this work comes from a vital time as he attempted to turn from the Delius-influenced harmonies of the 1920s and find a new voice. Despite receiving good reviews on its debut, the work has, more than any other, been the subject of neglect. In an attempt to rectify this, I have been able to track down a copy of the score and commission a world première recording of this fifteen minute piece, [now available on the site](#).



### Concertos

Moeran's Violin Concerto is, for me, one of the great works of this genre. If there is one piece which justifies Moeran receiving greater recognition it is surely this - a work which can swing you from delight to tears in minutes. The Cello Concerto was one of Moeran's last major works, written for his wife - the cellist Peers Coetmore - in 1945, and stands as a robust and sweeping confirmation of his compositional brilliance.

### Oboe Music

The Fantasy Quartet for Oboe and Strings was written in 1946 for the great oboe player Leon Goossens, and is one of a very small number of works for this particular combination of instruments. This piece is also to be found in the Chamber Music section.

## piano

- [Piano Works Page](#)
- [Three Pieces](#) (1919) R4
- [Theme and Variations](#) (1920) R5
- [On a May Morning](#) (1921) R12
- [Toccata](#) (1921) R13
- [Stalham River](#) (1921) R14
- [Three Fancies](#) (1922) R17
- [Two Legends](#) (1923) R22
- [Summer Valley](#) (1925) R37
- [Bank Holiday](#) (1925) R36
- [Irish Love Song](#) (1926) R47
- [The White Mountain](#) (1927) R50
- [Two Pieces](#) (1933) R67
- [Piano Trio](#) (1920-5) R6
- [Rhapsody for Piano and Orchestra](#) (1942-3) R79

## sonatas

- [Violin Sonata](#) (1923) R15
- [Sonata for Two Violins](#) (1930) R53
- [Cello Sonata](#) (1947) R92

## concertos

- [Violin Concerto](#) (1937-41) R78
- [Cello Concerto](#) (1945) R89

## oboe

- [Fantasy Quartet](#) (1946) R90

[1](#) = Full page available



## music: solo

## Solo Piano Works

### Published

See individual works

### Recordings

[Eric Parkin](#)  
(1994, CD ★★★★★)

[Una Hunt](#)  
(Spring 2001, CD)

[Eric Parkin](#)  
(Selection)  
Lyrita SRSC 42  
(1972, LP ★★★★★)

[Iris Loveridge](#)  
(Selection)  
Lyrita RCS 3  
(1959, mono LP ★★★★★)

### Reviews

### Further Writing

### Audio

**At Moeran.com:**  
[Autumn Woods](#)  
[Theme and Variations](#)  
[On a May Morning](#)  
[Stalham River](#)  
[Elegy](#)  
[Summer Valley](#)  
[Bank Holiday](#)

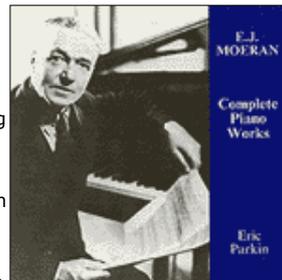
Also available from  
[Amazon](#)

## home page

Moeran wrote just about a CD's worth in total of published music of solo piano, in addition to a handful of earlier, [unpublished works](#), between the years 1919 and 1933. Most of the works last somewhere between 2 and 5 minutes, with the notable exception of the Theme and Variations, his only extended work for solo piano, stretching towards a quarter of an hour. Much of the music of this time shows Moeran's earlier influences, such as Delius and Ireland, and the set makes an attractive listen. The recording by Eric Parkin is excellent, and a new disc by Irish Pianist Una Hunt is due for release in 2001.

I am grateful, as ever to Barry Marsh, for his notes, and also to J Martin Stafford for permission to use extracts from his Eric Parkin CD. For anyone having difficulty in obtaining this CD, he writes "*I will send the Moeran disc to any address in the world (air mail where appropriate) for £12-50 (cheque to me) or a \$20-00 bill (not cheque, as my bank would charge me about \$10 to convert it to sterling). I am only an e-mail message or a letter away, so no one who wants my products should have too much difficulty in obtaining them.*"

You can contact J Martin Stafford, 298 Blossomfield Road, Solihull, B91 1TH, England, visit the [website](#), or e-mail: [ISMERON99@cs.com](mailto:ISMERON99@cs.com)



### Barry Marsh's Piano Works Notes

#### Three Piano Pieces (1919). R4

These are Moeran's first published compositions; they also mark the start of a lifelong love affair with Ireland, its scenery and its people. Early in 1918 he had come to Boyle in County Roscommon to recuperate from his war injuries. His first response to the landscape presents us with an impression not of reality but of other-worldliness. The Lake Island evokes Yeats's 'land of fairie', unfolding lento over the calm and peaceful water. As a student, Moeran had heard [Bax's](#) In the Faery Hills. Autumn Woods owes something to that composer's tone poem November Woods, composed only the year before (1917). By contrast, At a Horse Fair is a lively depiction of a fair that Moeran had attended in Roscommon. For the first time we hear the offbeat rhythms which were to colour so many of his later works.

Published: Schott, 1921

#### Theme and Variations (1920) R5

The theme, introduced andante, seems instantly recognisable and yet cannot be categorised. A Norfolk folksong, surely? But no. It is Moeran's own, and its beauty serves as the basis for six variations and a finale. The first two are marked Poco piu moto and Allegro scherzando. The third, Alla marcia a con energico, is a march built out of rising octaves, which climax only to fall away into stillness. By contrast, Variation 4 is a calm Allegretto mixing bars of 6/8 and 9/8. The fifth, Vivace, reveals Moeran's true stature and looks forward to the Cello Sonata of 1947. Variation 6 is slow and songlike, non troppo lento a rubato. A series of violent chords wakes us from our reverie as the finale, Allargando ma non troppo brings this, the most extended of his piano pieces, to its scintillating conclusion.

Published: Schott, 1923

#### On a May Morning (1921) R12

In 1920 Moeran resumed his studies at the Royal College of Music. His composition teacher was [John Ireland](#), whose influence is clearly heard in this work of 1921. If the style is derivative, the structure is individual, transforming a rather limpid introduction into a more eventful dance in 6/8 time.

Published: Schott, 1922

#### Toccata (1921) R13

Written in Norfolk at the same time as Stalham River, the music is characterised by the emergence of its theme in chords contrasted by a singing central section. Again the writing is florid, in the manner of [Debussy's](#) Children's Corner Suite, for which Moeran had a great affection.

Published: Chester, 1924

#### Stalham River (1921) R14

The inscription on the manuscript "Bacton, Norfolk September 1921" refers to the village where the family had been living since 1913. [Expeditions into the East Norfolk countryside often brought the composer to the tiny hamlets of Sutton and Stalham.](#) With its florid writing, this is a loving portrait of that part of the world which he knew so well and which inspired the 1924 orchestral piece [Lonely Waters](#).

Published: Chester, 1924

## Piano Music

[Three Pieces](#) (1919)  
[Theme and Variations](#) (1920)  
[On a May Morning](#) (1921)  
[Toccata](#) (1921)  
[Stalham River](#) (1921)  
[Three Fancies](#) (1922)  
[Two Legends](#) (1923)  
[Summer Valley](#) (1925)  
[Bank Holiday](#) (1925)  
[Irish Love Song](#) (1926)  
[The White Mountain](#) (1927)  
[Two Pieces](#) (1933)

#### Three Fancies (1922) R17

The Norfolk countryside impressed the young Moeran, particularly on his [long walks from village to village in search of folk songs](#). After a short introduction the main theme of Windmills develops presto from a three bar fragment. The reiterated accompanying figure suggests the whirling of windmill sails - a familiar sight on the Broadland skyline. Elegy brings us to the heart of the matter, a dreamy pastorate yet with hints of darker moods below the surface - a prophetic glimpse perhaps of the composer's own destiny. Burlesque whirls us around, calling to mind the music of Mahler, of whom he was to write: his music is perfectly sublime to the point of spiritual ecstasy.  
Published: Schott, 1922

#### Two Legends (1923) R22

By 1923 Moeran was on the threshold of success. [Folksong](#) had been the unifying element in his first orchestral rhapsody but, as with [Vaughan Williams](#), it was so much a part of his subconscious that he could just as easily create his own. This is how A Folk Story is cast. Rune is more elusive but no less atmospheric. Its title, which relates to the Viking 'alphabet of signs' may owe something to Bax's interest in the subject. Moeran had met him in 1919, but both composers were influenced by a greater master, who had long ago fallen under the spell of the Norse myths - Sibelius.  
Published: Augener, 1924

#### Summer Valley (1925) R37

Moeran dedicated this piece to [Delius](#), whom he fervently admired ever since hearing his Piano Concerto while still a student. Delius's style is imitated in a beautiful Sicilienne, a form often used in Delius's tone poems. The layout of Summer Valley seems to show Moeran thinking more of orchestral colour than of the textures of the piano.  
Published: OUP, 1928

#### Bank Holiday (1925) R36

This short celebratory piece, with more than an echo of [Percy Grainger's](#) Shepherd's Hey, seems to be Moeran's way of expressing optimism for a new future. 1925 was, after all, the year in which he would break away from his conventional family background and go to live with the equally unconventional [Peter Warlock](#).  
Published: OUP, 1927

#### Irish Love Song (1926) R47

Moeran's visits to Ireland did not become frequent until the early 1930s, so this folk song might have been brought to his attention by [Peter Warlock](#) (who too had spent some time in Ireland and to whom this arrangement is dedicated). On the other hand, Moeran might have heard it as early as 1918. [Hamilton Harty](#), another of Moeran's mentors, also used this tune in his Irish Symphony.  
Published: OUP, 1926

#### The White Mountain (1927) R50

Moeran made his piano arrangement of this Irish folk song in 1927, a significant year in which he was considering how to exorcise the dominant influence of [Peter Warlock](#). The overt use of chromaticism is here avoided in favour of simplicity. The tune must have haunted Moeran; for shortly before he died in 1950 he was contemplating a Symphonic Scena to verses by his friend Niall O'Leary Curtis, the last part of which was to have been based on The White Mountain.  
Published: OUP, 1927

#### Two Pieces (1933) R67

Several of Moeran's works after 1930 are pervaded by an underlying sadness which mirrors a loss. [Peter Warlock](#) had died in that year. The hymn-like almost mournful sadness of the Prelude in G minor is in curious contrast to the perky echoes of 'Tom, Tom the Piper's Son' in the middle section. The Berceuse is a continuous melody rooted in the traditions of folk-song, freely accompanied but also harmonised in the grandest [Delian](#) manner.  
Published: Schott, 1935



music: chamber

Piano Trio (1920-25)  
R6

### Published

OUP, 1925

Allegro  
Lento Molto  
Allegro Vivace  
Allegro

"Youth celebrates its new  
found strength with  
unrestrained joy"

### Recordings

[Joachim Piano Trio](#)  
(1998, CD ★★★★★)

### Reviews

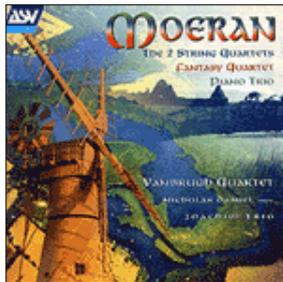
[Gramophone Magazine  
Review](#)

### Further Writing

### Audio

[At Moeran.com](#)

[home page](#)



Notes by Barry Marsh

It is on the strength of his larger scale works, the Symphony, the two concertos and the Sinfonietta, that the reputation of E J Moeran will be assured. However, much of the chamber music is also of high quality. It was a medium in which he always felt at ease, having gained 'inside knowledge' as a 16 year old violin player in his own quartet at school.

By the time he came to enter the Royal College of Music two years later Moeran could claim intimate knowledge of all the Haydn quartets, as well as having composed no less than three of his own. Study with Stanford was to be interrupted by military service in the 1914-18 war, so it was not until February 1920 that Moeran was able to return to serious composition.

First sketches for the Piano Trio date from this time, followed by a first performance at the Wigmore Hall in November 1921. By the time of its second performance there on 13th June 1925 it had been largely rewritten. If the style is reminiscent of his teacher John Ireland, Moeran's Trio is full of an exuberance firmly set in its intention to announce the arrival of a new voice on the English musical scene.

Youth celebrates its new found strength with unrestrained joy; Moeran gives us but one chance to share his optimism which, by 1930, would have become more restrained, and from bitter experience, more introverted and reflective.



music: **orchestral**

Rhapsody for Piano and Orchestra (1942-3)  
R79

Published  
Chester, 1943

Recordings

Margaret Fingerhut,  
Vernon Handley,  
Ulster Orchestra:

[1 - c/w Symphony](#)

[2 - c/w Rhapsodies 1 & 2 & In The Mountain Country](#)

(1989, CD ★★★★★)

John McCabe,  
New Philharmonia  
Orch., Braithwaite:  
Lyrita SRCS 91  
(1977, LP ★★★★★)

Reviews

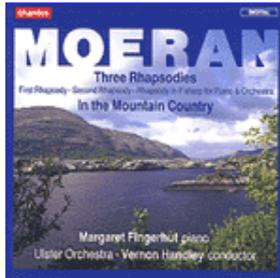
Further Writing

["New Music" by Robin Hull](#) (1946)

Audio

[At Moeran.com: Excerpt](#)

[home page](#)



The Rhapsody in F sharp minor\* for Piano and Orchestra is almost, but not quite, Moeran's Piano Concerto, written shortly before the [Sinfonietta](#) which wasn't quite his Second Symphony. It was written as a Proms commission (following an earlier suggestion from [Arnold Bax](#) that Moeran write something for piano and orchestra) for the pianist Harriet Cohen to play. It was first performed at the Royal Albert Hall on August 19th, 1943, a concert later reflected on by Lionel Hill:

"I waited impatiently until at last Miss Cohen entered to applause and sat down at the piano, adjusted her stool, looked to the conductor - and the Rhapsody sprang to life.

*"I had studied the piano reduction score of this work during previous weeks; nevertheless, I was captivated by the triple-time entry of the cellos and double basses, followed by the piano's dramatic statement of the first theme, and as the performance continued I became enthralled by the spell that this composer could weave. There was a juxtaposition of violence and lyricism that I was later to know was typical of the man himself. There was also a pervading sense of nostalgia for the pastoral scene of long ago - something whose roots lay deeper than folk music itself."*

Geoffrey Self points out that Moeran, despite initial scepticism, grew to quite enjoy the work himself - unlike some of its contemporaries. Having written in October 1943 "to my certain knowledge, it contains more than its fair share of tripe", eleven months later he was to confess "I find I was wrong, and I really think that after all it is a very good effort on my part. It seems now so virile and logical."



Pianist Harriet Cohen

Written with a wartime audience in mind, the piece is both immediately accessible and requiring of considerable showy virtuosity. Geoffrey Self calls it a 'large-scale waltz', albeit one for which the composer claimed to have found the inspiration in the 'four-ale bars of Kerry'. Certainly for an unchallenging, attractive introduction to Moeran's music, this fifteen minute piece is hard to beat. As Self notes: "for this work and one or two others of about the same time, there was to be a looseness of construction and relaxation of manner which was not inappropriate to the aim - a popular work for the delectation of Proms audiences in wartime." This 'looseness' was to be significantly tightened up when he came to the *Sinfonietta* of 1944.

*\*Note - from Barry Marsh: "Barry Collett, conductor of the Rutland Sinfonia, performed the Piano Rhapsody with Margaret Fingerhut in Leicester in EJM's Centenary Year 1994. Both came to the firm conclusion that the piece should be re-titled 'Rhapsody in F sharp minor' - indeed a study of the score would seem to support this, that much of the music veers towards the minor, rather than major keys."*

"I was captivated by the triple-time entry of the cellos and double basses, followed by the piano's dramatic statement of the first theme, and as the performance continued I became enthralled by the spell that this composer could weave"

Real Audio

From the [Chandos](#) recording by Margaret Fingerhut with Vernon Handley conducting the Ulster Orchestra, the opening:

[Piano Rhapsody \(30"\)](#)





music: chamber

Violin Sonata (1923)  
R15

Published

Chester 1923

Allegro non troppo  
Lento  
Vivace e molto ritmico

Recordings

Scotts/Talbot  
(1984, CD ★★★★★)

Reviews

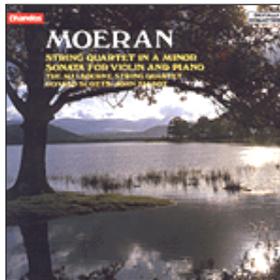
[Musical Times, Feb 1923](#)

Further Writing

Audio

[At Moeran.com](#)

home page



Moeran's Sonata for Violin and Piano premiered at the same concert at London's Wigmore Hall as the [First String Quartet](#), written in 1921, and of the two seemed to get the better reception, the reviewer in the Musical Times commenting~ "the Allegro of the Sonata shows a great advance, for its impetuosity is not hampered by technical obligations, although these are met as consciously as we have a right to expect in a modern sonata"

Geoffrey Self describes the work as having "a thrusting passion", and goes on to suggest that, were it not for the influence of Peter Warlock, this work may well point the direction in which Moeran's music would have headed. The music certainly is thrusting and passionate, and displays a level of dissonance greater than much of his output. At first hearing one might find it hard to recognise as a work by Moeran, until a few chinks of typical lyricism find their way out, moments of vaguely folk-like music. But easy-listening it ain't.

There's an intense brooding surrounding the first movement, in its relentless minor key augmented by broad Ireland-esque chromatic piano accompaniment. This is leavened by the second subject somewhat - providing those chinks of daylight - before finally ending in a whirling frenzy up towards a quite unexpected major chord.

The brooding is intensified in the slow second movement, though again Moeran uses a contrasting second subject, this time with a pronounced Aeolian mode accent to bring relief from the dissonant chromaticism that runs through most of the material. A characteristic of much of Moeran's music throughout his life is a section of wonderfully bright, lyrical music, radiant with warm sunlight, suddenly having a shadow cast over it and turning dark, even bitter. This seems to be operating in reverse in this piece. The moments of light are brief, and bring the dark, rugged edges of the majority of the music into a kind of relief.

The final movement, a "complex and energetic rondo" (Self) launches itself with great vigour. Elsewhere in Moeran's work a theme in 9/8 time might be expected to rapidly evolve into some kind of jig; the tone here is jagged. Self suggests an inspiration in [Stravinsky's](#) Rite of Spring, and in the pounding rhythms of the final movement this comparison seems more than justified. The harmonies too are among the harshest Moeran ever wrote, leading a reviewer in 1924 to plead: "must we really have ninths and ninths all the way...?".

At around eighteen minutes the Violin Sonata is not a long work, and is perhaps unfairly neglected. Self cites it as Moeran's first real masterpiece, the culmination of his student days, a piece apart from his other early work. As both a violinist and pianist, perhaps it's to be expected that Moeran would be able to write well for the combination, and it's a real pity he was apparently never inspired to try his hand at a second such work.

It seems hard to come by recordings of it, though the 1982 Chandos recording by Donald Scotts and John Talbot (CHAN 8465) is worth tracking down. Be warned, however - if you've heard the two more recent recordings of the First String Quartet that accompany the Sonata on this disc you may well be disappointed with the somewhat lumpen rendition given here by the Melbourne Quartet.

The moments of light are brief, and bring the dark, rugged edges of the majority of the music into a kind of relief...



## music: chamber

### Published

Boosey & Hawkes, 1937

### Recordings

### Reviews

### Further Writing

### Audio

[At Moeran.com](#)

[home page](#)

## Sonata for Two Violins (1930) R53

Allegro non troppo  
Presto  
Passacaglia



The elusive score

Moeran's Sonata for Two Violins, written in 1930, is probably the most elusive of his officially published works, yet for the Moeran scholar or historian, it potentially holds the key to his mature compositional style and success. The work has somehow escaped the interest of the record companies, and until very recently potential performers faced great difficulty in finding a score from which to play.

While it is difficult to date precisely a number of works Moeran wrote at the end of the 1920's and start of the 1930's, which does seem clear is that the two chamber works he produced at this time marked the beginning of a new direction for Moeran, and a deliberate attempt to put behind him his Delian roots. In November 1930 he wrote to [Peter Warlock](#):

"...It is an excellent discipline in trying to break away from the much of Delius-like chords, which I have been obsessed with on every occasion I have attempted to compose during the last two years. Perhaps some good has come of being abed and unable to keep running to the keyboard for every bar."

This is doubly telling: Moeran not only wanted to change his style, but a bad injury kept him in his bed for quite some time, and he was for the first time composing straight from his head to the page. The results in the Sonata for Two Violins and the [String Trio](#) are perhaps two of the starkest pieces Moeran ever wrote. I have written elsewhere that I view the String Trio in its final form as an elegy to Warlock. The Sonata for Two Violins predates Warlock's death, and seems to lack some of the despair evident in the Trio.

This apparent of lack emotional weight, exacerbated by the fact that Moeran writes no slow movement, is perhaps also reinforced by the constraints of the instrumentation. It is a highly unusual pairing for this style of music - Geoffrey Self comments "It is the choice of passacaglia for the last movement which perhaps tells us most about Moeran's intention, for this is an 'academic' form, and a searching test of compositional skill."

I would go one stage further - trying to write in a recognisably Moeran-like style with the exceptionally limited tonal resources of two violins is in itself a 'searching test of compositional skill'. It is a test which Moeran passes admirably, though not without creating quite a tricky work for the players. There is no room for error and no easy ride for either performer, for each part is treated as equal and each note is vital to holding the piece together - and there quite literally aren't enough notes available to create an 'mush of Delius-like chords'.

The first movement opens with a jaunty and highly memorable major key folk-like tune, tossed between the two players and developed with a very recognisable Moeran voice. There is much use of echoing between the two players, and they pass through a variety of keys with the material. The movement is written in Sonata form, though the second subject is far harder to discern, as everything appears to grow organically out of the opening. There are typically Moeran moments where the clouds appear to form over the sunny feel, and the mood changes quickly and dramatically more than once.

The second movement is a tricky Presto which Self describes as a Scherzo. Well, perhaps, but it lacks the true Scherzo lightness he was to employ in his [Symphony](#). This movement is, if anything, the dark heart of the work, with the two instruments frequently working harmonically against each other, taking a mournful folk-like melody and skewering it on a series of vicious stabbing pizzicato chords, their atonality only resolving with a surprising major chord ending.

hear the first extract from  
an historical world  
premiere recording

### MP3 Audio

Anonymous premiere recording of the Sonata for Two Violins in high quality digital stereo. Note that the final movement is incomplete in this recording:

[Allegro non troppo](#)  
[Presto](#)  
[Passacaglia](#)



[See also full page item](#)

The Passacaglia is superficially quite attractive, its difficulty in playing and timing masked by the apparent ease with which the two parts hold together after the brittleness of the preceding movement. But, as Geoffrey Self writes, "In the last movement of the Sonata...the part-writing seems to be without pattern - even aimless on occasion." With the benefit of a recording, of sorts, one can perhaps try and unravel where Moeran is coming from in this movement. He does manage to create a flatness of texture for much of the first half of the movement, the two melodies weaving apparently unstoppably around each other. Yet again we begin with a very folk-like modal minor melody, but one from which the life seems to have been stripped.

As the melody develops and wraps around itself the effect starts to get quite claustrophobic, and the harmony starts to mutate, until suddenly strange pizzicato chords break the cycle. The mood turns increasingly dark until... my recording breaks down and stops! And for the rest of the piece? Well the score suggest more dramatics and more changes, but I hesitate to provide further comment before having the chance to hear a full recording of the movement - watch this space!



Moeran in the late 1920's



music: chamber

Sonata for Cello and Piano (1947)  
R92

Published

Novello, 1948

Tempo Moderato  
Adagio  
Allegro

"If nothing else of Moeran had survived, we would know from this Sonata that he was among the finest composers of his time"

Recordings

[Raphael Wallfisch & John Yorke](#)  
(1994, CD ★★★★★)



"I have just spent all day yesterday on cello sonata proofs. You know I don't usually boast, but coming back to it, going through it note by note, and looking at it impartially, I honestly think it is a masterpiece. I can't think how I ever managed to write it."

Moeran, in a letter to Peers, Kenmare 1948

Peers Coetmore & Eric Parkin  
Lyrita SRCS 42  
(1972, LP ★★★★★)

Reviews

[Musical Times \(1949\)](#)

If one is to go along with the prevailing view that the Moeran's Serenade in G of 1948 is the first indication of his final decline, an opinion which is weakened when the work is considered in its original full form rather than the abbreviated published score, then without a doubt the Cello Sonata of 1947 is Moeran's final masterpiece. As the quote above shows, even the ever-modest composer felt rightfully proud of his work, though naturally his self-deprecation comes through.

Further Writing

This Sonata follows the Cello Concerto and, before that, the Prelude, in the trilogy of works Moeran wrote for his new wife, the cellist Peers Coetmore. There may have been any number of reasons why the marriage itself was not a success, but as a trigger for the Concerto and Sonata, lovers of Moeran's music can only be glad that, having 'given my word as a gentleman', Jack went through with the marriage and then put all his creative efforts into creating music for his new wife.

Audio

[At Moeran.com: Excerpt](#)

Moeran had written to Peers in 1943: "There are wonderful things we could do together in creating music, not only concertos and orchestral work, but chamber music." It is difficult to precisely track the development of the Sonata and Concerto. With a number of commissions to complete, Moeran had knocked out a short and somewhat undistinguished Prelude for Cello and Piano in 1943, as a 'keepsake' while she toured abroad. It seemed initially that his next work for Peers, following the completion of the Sinfonietta would be the Cello Sonata, and work apparently started on this in February 1944, but then he turned to the Concerto, which was finished by the following year.

[At Amazon: 1st movt](#)  
[2nd movt](#)

Geoffrey Self's analysis in his book "The Music of E J Moeran" suggests similarities in the musical ideas in the first movements of both major cello works indicate some sort of joint conception. Indeed, he identifies a melodic 'cell' idea common not only to these two works, but also used in both the Symphony and the Violin Concerto. Self goes on to say: "It is now possible to see that this melodic cell is one which Moeran had been toying with for most of his creative life." Self goes into great detail, and certainly his close analysis is highly recommended to students of this work and of Moeran generally - I shall not attempt to paraphrase him here!

home page

What is worth lifting word for word from Self's book, however, is his conclusion:

The Sonata for Piano and Cello is the ultimate prize at the end of Moeran's long journey and apprenticeship, absorbing and rejecting and eventually crystallising a language and technique fit to express the deeply personal thought of what he knew to be his masterpiece. The concentration of thought is such that it would be difficult to find a redundant sound; whatever criticisms may be sustained of other works, whether of technique or of derivation, they fall to the ground here. If nothing else of Moeran had survived, we would know from this Sonata that he was among the finest composers of his time.

This fulsome praise echoes the reception the Sonata received on its completion - in the Musical Times of December 1949, A.H. wrote: "Every piece of this work is genuinely impassioned, and one cannot find a point at which the interest flags or the material belongs to a miniature conception...since Delius's Cello Sonata, there seems to have been no better work in the romantic and rhapsodic style that so well suits the cello."



**music: orchestral**

**Violin Concerto (1937-41)  
R78**

Published  
Novello, 1950

Allegro moderato  
Rondo: Vivace - Alla valse burlesca  
Lento

" a delightful frolic through the sights and sounds of that most famous of traditional Irish fairs"

**Recordings**

[Albert Sammons, BBC SO, Boult,](#)  
(1946 broadcast, CD ★★★★★)

[Lydia Mordkovich, Ulster Orch., Handley](#)  
(1989, CD ★★★★★)

John Georgiadis, LSO, Vernon Handley, Lyrita SRCS 105  
(1979, LP ★★★★★)

**Reviews**

[Gramophone Magazine reviews](#)

**Further Writing**

[Hubert Foss's thoughts prior to the premiere](#)

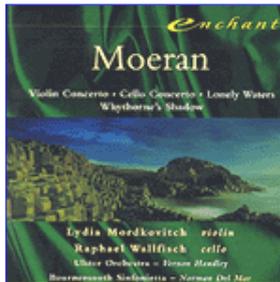
[Musical Times, 1942](#)  
(descriptive article, August 1942)

[Musical Times, 1943](#)  
(analytical descriptive article, August 1943)

**Audio**

[Albert Sammons full](#)

[At Amazon.co.uk:](#)  
[1st movt](#)  
[2nd movt](#)  
[3rd movt](#)



The Violin Concerto is without doubt one of Moeran's finest musical achievements, a work which truly deserves a place amongst the great works of history. And yet, its story is one of sorry neglect, with the only known recording prior to 1979 a privately cut set of 78's owned by Moeran's friend, Lionel Hill, recently made available on a CD transfer. One can only speculate at the different course history might have taken had a commercial recording been made during Moeran's lifetime, with the composer around to promote it - surely it would now sit beside Elgar's Concerto in the repertoire.

Moeran began work on his Violin Concerto almost as soon as the ink was dry on his Symphony, and it has been suggested that the work is in some way an answer to the questions raised in that work. It is certainly much lighter in spirit, a deliberate evocation of Moeran's beloved west of Ireland. Many commentators have drawn comparison with Elgar's Violin Concerto, suggesting this as a reference piece for the Moeran, and while there are parallels which one might draw in detailed analysis, they remain two quite different works.



The Moeran Concerto has a joy to it, particularly in the evocation of Puck Fair in the second movement, a delightful frolic through the sights and sounds of that most famous of traditional Irish fairs. This is surrounded by two beautiful evocations of the landscape around Kenmare, County Kerry, with the first movement addressing Kenmare Bay, the last an autumnal scene along Kenmare River. In all three movements the clouds which gathered over the Symphony are lifted, and we find Moeran's personal answer to his demons. The tensions he builds up here do find resolution, in beauty, scenic grandeur (although not in the Elgarian sense at all) and thrilling excitement.

**MP3 Audio** First Movement

Lionel Hill's restored recording of Albert Sammons and the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Boult in 1946, the full piece:

[Allegro moderato](#)  
[Rondo - Vivace](#)  
[Lento](#)



[See also full page item](#)

**Second Movement**

From the opening fanfare we're immediately transported to a different place, and the soloist introduces us on a merry jig through the thrills and spills of the fair, with some fabulous technical fireworks thrown in, and an unmistakable Irish flavour to the melodies and rhythms. Moeran's mastery

of orchestral textures and possibilities is brilliant, as he effortlessly leads us from one scene to another, and one pictures the freewheeling joy and chaos, the people, old and young, the merry revellers, and the quiet corners, the beautiful people he loved so much. Listen out for what Geoffrey Self described as the rather tipsy waltz which makes a brief appearance towards the end of the movement!

**Third Movement**

The feeling here is often more of serenity, and although clouds appear to be gathering at the start of the movement, small rays of sunlight break through from time to time, sufficient to light the way, to pick out a path, holding our spirits up for a resolution of almost heart-rending beauty and ultimately autumnal tranquility. Here is Moeran's answer to life's problems, found in the country landscape he visited again and again, and where he found the inspiration for so much of his work.

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[home page](#)





music: orchestral

Cello Concerto (1945)  
R89

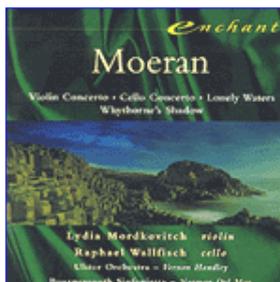
Published  
Novello, 1947

Moderato  
Adagio  
Allegretto deciso, alla marcia

Recordings

[Raphael Wallfisch, Bournemouth Sinfonietta, Norman Del Mar](#)  
(1986, CD ★★★★★)

Peers Coetmore, London Philharmonic, Sir Adrian Boult  
Lyrita SRCS 43  
(1970, LP ★★★★★)



In 1986, Lionel Hill wrote: "It is a complete mystery why this splendid Concerto has not been gratefully seized upon by today's cellists, whose repertoire is not extensive anyway. The work is in conventional sonata form and is one continuous paean for the cello, which is allowed to sing through the expert orchestration from start to finish, and is the final expression of all that Moeran had strived to say throughout his life."

Moeran's Cello Concerto is without doubt one of his crowning achievements, and yet it can be a difficult work to get to love. It is one of those pieces which takes time to be assimilated, time to be loved. Perhaps the opening theme is less than welcoming? Or is it rather a work yet to be done

full justice on disc? For it is truly a work of great beauty, and one worth persevering with if it does not initially appeal, for ultimately the rewards are fabulous.

Reviews

[Premiere, Dublin \(1945\)](#)

[Hallé Orchestra \(1946\)](#)

[Gramophone Magazine review](#)

Further Writing

Moeran opens the Cello Concerto with a grim, jagged melody which, if it lacks lyrical beauty, does suggest an elemental harshness - one can imagine wild walks over wintry Kerry Mountains in a torment of passions as he contemplates and questions his marriage to Peers Coetmore, for whom the concerto was written. This is indeed stormy stuff, and Moeran's exquisite control of his orchestral forces allows the mournful cello to really sing out its pain. And yet there is sunlight here, glinting occasionally through his clouds, bringing brief, hopeful moments before the clouds gather again, switching from the major back to the minor and the tempestuous forces of the full orchestra. From then on in Moeran's soloist is wracked with torment and questions, sometimes introspective, sometimes thrashing out, always with the near bitterness that cuts through this entire movement. The movement ends with a brush of cold air...

Real Audio

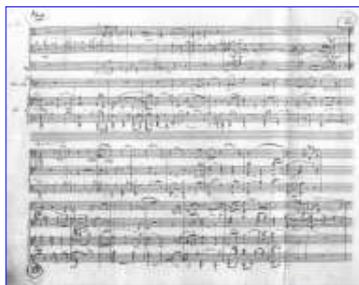
From the [Chandos](#) recording by Raphael Wallfisch and the Bournemouth Sinfonietta, the soaring second movement theme:

[Adagio \(30"\)](#)



Audio

[At Moeran.com: Excerpt](#)



This feeling is immediately picked up on the brooding, threatening opening to the second movement, which initially promises more misery, but just as one buttons down and prepares for the worst, Moeran's ability to bring light out of shadow is called to play in a theme of heart-breaking beauty. Geoffrey Self demonstrates in his book how the melody here has its origins in the first movement, yet the two could not sound or feel more different- someone in Hollywood should be using this to illustrate their great moments of loving passion! Here is the tender reward for the wild tempest of the first movement, music to melt the coldest heart, and again brilliantly scored and

arranged.

[Click on the picture above to enlarge the opening bars of the second movement, in Moeran's handwritten short score]

The second movement ends with an extended section for solo cello which, in true Moeran style, sounds just like an age-old Irish folk tune, but is probably original. This links seamlessly into the final movement, where the orchestra picks up on the tune and lifts it into a rumbustious theme for a constantly varied rondo finale. This Moeran intersperses with a variety of ideas - he wrote to Peers on 4th May 1945: "the very nature of the main subject seems to call for an insistence on the Rondo scheme. One is, I feel, fully justified in interpolating all sorts of tunes provided the movement in bound together by the main idea which in the case leads itself admirably to the purpose." Thus he is able to bring in all sorts of different meditations and episodes, and again the sun is shining - in a later letter he states: "I am longing to see what other ideas crop up as I forge ahead. I think working in bright daylight has more to do with it than anything, together with the pleasant outlook from the window facing me to the green lawn."

Interview

Read and listen to the interview by top British cellist Paul Watkins on his own recording of the Cello Concerto commissioned by the BBC for their Composer of the Week programmes - the first time Paul had encountered the work:

[Paul Watkins](#)

Lionel Hill is correct when suggesting this is a wrongly neglected work. Geoffrey Self says much the same thing: "Arguably it is a work of such quality as to place it with the concertos of Dvorak and Elgar as the finest written for the instrument. Regrettably, it is hardly known."

"Arguably it is a work of such quality as to place it with the concertos of Dvorak and Elgar as the finest written for the instrument. Regrettably, it is hardly known"

home page

Perhaps the first movement is too unwelcoming at times? And yet who could fail to be moved by the second? Here is a work which, perhaps more than any other (with the relative paucity of great repertoire works for cello and orchestra), deserves its place on the international stage and the radio playlists. And of course in your CD collection and heart...

▪



Piano Trio (1920-25) R6  
[www.gramophone.co.uk](http://www.gramophone.co.uk)

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The Piano Trio has been recorded but once, and I can only imagine that this took quite a bit of detective work as Geoffrey Self suggested in his book that scores were particularly hard to come by - especially from the publisher! This is a shame as this really is a remarkable piece of music, a real must-have for anyone interested in Moeran's chamber music output.

ASV CD CDDCA1045  
Joachim Trio  
Published February 1999

We finish with the Piano Trio, Moeran's grandest chamber work, first heard in 1921 (the A minor Quartet dates from the same year) but extensively revised for publication four years later. Cast in four movements, it is less distinctive than its companions (there are plentiful echoes of John Ireland, with whom Moeran was studying privately - and Ravel's Piano Trio can be heard loud and clear in the Scherzo), yet in its heady lyrical flow the piece has much in common with such contemporaneous offerings as the Violin Sonata and the orchestral In the Mountain Country and the First Rhapsody. The Joachim Trio give a thoughtful, beautifully prepared rendering, and although Cantamen's rival world premiere account on British Music Society is scarcely less passionate or accomplished than this newcomer, it is by no means as sympathetically captured by the microphones.

In summary, an enterprising, beautifully engineered and uncommonly generous anthology - and a release, I fancy, already destined for inclusion in my 'Critics' Choice' come the year's end.

AA

...Moeran's grandest chamber work...

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#### New Music

by Robin Hull

Moeran is one of the few living composers who can handle this kind of pattern with true mastery...

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E J Moeran's 'Rhapsody in F sharp for Piano and Orchestra' offers a welcome alternative indeed to some of the older concertos which have been worn threadbare up and down the country. Here is a Rhapsody that really lives up to its title. Moeran is one of the few living composers who can handle this kind of pattern with true mastery. He writes succinctly and often brilliantly, giving due place to lyrical meditation, and achieves a feeling of spaciousness without the slightest deviation into relaxed or diffuse thought.

He scores for a fairly large orchestra, but these resources are used economically and leave him an ample reserve for movements of heightened power. His treatment of the keyboard, too, is both expert and closely sympathetic; to be sure, the music calls for first-rate playing, alike in matters of technique and interpretation, yet its demands on the player are wholly reasonable.

My own view is that Moeran finds himself thoroughly at home in a work conceived on this scale (the duration of the Rhapsody is 17 1/2 minutes). He has given us some glorious music of course, in the two concertos proper - for [Violin](#) and [Cello](#) respectively - but here the pattern seems even more to his liking. Moreover the Rhapsody is an ideal length for many programmes in which, frankly, the listener does not want a three movement concerto in addition to a big symphony. Whether anything will induce the builders of programmes to realise this fact, ad turn aside from the beaten track is a problem which seems to fall within the province of brain-specialists!

Penguin Music Magazine No. 1, 1946

"New Music" - Robin Hull



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#### Wigmore Hall Concert Review

Mr E J Moeran's ambition did not quite go to the length of giving a one-man's show, for his concert at Wigmore Hall on January 15th concluded with the Ravel Quartet, but it was obviously given for the purpose of introducing two important works from his pen - a [String Quartet in A](#) and a [Violin Sonata in E minor](#).

The former is the earlier of the two, and its chief merits are concentrated in a vigorous and sparkling final Rondo. Its opening subject suffers a little from the fact that its principal subject was apparently chosen more with a view to the mission it had to fill than for its intrinsic attractiveness.

In this respect the Allegro of the Sonata shows a great advance, for its impetuosity is not hampered by technical obligations, although these are met as consciously as we have a right to expect in a modern sonata. In short, this movement falls into line, as the other did not, with the general spontaneity of Mr Moeran's work.

This quality is perhaps more pronounced in the slow movements of both works, though it is naturally less assertive in the lyrical mood. Where it leaps up to meet the listener is in the two final movements, the Rondo which has been referred to above, and the concluding section of the Sonata.

Mr Moeran, who has been working with John Ireland, inclines, like many other composers of today, to rely on the pentatonic scale for the fashioning of his thematic material. It is this that gives it the flavour which is conventionally recognised as Celtic, although a film now showing proves it to be Tibetan. In his case it has been hailed as Irish, and non can object. The flavour itself is good, but we cannot entirely overlook the circumstance that with the pentatonic scale it is next to impossible to go wrong. The composer's treatment is, however, remarkably interesting.

The performers were Miss Harriet Cohen (who played with much charm a group of not very weighty pianoforte pieces before tackling the Sonata, in which she was joined by Desiré Defauw) and the Allied String Quartet, of which Mr. Defauw is leader. Both the concerted pieces were given with that assurance which denotes careful preparation and sympathetic interest. Hence the interpretation was excellent.

E.E.  
Musical Times  
February 1923

The flavour itself is good, but we cannot entirely overlook the circumstance that with the pentatonic scale it is next to impossible to go wrong...



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  - [people & links](#)
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- [home page](#)

from Musical Times, December 1949

Sonatas and concertos for the cello are few, for it takes a composer of experience and imagination to accompany the cello with piano or orchestra in such a way that the soloist shall have a clear-sounding part and genuine interplay with an accompaniment that does not betray reliance on a few types of texture or too frequent accommodation to an assertive partner.

Moeran's experience and imagination need no demonstration, and his new Sonata for Cello and piano quite hides any difficulties he may have had in surmounting the demands mentioned. It is indeed one of his finest works - finer, perhaps, than more ambitious works, such as the G minor Symphony - for there is in each of its three movements that consistency of form and quality which a rhapsodic composer can hope to achieve only in his full maturity.

With such a composer the melodic line takes precedence, and his themes must grow to climax organically; not for him the modern habit of nagging a few little figures into the twitching semblance of contrapuntal vitality, for counterpoint is more than imitative rhythms, and rhythms more than units of metre.

Every piece of this work is genuinely impassioned, and one cannot find a point at which the interest flags or the material belongs to a miniature conception. Indeed, since Delius's Cello Sonata, there seems to have been no better work in the romantic and rhapsodic style that so well suits the cello, for the style of Rubbra's splendid sonata does not invite comparison with Moeran's.

A.H.

Every piece of this work is genuinely impassioned, and one cannot find a point at which the interest flags...



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Violin Concerto R78  
[www.gramophone.co.uk](http://www.gramophone.co.uk)

There are two reviews of Violin Concerto recordings in the Gramofile records on the net since 1983, both of which are currently in print. Not included is a review of the excellent John Georgiadis recording with the LSO under Vernon Handley on Lyrita vinyl - an LP well worth tracking down.

Chandos CHAN8807  
 Mordkovitch/Ulster Orch/Handley  
 Published September 1990

I still have a clear recollection of hearing the Prom broadcast of the first performance of Moeran's Violin Concerto in July 1942 when Arthur Catterall was the soloist. It swept me off my feet and for days afterwards I was haunted by it. The spell, I fear, has not survived the passing of nearly 50 years, in spite of my hearing several excellent performances by the Halle in the Barbirolli era. Today I would rate the Cello Concerto much higher among English concertos and in Moeran's own works.

What captivated me at first, of course, must have been the finale and in particular its last five minutes, a most moving elegy which Lydia Mordkovitch plays very beautifully on this excellent new recording. Generally, though, the work is too long and diffuse and there is too much rather self-conscious Irish-jiggery. But if this doesn't worry you and you can surrender to its rhapsodic musings and gusts of passion and forget its obvious debt to Elgar and Delius, then this is as good a performance as you could wish, recorded with the clarity and fidelity that are the hallmark of Chandos recordings. The Ulster Orchestra plays superbly, so that Moeran's attractive and colourful scoring gets its full due; and, of course, Vernon Handley is a sympathetic interpreter.

MK

Symposium mono (Full price) (CD) SYMCD1201  
 Sammons/BBC SO/Boult  
 Published May 1999

We owe a huge debt of gratitude to Lionel Hill (from whose private collection the present triptych was quarried) that he managed to persuade his father-in-law, the great Albert Sammons, to take up a work he was surely born to play. For those who love Moeran's Violin Concerto as much as I do, hearing this glorious broadcast performance with Sir Adrian Boult and the BBC SO from April 1946 will be an intensely moving experience. Sammons plays with great poetry and sweetness of tone, while Boult's masterful accompaniment is a model of enviable cogency and scrupulous sensitivity. In his booklet-essay, Hill (whose close friendship with Moeran is touchingly annotated in *Lonely Waters*; Thames: 1985) describes how 'over the following months I moved Heaven and Earth to get HMV or Decca to record a performance with Sammons and Barbirolli - all to no avail.' That same year, Sammons gave his last concert performance ever (of the Elgar) before he contracted the Parkinson's disease that was to blight the remaining 11 years of his life.

AA

All reviews ©Gramophone Magazine, Haymarket Publishing

...It swept me off my feet and for days afterwards I was haunted by it...

...Moeran's attractive and colourful scoring gets its full due...

...Sammons plays with great poetry and sweetness of tone...



From The Listener, July 3rd, 1942

### Moeran and the English Tradition

By HUBERT FOSS

The first performance of Moeran's Violin Concerto will be broadcast on July 8 at 8.0 p.m. (Home Service)

THE second phase of what we might call 'the English revival' in composition kept very closely to its own lines of development. The Russian ballet might reveal new exotic charms, [Stravinsky](#) could thunder his practical theories of aural values across a world willing for novelty. Schönberg from another angle of approach could attract attention for the very unattractiveness of his intellectual sounds. But the still young - at least not more than partially adult - spirit of English musical composition was affected by two quiet separate elements - English folk-song, and what is called too vaguely 'old music'.

There is room for a study in detail of how English movements in music have nearly always followed, and neither kept pace with nor anticipated, the literary movements of the country. For example, into this second phase we are discussing, there came a new Wordsworthism: a spirit of nature that is not in the least naturalistic. It is a form of musical contemplation from the soil upwards: the peaceful growth of the plant is philosophically as important as its flower, and indeed it might be said that English music has not been content, not even sometimes willing, to pluck the flowers and make them into a lover's garland. There has been a neglect of the very thing which by his mastery of it made Stravinsky successful: effect. For effect is (dare I say?) effective and so successful, catching, compelling. To read the scores of Cowen and Mackenzie, [Stanford](#) and [Parry](#), alongside the scores of [Warlock](#), [Vaughan Williams](#), and [Butterworth](#), is to read two groups of completely different prose styles. The later group shows no more sincerity of intention, but it shows a far greater critical sense of musical values, and of the absolute truth of the musical phrases it writes down. From phrase-making in a conventional manner we proceed to the delicate management of a pithy and flexible language. The English musical tongue has become a real national medium again; but from its very truthfulness it is not compelling. And, in the state of apathy towards native-born music which has been our musical heritage since Purcell, this music, lacking compulsion, has no chance of attack, adopting a defensive, almost entrenched position, while frequently the international battle has moved its centre to another front. The result is for the English composer disastrous: his virtues are not noticed, his existence not believed in. He is hard put to it to get a hearing, much less a living, and as Alan Bush points out in the current issue of *The Author*, the English composer is the last person recognised by the English concert-goer.

I do not for one moment accept this popular neglect as a slur on English composition. I have my own beliefs, but they do not permit me such perspective of eye as will tell me whether the forty years of this century will live or not. I am convinced that musically, for England, they are years of splendid composing: and I am equally convinced that a majority of those who do not think so have not taken the trouble to know the music which they decry.

Moeran's music has the firm, growing attractiveness of a tree. It is not difficult to neglect its existence for it does not command one's attention. The fault is not the composer's, for it is there, this music. The reference books say that Moeran's music is indebted to folk-tunes. Perhaps: but far less than Grieg's, or Falla's, or Dvorák's, whose local colour we extol. And as an actual fact, to what extent? There is the pentatonic scale, a scale without semitones. Moeran's harmony is in general based upon the tone, as [Walton's](#) finds its characteristic flavour from the semitone. Thus Moeran's dissonances are of mellow sound than Walton's; his harmonic scheme never deviates far from the pentatonic scale - he startles us by richness rather than surprise of sound. The English folk-idiom has persisted more in song than in dance, and the older instruments of the dance have not survived in their original shape - the rebeck is now the violin and the tabor is a charming archaistic revival. Moeran's music is therefore infected by song rather than by instrumental music. I personally perceived an advantage here. Years ago I pointed out that the viola part of 'Flos Campi' by Vaughan Williams is vocal, whereas the voice part in Hindemith's 'Marienlehen' derives from the viola. The opening of the second movement of Moeran's [String Quartet](#) is a song: it speaks from within, as song must. Not paradoxically, it may be said that to discover how small an extent Moeran's idiom is influenced by folk-song, the best way is to examine closely his folk-song arrangements: in particular 'The Little Milk-maid' and 'Down By The Riverside'. Here, with reverence, he makes the songs his own: they do not absorb him. And, in his original works, there is more trace of Irish influence than English in the dialect.

Moeran's output is not very large. There are three outstanding chamber works of the early 1920's - a [String Quartet](#), a [Violin Sonata](#), and a [Pianoforte Trio](#). The first two have moments of great noisiness, of a passionate and even violent statement. The Piano Trio comes from the time when Moeran was a prolific and continuous writer, of a flow that dried up as he matured: it represents in its published form a very reduced version of the original conception. The String Quartet does not fade in beauty by one shade of colour. The slow movement is as beautiful as ever, inspired by pure musicality of conception, expressed in a medium of lyrical style and precision of phrase very like that of the verses of [A. E. Housman](#). The Violin Sonata is more rugged: it opens with what appears to be an epigram and turns out to be a dramatic speech: and in its last movement there is a variety of rhythmic excitements which are almost too much for the slender instrumental forces. Then Moeran gives us a number of lovely songs, where, for example in 'Come Away, Death', he shows that, though his technique is not creative but based on a traditional language, he has a precise and delicate ear for original sound and for exact

"Moeran's music has the firm, growing attractiveness of a tree"

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registration. Perhaps his most perfect song is ' 'Tis time, I think, by Wenlock Town'. In a more dramatic way, the four James Joyce songs are of outstanding interest: they epitomise this philosophic attitude towards musical expression. Moeran is not a miniature painter: but he excels in swift development of big ideas in a small time-space.

The contemplative Moeran, the composer who dreams his music irrespective of life's conditions, dreams it for long periods and writes it with 'emotion remembered in tranquillity', is seen again in the [String Trio](#) and the [Duo](#) for two violins. This management of stringed instruments dates from Moeran's schooldays at Uppingham. He revels in these difficult mediums: but he is nowhere trying to startle us with them. Yet the technical skill is such that one is agog to hear how he will treat the solo part in a violin concerto. Of the orchestral pieces, I like best the quiet, tender '[Thomas Whythorne's Shadow](#)'. The [Symphony](#) has been played too seldom for me to know it: there is always in it, as there is in all Moeran's music, a purely musical, touching quality which defies analysis. It has the human tenderness of the country people, and a sense of the long endurance of the countryside. I have not assimilated it as a symphony: on another performance, I hope I should. And later there came two groups of part-songs, in longish cycles, '[Songs of Springtime](#)' and 'Phyllida and Corydon'. They have a strange individuality: there is a personal flavour about them. I have often wished to get to know them by conducting them, which would be the way of finding out their worth.

As English as this land, Moeran's music has, as Hadow said of Schumann, the power to make its hearers go on dreaming after the music has stopped. The nostalgic quality is healthy. It must be sought before it reveals itself. It does not display its charms in the limelight of the day. It is neither topical or fashionable. It does not shout. I would not call it masterly, certainly not masterful. But its singing quality is undeniable, something to treasure.

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### Moeran's Violin Concerto

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THE general plan of E. J. Moeran's Violin Concerto is somewhat unusual. After the first movement there comes a scherzo, and after the scherzo a Lento, with which the composition ends. This is unusual but not revolutionary. As the most popular symphony of our time, the *Pathétique*, ends with a slow movement there is no reason why a concerto should not follow so attractive a precedent. Indeed, Mr. Moeran is wise in refusing to write a final rondo if he feels, as a composer does feel, that he has said all that for the time he wants to say. The Concerto is also unusual in the construction of the first movement, and this innovation will not be accepted without some reservations. One of the themes, for instance, appears in the orchestra but not in the solo instrument, which is in keeping with the modern notion of a concerto as a composition not written solely to display a player's skill, but one in which the solo instrument is a very important, though not the only important, part.

But if the plan implies a loss on the swings it provides compensations with the roundabouts. The limelight may not be constantly on the soloist, but that means not that it is dimmed; it means that it is shifted on to some other feature. In any case the solo is conspicuous enough and, as the exceedingly fine playing of Arthur Catterall showed the other night, as grateful to the player as it is satisfying to the listener. Mr. Moeran has pleasing things to say, and says them with a graciousness that is all too rare in modern music. He is modern enough in his technique but does not make a parade of modernity; he has the gift of lyrical expression, but does not make lyrical expression the sole aim of his composition; his treatment of the orchestra is that of an expert but he doesn't make the orchestra 'dance,' as Verdi expressed it.

The outcome of this happy combination of generous gifts and strict control, of a natural instinct controlled by knowledge and experience is very gratifying. For one thing it gives the Concerto a very original turn - not less original or striking because of the Irishness of the Scherzo and concluding Lento. The programme notes told us that the work was conceived in Ireland and that it might, therefore, bear the influence, conscious or unconscious, of Irish folk-song. That influence is felt but does not intrude. The music is not based on folk-song, and one is aware of it only as one might be aware of national characteristics in any other work which does not deliberately imitate a foreign idiom.

The brilliance of the Scherzo and the graver lyrical beauties of the last movement are significant, pointing to an artistic temper that is neither easily led into wild experiment nor afraid of novelty. The violin is an instrument that lends itself better than most to the mood of the scherzo. The comparative ease with which it can perform tricks, the variety of its 'coups d'archet,' open up great possibilities in that direction. Yet no concerto has ever tried to exploit them with the single exception of a Concerto of Vieuxtemps which is still taught to students-often omitting the Scherzo. Now moderns are showing a desire to explore this field. A few months ago Sir George Dyson charmed an audience with the Scherzo he had provided for his Violin Concerto, and now Mr. Moeran repeats the experiment with equal felicity.

But above all things the violin is a lyrical instrument, and Mr. Moeran never allows himself to forget it. He has some very fine lyrical passages in the first movement, and the last abounds in phrases which have a most fascinating eloquence.

Lastly his Concerto seems exceptionally well written for the soloist. The general tendency today is to write extremely difficult passages which never make the effect they should. Composers may say that the effect intended is, in fact, achieved and, of course, if the composer is satisfied, the critic should be silent, while players possessing a great technique will probably support the composer because they will be stimulated by the challenge to their powers. Thus all in the garden would seem to be lovely-but it isn't. The system is simply uneconomical. It predicates a maximum of effort with a minimum of effect. Such a combination has always been and ever will be uneconomical. Now there is nothing of the kind in the Moeran Concerto. The writing does here and there presume an unusual degree of ability in the player, but the reward is commensurate with the effort. After all, the greatest skill of the player is not apparent in triumphant progress through awkward double stops (of which the listener is totally unaware), but in the treatment of a noble passage. The greatest difficulty in Beethoven's Concerto is not in its scales and arpeggios but in the realization of the grave beauty of some extremely simple phrases of the Larghetto.

F. B.

Mr. Moeran has pleasing things to say, and says them with a graciousness that is all too rare in modern music



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Moeran's Violin Concerto  
By EDWIN EVANS

So far as the composer is aware, no use is made of actual folk-tunes but, as he explains, he was living in the midst of a community where, apart from the radio, little else was to be heard...

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**E. J. MOERAN**

CONCERTO for VIOLIN and ORCHESTRA

PIANO SCORE 10s. 6d.

● This work was performed at the Promenade Concert, Royal Albert Hall, on Friday, July 30.

Solo Violin  
ARTHUR CATTERALL

"The VIOLIN CONCERTO by E. J. MOERAN was delightful to hear, and well deserves a place in the concert repertoire. Its misty harmonies and delicate orchestration are rather reminiscent of Delius. It is in three movements of which the first is an allegro in rhapsodic form, the second a brilliant rondo and the last a beautiful slow movement. Apart from its obvious merits it is a relief to hear a concerto whose last movement is not of the dreadfully jolly kind, of which one is heartily tired."

PUNCH, August 5th, 1942.

**NOVELLO**

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MOERAN is essentially a lyrical tone-poet. Whatever the degree of constructive skill displayed in his major works he is invariably at his best when moved to song. At such moments one forgets, as being of little importance, whether he has or has not satisfied all the postulates of musical architecture, in the sheer beauty of the lyrical expression. It is so, for instance, in the lovely concluding pages of his [Symphony](#), in which one is content to be swayed by lyrical exaltation alone and cares little by what logical process that stage has been reached, though it will bear examination from that angle if one is that way inclined. It is in the very nature of such music to be, if not actually induced, at least profoundly affected, by the conditions under which it is created. This lends more importance than usual to the circumstances of time and place of composition. His Violin Concerto was begun on Valentia Island in 1938, the year after the completion of his *Symphony*, but whereas much of the latter was composed during the stormy winter months the first movement of the Concerto was written during the summer calm. The rest of the work was composed at Kenmare, South Kerry, which lies at the landward end of a long fjordlike inlet of the Atlantic. It was occasionally set aside while the composer was engaged on other work, notably the choral Suite '[Phyllida and Corydon](#)' (1939), some songs, and the planning of instrumental works to follow, and was not completed until the end of 1941. So far as the composer is aware, no use is made of actual folk-tunes but, as he explains, he was living in the midst of a community where, apart from the radio, little else was to be heard. He was actually taking advantage of the opportunity to collect folk-songs in the district. It would therefore appear almost inevitable that the influence of folk music should assert itself, and unnatural on the composer's part to strive against it-for which, as we know from other works, he would have had little inclination. This influence is felt especially in the second movement, a Rondo, which expresses the spirit of the summer fairs of Kerry, and particularly of the famous Puck's Fair of Killorglin, which lies to the north, near Castlemaine Harbour and Dingle Bay. The retrospective third movement originated during the autumn of 1941. In its concluding pages it reflects the calm experienced in Southern Ireland at this season, before the gales begin to burst in from the Atlantic.

The first movement, *Allegro moderato* (4-4) in G major, opens with:



on the strings, joined at the third bar by clarinet. This short phrase, which is reserved for the orchestra and never given to the solo instrument, recurs frequently in the course of the movement, and returns to preface the epilogue which concludes the work. At the sixth bar the solo violin presents the main subject of the movement:



In modified form this same theme is also the basic subject of the last movement. At its conclusion Ex. 1 is heard a tone higher, followed by a brief lyrical phrase which, although it is to recur at the very end of the movement, has otherwise no individual thematic importance, but like some others in the course of the work, may be considered an indication of mood. This leads immediately to a new subject:



in the continuation of which, after a recall of Ex. 2 by the orchestra, occur dance-like figures foreshadowing a mood which is to assert itself before the exposition is completed. After a cadenza based on Exx. 3 and 2, and ended by the orchestra with Ex. 1, a modulation to B minor introduces the second subject:



This is followed by the anticipated change of mood in a tripping, dance-like, non-recurrent episode (12-8), first on the wood-wind in imitation, then on the solo violin, towards the close of which Ex. 3 reasserts itself on the orchestra, to be extended in imitation in a tutti, concluding the exposition. As frequently in the works of contemporary composers, development and recapitulation are virtually one. The solo instrument muses rhapsodically, *molto rubato*, on Ex. 2, the orchestra interpolating Ex. 1, and continues to elaborate until the oboe interposes with a new non-recurrent lyrical phrase which the solo violin imitates an octave higher. This leads to a variant of Ex. 1 on the orchestra, followed by a cadenza and the return of the second subject, Ex. 4, on the clarinet, the solo violin taking over its second phrase. Ex. 1 in its original form and the lyrical phrase which preceded Ex. 3 bring the movement to a very quiet conclusion.

The Rondo, *Vivace* in D (2-4, 4-4, 3-4) is largely based on various dance-rhythms all worked out to the unit of the quaver, which remains constant in spite of many changes of time-signature, and rhythmic combinations. It opens with the strings indicating the initial rhythm in triplets, trumpet and wood-wind adding a rising figure. At the seventh bar the horns give out *marcatissimo* a vigorous theme in a counter-rhythm:



the strings continuing their figure. The solo violin then enters with a short bravura passage leading to:



which is quickly carried to a climax. A more flowing theme in E minor, mostly in sixths, is presented by the solo violin against string tremolos, but otherwise the buoyancy continues. Soon, against the resumption of the initial rhythmic figure by the strings, the violin gives out:



When this has been extended Ex. 6 returns in 3-4 time on tutti, followed by a new dance-figure which, when it reaches the solo violin, is completed as:



There are references to material previously heard, notably Ex. 5. Then the flowing theme in sixths is extended by tutti with a lyrical continuation on the solo violin ending in another resumption of the initial rhythm. After a short cadenza the solo violin introduces yet another dance-rhythm, *Alla Valse Burlesca*, which is a variant of Ex. 7, and begins a coda based mainly on the initial rhythmic figure with Exx. 6 and 5.

The last movement, *Lento* (3-4) in F sharp minor, concluding in D, is largely based on Ex. 2, which, however, is at first so modified that its identity is only gradually made clear as the movement proceeds. First the strings, joined at the third bar by clarinet, announce a theme over which solo violin and clarinet alternate with soaring phrases derived from Ex. 2. Then a modulation to C minor brings another theme in sixths on the solo violin, but before long the influence of Ex. 2 reasserts itself, in D minor, in a form appreciably nearer to the original, with counter-phrases on the cor anglais. All the foregoing may be considered the first subject-group of the movement. The second subject-group follows, in D major, *cantabile a molto tranquillo*. First the orchestra unfolds a suave theme the initial phrase of which still retains a kinship with Ex. 2; then the solo violin re-enters with:



After a climax an elaborate passage on the solo violin subsides pp into Ex. 1 on the muted

strings, and the epilogue begins in autumnal calm. Against a murmuring background of strings, still muted, the solo violin resumes Ex. 9 and continues it with Ex. 2, which is now brought nearest to its original shape. The conclusion thus accords with the opening; but this appears to come naturally, as it were, without any deliberate restatement of the kind that is sometimes resorted to in the hope of establishing formal unity.

The first performance of the Concerto was given at a Promenade Concert, July 8, 1942, the soloist being Arthur Catterall, to whom the work is dedicated and who has edited the violin part. Owing to the success of the Symphony, and perhaps also to curiosity having been stimulated by those who had had access to the score, it had been awaited with much interest. For once such anticipations were not disappointed and it was warmly welcomed—as well it might be, for the qualities it displays are never too prevalent in music generally, and solo concertos in particular, with their inherent temptation to virtuosity for its own sake, rarely prove so congenial to them.



#### Cello Concerto Premiere - Reviews

Irish Times, November 26th 1945

Yesterday's symphony concert in the Capitol Theatre, Dublin, included the first performance of Moeran's cello concerto. The soloist, Peers Coetmore, gave a superb performance. Her tone was of an amazingly rich quality, and her expressive playing was exactly right for this lovely work with its delightful, almost song-like melodies woven into a pattern of rich colour.

Irish Independent, November 26th 1945

A new work by E.J. Moeran was performed for the first time by Peers Coetmore, with the Radio Eireann Symphony Orchestra, in the Capitol Theatre. The composer has appreciated that the 'cello is heard to best advantage in broad and flowing melody, and in the first and second movements the soloist was given many opportunities to display power, beauty and a variety of tone in smooth melodic playing. There is a fine cadenza at the end of the second movement, well in character, which was excellently played.

...this lovely work with its delightful, almost song-like melodies woven into a pattern of rich colour...

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Cello Concerto Hallé Review, 1946

THE HALLE CONCERTS

It is possible that the bright young people of our time, or at any rate those queer souls who are known (strangely enough) as the intelligentsia, would deny that composers who are so impulsive as to allow emotional feeling an equal place with intellectual effort when they write their music are modernists in the strict sense of the term. If that notion prevails Mr.E.J.Moeran, whose Violoncello Concerto was played at last night's concert in the Houldsworth Hall, Manchester, would no doubt gladly disavow any connection with modern fashions in musical art. He is frankly and unashamedly prone to spontaneous emotional feeling and it is obvious that his impulses are never cooled down or diverted from their natural expression by anxiety about whether he is or is not true to up-to-date style. Yet it is no less obvious that Moeran has the modern harmonic technique at his finger-ends and when he likes, can be as free, daring, and ingenious in its use as most of the younger men. Whereas many composers who during their early years lived in the midst of the romantic movement in art reacted against the spell and sought to prove its illusoriness, Moeran is among those richer natures who combine present-day ideas with undisturbed attachment to and real feeling for traditional views. The occasional complexities of the 'Cello Concerto which is highly original in thematical material and in the treatment of it, offer more difficulty to the performers than to listeners. As Mr.John F.Russell suggests in his analysis in the programme, Celtic influences as well as meditations on the English countryside have apparently had their effect on the work, though the composer perhaps remains sceptical about that matter. A deeply expressive adagio and a varied and picturesque finale are movements that will, we think, appeal to all tastes, and both these sections of the work show an inward cohesion which, in spite of rhapsodic passages, binds image to image in logical sequence.

The soloist last night was Miss Peers Coetmore (Mrs.Moeran, the composer's wife), and she gave us a delightfully spirited performance of the 'cello music. The solo frequently explores the highest positions on the strings, and once or twice a slightly doubtful intonation was heard, but the general firmness and fluency of Miss Coetmore's playing were as admirable as its interpretative range. Under Mr.Barbirolli's sensitive direction the orchestral parts were finely suited to the work's texture and to the style of the soloist.

G.A.H.  
[review of the first Manchester/Halle performance of the Cello Concerto, 30 Oct.1946]

...composers who are so impulsive as to allow emotional feeling an equal place with intellectual effort when they write their music are modernists in the strict sense of the term...



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There is one review of Symphony recordings in the Gramofile records on the net since 1983, which is currently in print. The only other commercial recording, on a 1970 Lyrita LP, is by Peers Coetmore with Boult and the LPO. This is perhaps of historical interest only - there are severe flaws in the performance which make it an almost painful experience to hear.

Chandos CHAN8456  
Wallfisch/Bournemouth Sinfonietta/Del Mar  
Published September 1986

Written at the end of the Second World War, Moeran's Cello Concerto is a dark, sombre work, in which the prevailing feeling of sadness and regret is relieved only at the beginning of the last movement by an Irish reel-like tune, whose jauntiness soon however gives way to a more introspective mood similar in feeling to the material of the first two movements. It's an elusive piece, but repeated hearings reveal many passages of exquisite beauty, and it is good to have it in such a sympathetic and well-played performance as this. This 1969 Lyrita recording, by Moeran's wife Peers Coetmore, for whom the Concerto was written, gives an inadequate picture of the work, since her insight is not matched by playing of sufficient strength or skill. Raphael Wallfisch, on the other hand, plays with much beauty of tone and phrasing and Norman Del Mar obtains eloquent, high-quality playing from the orchestra.

The new record is most welcome...for the revelatory account of the Cello Concerto.

AS

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