

JUSTIN CONNOLLY IN INTERVIEW

Andrew Kurowski

Abstract: In this transcription of an interview between the former Editor of New Music at BBC Radio 3 and the composer Justin Connolly, Connolly discusses his life as a composer. He traces his development from childhood to studies at the Royal College of Music and Yale University and the influence of the composer Roberto Gerhard. Connolly's *Poems of Wallace Stevens IV*, his most recent work at the time of the interview, is considered in particular detail. The interview took place at the former British Music Information Centre in Stratford Place, London on 14 April 1993. *TEMPO* gratefully acknowledges the work of the Estate of Justin Connolly in transcribing the interview and permitting its publication.

Andrew Kurowski: I want to start, Justin, by reflecting that you are a man of many talents. Obviously you are here as a composer. And when I looked at the billing for this interview it talked about 'Justin Connolly, the long serving member of the ISCM committee and of the SPNM'. And I know you, of course – apart from your composing – as a broadcaster. You're a conductor and notably a teacher, so we've all got some reason to want to hear what you have to say on these subjects. I want to step off by asking you about your beginnings in music, because I understand that you weren't necessarily fostered in a musical background. It was quite a different, more literary one, wasn't it?

Justin Connolly: Yes. Well, my father was a writer and my sister is a novelist and I started out as a writer. I wanted to be a writer very much. But my great-grandfather was an amateur composer in the nineteenth century. He was in the cotton business in Liverpool and his family didn't want him pursuing music. So he used to shin down the drainpipes at night to go to concerts secretly. And while still engaged in the cotton business, he ended up writing a lot of church music – very respectable, rather tidy – it certainly makes sense; it's not silly music. And he was one of the founding spirits behind the Liverpool Philharmonic Society. One of his closest friends was a German-born composer and conductor called Julius Benedict. And I was absolutely

astonished not all that many years ago to learn that Benedict had been for three years a pupil of Weber and also, for a very brief period when he was 15 or 16, he had been associated with Beethoven. So my great-grandfather's closest friend had been a student of Beethoven. Top that! I think, however, that my great grandfather's examples of music are not quite in that class; I have to be honest about that.

AK: Was this music known to you in your childhood?

JC: Oh, yes. And so it was always possible in my mind that one could be a composer. Now, a problem that all composers have is of having no example. You think, well, it's OK for Mozart or Beethoven, but why does it have to be me? And I once heard Stockhausen use exactly that sentence. And you discover that it does have to be you. I tried to get away from it, by studying law, which was interesting in its own way, but in the end I found that I only wanted to be a musician and I've never regretted making up my mind eventually – at the age of 25 – that I would study music seriously.

AK: You also studied conducting?

JC: I did a fair amount of conducting at school. And then again, I always got myself into situations where I was making music with people, so it really wasn't such a change to give up law to become a full-time student.

AK: Where were you a student?

JC: I was at the Royal College of Music for five years and then I went to America to study at Yale, then I taught there, then I came back to England.

AK: And was this a time of great impressions?

JC: I thought that that was a great age of *hearing* music, certainly. I was a bit worried by the fact that arriving there at the age of 25 (this sounds terribly arrogant, but I have to say it) I actually knew a very great deal of music, partly because of the old Third Programme and Radio 3, and going to a lot of concerts and so on, and of course just having those few extra years; and I was amazed that everybody else didn't. I was really quite disappointed because I felt as though the thing had been stood on its head. I was expecting to learn a lot from these people – of course you do learn a lot from your fellow students, but in a different kind of way.

AK: Were you encouraged then – I mean, was there a fund of people you could go and discuss things with?

JC: Oh, yes, I think you find a few people who are kindred spirits and you end up [with them]. You also find a lot of people for whom – whatever music means to you, it doesn't mean quite the same thing to them; after all, music is a lot of different things. We all have some path that we're trying to pursue, and some of these paths are exclusive of other paths so it never surprised me that people didn't always like the kind of music that I did or found it difficult in some kind of way. I have to say that my attitude towards contemporary music – from when I was really quite young, 12 or 13,

and hearing new pieces of Stravinsky and Schoenberg on German radio stations – I never had any difficulty with it; it never seemed to me that this music was difficult – it’s the music I really wanted to hear! I didn’t always understand it completely, but that didn’t really matter to me. What was important was to get involved with it.

AK: When you say ‘get involved with it’, you mean analysing it?

JC: Well, yes, partly, and trying to get more from the performances of it, trying to make more sense of it, because there are always points at which one’s concentration would lapse. I remember a really good performance of the Schoenberg Violin Concerto given by Tibor Varga, who actually played it very well, but the experience of playing it in 1951 was a very different one to what one hears today. And only a few months ago I turned on the radio and it was just after the beginning of that very same piece done by the Hallé with Pierre Amoyal. And for the first time I heard *playing* which was as beautiful and eloquent and easy as it would be in Brahms’ Concerto. And I said, ‘So that’s what it’s meant to sound like,’ because it never did. And yet somehow you always knew that it should. And I even knew that when I was 15 – I don’t know how, but it just seemed to me that, OK, this is a scratchy performance, but there’s something behind that – and it spoke to me very directly. I think in some ways it was Schoenberg more than Stravinsky who was really decisive in that.

AK: How did that feed into your composition?

JC: One of the things that was very formative for me, when I was a student, I think, was getting to know – quite away from college – the Spanish-born composer Roberto Gerhard. Roberto had been a student of Schoenberg, and it took him a long time, very many years, to get away from all that and then get back to it. And in some-what a similar way, I started imitating other things, like Stravinsky, rather than what I was really looking to profit by. And also I think, again, you either absorb things by just doing it rather inefficiently or you do something which you hope is really new and which those other things will gradually feed into. From the beginning, I think I always wrote music which was my own in some kind of way, and there were no pale imitations of other things – unless I was trying to do stylistic imitation.

AK: Do you feel that there would be a point at which you arrived at your style?

JC: No, I didn’t think that. I thought that I had arrived at the very beginning. However inefficient the pieces were, they were what I was trying to do, and they didn’t resemble anything else. And because of that, I felt I wasn’t doing it well, but that wasn’t the point. The point was to be doing it at all!

AK: How did you know you weren’t doing it well? Did you have someone to bounce the ideas off?

JC: No not so far as my opinion about music. Occasionally I would show Roberto [Gerhard] pieces. I had one extraordinary experience with him which was very distasteful in a way, but also taught me something. It was at the hands of the distinguished viola player Brian Hawkins, who's one of my oldest friends, that I received my very first performance – a piece for viola and piano, quite a large work. I showed this piece to Roberto Gerhard because I wanted him to see what I was doing and so on. We met in a little cafe and I gave him the score. He opened it, and he went on looking at it; he'd turn the pages – pause – sometimes he would pause for longer, then he would turn the page again. At the conclusion he folded the book up, and gave it back to me, without a word. Now, he had seen other things of mine, which he'd been very good about, and I couldn't think why he was being so funny about this one: maybe he wasn't feeling great or whatever.

And then it suddenly occurred to me that this was something quite different. I didn't feel offended by it because I admired him very much and I was really very fond of him – I reckoned he could do what he liked as far as I was concerned. I didn't feel humiliated, but I never forgot it because it wasn't actually a bad piece. But I realised he wasn't looking at it as to whether it was a good piece or a bad piece. He was looking at it as if it were a piece by Schoenberg. And it wasn't actually as good as a piece of Schoenberg, and therefore, in a sense, it didn't really count in any kind of way. And that was a very valuable lesson because I suddenly realised, 'Yes, that was something': we'd got from the sub-basement to the basement. But we still had to get on to the first floor, and how are we going to manage that? I didn't feel particularly desperate about it – I was of course disappointed. But at the same time, there was a certain sort of dignity about it that he didn't actually say anything. It was very interesting, that, and it didn't spoil our friendship at all; on other occasions he was very communicative.

And eventually when he heard a piece of mine he liked, he sent me a postcard saying 'I heard it, I thought it was terrific', and I was really thrilled. That meant more to me than anything, especially because of his previous silence. But if I hadn't been strong enough to take it, I think I might have never written another note. It could have been completely damning. It's the kind of kill or cure method. But I've never done that with a student myself because I lack the gall to do it. Roberto had that. He was a great genius and a very extraordinary human being and I think in some ways of all musicians he's the one whom I felt closest to. He didn't always write brilliantly; I mean, some of his pieces aren't as good as others. But there's something about the quality of his integrity and his ideas, the fact that he was brilliant at explaining anything – and he could! Every article he wrote is well worth reading: they're full of great insights about what the properties of music really are – very often properties that have been neglected by other people.

AK: Can I ask you how old you were at that time, with Roberto?

JC: I'd have been about 26, 27.

AK: So your opus 1 [the Sonatina in Five Studies for piano, 1962] was still to come?

JC: Oh, yes, I'd written a lot of pieces, but I threw them away, including the viola and piano piece. Brian [Hawkins] was asking me about it and I said I threw it out long ago. He was quite disappointed because he put a lot of work into it. I remember: he was looking at it and he was always very friendly and good natured about playing things: 'Nothing impossible, I think I'll do this fingering here, and this chord is a bit awkward' (or whatever it was). 'It's nice isn't it?' he said, turning over the pages. 'But, er, let's have some dynamics!'

I never forgot that. It had dynamics, but they were very few and far between. And now my music's absolutely peppered with dynamics. But it was the cool way he said 'what about some dynamics?', as one might say 'let's have another drink'. You know, the great thing of working with players is the fact that they always manage to bring something to the dots. I don't think I'd write music if it wasn't for that sense of communication, particularly with the people who play it. I think the sense of hearing somebody doing what you thought a lot about and making a deeper sense of it in some kind of way is absolutely wonderful. It's really an extraordinary experience.

AK: Have you revised works in the light of what players have brought to them?

JC: I think I have, yes. I think sometimes I've totally reconceived things. Everybody who knows my music knows that I'm a great reworker of things. And, in fact, one of the pieces, the Sonatina [for piano], went through at least three or four versions before finally I found that I would only be damaging it if I changed it more. I think I do know when to stop, but sometimes I don't get things right first time.

AK: I was interested, if one just looks at your worklist – and this is why I ask the question about revisions – you do find works with the same title but with a different appellation after them; *Triad I*, *Triad II*, *Obbligato I*, *Obbligato II*.

JC: Yes, they're all parts of series of pieces. They're actually different pieces: they're not related, except that they have some formal relation or in some cases they have internal similarities. They're not actually *versions* of one another, in any sense. The *Obbligati* are all different; the *Triads* are all different; the *Tesserae* are all different (see [Example 1](#)). In fact, I think I've probably come to the end of those series; I probably won't write series any more.

AK: Did you begin with the idea of a series?

JC: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, absolutely. The *Triads* came out of the pleasing fact that the word 'triad' means what it does. Also, they're all for three instruments. Also, they're all in three movements. Also, they contain the kind of

I. Spettrale, minaccioso, ♩ = 90

ff, feroce

mp *mf* *p* *mf* *pp*

ppp *p* *mp* *mf* *f* *p* *mp, inquieto* *mf* *p*

mp *mf* *f* *mf* *p* *mp* *mf*

f *mf* *f* *più, f* *ff*

♩ = 75

pp *p* *mp* *p* *mf* *p* *sub. mf* *f* *p*

mp *mf* *mf* *p* *mf* *pp* *mf* *pp*

p *pp* *p* *pp* *ppp*

♩ = 112

pp *sf p, non cresc.* *sf* *pp* *sf p, non cresc.* *sf*

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4th proof

Example 1:

Justin Connolly, *Tesseræ F* for bass clarinet, opening; © Wise Music, printed here with permission.

thesis–antithesis–synthesis triad, which is characteristic of the so-called Hegelian triad, which all fitted together rather nicely. They were all for funny combinations; there is one for trumpet, viola and piano, which is a very nice combination, but strange.

AK: And the Wallace Stevens association?

JC: Wallace Stevens has always meant a great deal to me because having been a poet myself – not for publication, but I was serious about it – I just happened to like what Stevens did a great deal.¹ I've always found it difficult to find verse to set from our own (or more or less our own) time, and it just happened that what he did resonates very well with my ideas of colour and so on. I think that's really what it was. And then I found more and more poems that I wanted to set. I wouldn't end up setting all of them, by any means, because some of them are not possible.

The *Wallace Stevens IV* set² are all based upon, as so often in his work, philosophical ideas – and in this case,

¹ While Connolly was a schoolboy, several of his poems were published in the Westminster School magazine, under his birth name of Justin D'Arcy-Dawson.

33 *accel.* $\text{♩} = 150$
pp *p* *< mf* *pp* *p* *< mf* *ff* *p* *f*

39 $\text{♩} = 75$ *rit.*
p *sf* *f* *ff* *f* *mf* *f*

44 *(rit.)* $\text{♩} = 60$ $\text{♩} = 75$ *rit.* $\text{♩} = 60$
mf *mf* *p* *mf* *f* *p*

5 $\text{♩} = 150$
 48 *Vivo* $\text{♩} = 150$
mf *p* *ff* *p, non cresc.* *sf* *mf*

53 *sfz* *mf* *sf* *mp* *f* *mp* *mf* *f*

58 $\text{♩} = 75$
ff *f* *mf* *p* *mf* *p* *f* *mf*

63 *rubato*
f *mf* *f* *mf* *f* *mp* *p*

67 *espr.*
mf *p* *mp* *mf* *f* *p* *mf* *f* *mp*

4th proof

Example 1:
Continued.

of course, the philosophy of poetry, which is of central interest to him. And he says, in effect, that there are ways of seeing the world which the poet has to address. And in the opening song, we find three of these: the serious, the satirical and the poetic. Again in the second song, which is a kind of barcarolle, there is a sort of meditation on the nature of poetry, on the nature of the poetic idea; and the challenge for me there was to find music which would not contradict this. And the final one is a brief, epigrammatic poem entitled 'Poetry is a destructive force'. He compares it to having a lion or ox in one's heart – you can feel it breathing there – and that it's at any moment going to jump out. And that just happens to be the feeling you have to have about creating things in

² Justin Connolly, *Poems of Wallace Stevens IV*, op. 38, for mezzo-soprano, viola and piano (1992), premiered by Antonia Kendall (mezzo), Brian Hawkins (viola) and Justin Connolly (piano) on the occasion of this interview.

71 rit. $\text{♩} = 60$ $\text{♩} = 90$, accel. $\text{♩} = 100$ $\text{♩} = 75$
ben marcato
p mp p f ff sub. p

74 rit. $\text{♩} = 60$ $\text{♩} = 90$, accel. $\text{♩} = 100$
ben marcato
ff mp p f ff ff

77 $\text{♩} = 90$ $\text{♩} = 75$ rit. $\text{♩} = 60$ $\text{♩} = 90$, accel.
f ff p ff mp p sub. f

80 (accel.) $\text{♩} = 100$
mf p mf f p ff p ff ff, non crescendo sub. f

83
mp mf p f p

85
f ff p mf f p

87
mf f ff pp

(ca. 3'45'')

Example 1:
Continued.

4th proof

general. As you know, I subscribe to that philosophy. That's why I wanted to set these words.

AK: So that's your most recent work. And the Sonatina for piano, does that belong to your juvenilia?

JC: No, it's the immediate post-juvenilia. As I said, I revised it 21 years after I wrote it, which gave me plenty of perspective. I think I'd like to say something about that, because that's both a human thing and a personal thing. The Sonatina was written for a pianist called Arthur Thomson, who was a fellow student of mine – and who was the pianist when my viola and piano piece was played by Brian Hawkins. Arthur had made his debut as a pianist at the age of 15 at the Wigmore Hall playing the Liszt Sonata, and he got rave reviews and everything was fine in a way, but in the end he didn't become a professional pianist because he was also a scholar of Oriental languages and he spent his life on that. When he died, in 1981, I decided that I wanted to revise the Sonatina as a tribute to him. So

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II. Cupo e mesto, ♩ = 36

89 *misterioso sempre*
ppp *sfpp* *p* *pp* *mp* *pp*

93 *mp* *sf* *p* *mp* *pp* *p, senz'expr.*

96 *sub. f* *mp* *mf* *mp* *p, senz'expr.*

100 *sub. f* *p, senz'expr.*

104 *ppp* *pp* *mp* *mf* *pp* *mp* *pp* *p* *accel.*

108 *poco pesante, trascinando* *(vivo)* *come prima* *sim.*
mp *p* *sub. f* *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *p*

112 *(vivo)* *(pesante)* *(vivo)* *(pesante)* *marcato*
sub. f *mp* *f* *mp* *f* *mf* *mp*

4th proof

The musical score is written for a single melodic line in treble clef. It begins at measure 89 with a tempo of ♩ = 36 and a mood of 'misterioso sempre'. The key signature has one flat. The score is divided into systems of measures. Dynamics range from ppp to sub. f. Performance instructions include 'poco pesante, trascinando', '(vivo)', 'come prima', 'sim.', and 'marcato'. There are several triplets and a section marked 'accel.' starting at measure 104. The piece concludes at measure 112.

Example 1:
Continued.

that was the reason for that – and to try and get it right, which I think I did, as far as I could. So the piece was important to me from that point of view. It had always been the opus 1 because it was the first piece I felt, you know – this is really what I am doing.

AK: So there's the Sonatina, opus 1, and your latest piece, the *Poems of Wallace Stevens IV* [op. 38], from 1992. Roughly halfway through your catalogue come some intriguing settings from the Japanese.³

JC: It isn't absolutely equidistant between the two, but was written in 1972 – ten years after the Sonatina, but ten years before it was revised – and that's a setting of Japanese poems in English. It's called *Waka*, which are rather long twelfth-century poems, and which, in the normal manner of Japanese poetry, have a lot of complicated relationships within the words. In some ways I tried to make the music amplify those relationships because

³ Justin Connolly, *Waka*, op. 24, for mezzo-soprano and piano (1972).

Example 1: Continued.

4th proof

some of them would depend on what the imagery represented to the person who wrote it. There's a mention at the end of sea birds, and the sea birds are the souls of the dead flying towards nirvana, but you don't notice from the actual phrases used. You have to understand that, and the music tries to give that kind of picture.

AK: I was looking through Lewis Foreman's 1975 book – you probably know it, called *British Music Now*.⁴ There's a series of chapters devoted to various, as it were, established composers at that time. And then there's the 'Miscellany' [chapter], compiled by Michael Oliver. And you're number one in the 'Miscellany'.

JC: I didn't know that.

AK: But you must have read it?

JC: That's one thing I never do. If I see my name, I look somewhere else. I've done that all my life. I've never read a review of anything of mine, except by accident.

⁴ Lewis Foreman, ed., *British Music Now: A Guide to the Work of Younger Composers* (London: Elek Books, 1975).

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III. Inquieto, tempo instabile, $\text{♩} = 200$

animato

137 *p mp p pp mf p sf p sf p sf*

$\text{♩} = 75$, *rilassando* *incalzando*

143 *p mp p pp f mp mf*

poco a poco $\text{♩} = 200$ *animato*

150 *mf mp mf sf mf mp p sf*

$\text{♩} = 150$, *leggero, recitando, quasi parlando*

156 *p sf mf sf mf mf f mp*

$\text{♩} = 75$

161 *p sf mp mf*

$\text{♩} = 150$, *leggero, recitando, quasi parlando*

166 *sf p sf mp f p mf p*

$\text{♩} = 200$ *risoluto*

171 *sub. f mf*

177 *mf f sf mf*

4th proof

Example 1:
Continued.

I don't know why this is so but I'm absolutely rigorous about this; I think that the right of reply on the part of the critic is absolute, and I'm not really going to do anything about getting myself involved with that. It seems to me that that's perfectly correct; after all, if I'm entitled to address the public, people are entitled to reply. What the reply is must be immaterial. I rather feel that maybe it wouldn't be immaterial, and I would want to please rather than not please, or not please rather than please, or whatever it was.

AK: Michael points up in your work what he calls 'the exhilarating technical virtuosity of the early works', matched with 'the passionate and dynamic input'.⁵ And he describes these two things – which you steer a course between, so they're perfectly in balance – with the term 'Scylla and Charybdis', a phrase I know you used in one

⁵ Michael Oliver, 'Miscellany', in Foreman, *British Music Now*, p. 162.

♩ = 90 poco rall. 7

182 *intimo* *p* *pp* *mp* *p* *animato* *f*

187 *mf* *f* *p* *mp* *mf*

(♩ = 100) *fantastico e con rubato*

193 *f* *ff* *sub. mf* *sfz* *mf* *ff*

196 *sfz* *ffp* *ff* *f* *mf*

199 *mp* *p* *sf* *pp* *mp*

204 *p* *mp < sf* *mf* *sfp < f* *sfp < f*

(♩ = 75) *brutale, ritmico* *sub. fff* *pp* *fff* *pp*

212 *ben marcato ma rubato, sempre capriccioso* *rall.* *♩ = 50* *ff* *sfz* *mf* *p* *f* *mp* *p*

4th proof

Example 1:
Continued.

of your scripts for me. Go too far toward one, or too far toward the other, and you end up making a mess of things, or making a mess of yourself. And he's praising you for the way you steered this course.

JC: That's very appreciative. I'm glad if somebody feels that that dynamic tension is an important part of [music] – it seems to me that it's a very important part of all the music that I like. Wallace Stevens once said that the definition of poetry, from the point of view of the poet, was having that feeling about the world to which the only possible answer was a poem. And I feel just the same about writing music: that in a way, if it's going to come out, and that is going to be its characteristic, it is in some way independent of anything that I might do: it's going to happen anyway. But it surprises me, too, because I think the aim of producing works of art is not, for me, a process of doing something where I know exactly what quality the product will be before I

7a

214 $\text{♩} = 200$
animato
mp *mf* *mp* *mf* *sfz* *f* *fffz*

222 $\text{♩} = 100$
furioso
ff *f* *fff* *pp* *ffz* *f* *mf* *>*

225 acuto
 $\text{♩} = 90$
pp *sfz* *< f* *mp* *sfz* *< f* *pp* *mp*

230
p *mp* *< sf* *mf* *sf* *p* *f* *pp* *f* *p* *< f*

237
p *f* *sfz* *sfz* *sfz* *pp* *p* *mp*

allargando poco a poco

243
sfz *f* *p* *mf* *sf* *mp* *p* *pp*

247 $\text{♩} = 75$
f *f* *mf* *< sfz* *f* *> mf* *sfz* *f* *mf*

251 pesante
fff *ffpp* *ff* *fffz* (ca. 3')

4th proof

Example 1:
Continued.

start, and as it will be at the end. I want to surprise myself; I think that if I do surprise myself, I have a chance of maybe interesting other people. But, on the other hand, it takes a certain amount of nerve to do this because it's much easier to do something where you think that you actually know what's happening. To do something where there's some element which is unknown, to run that risk – it's like any other kind of athletic risk really, you know, that guarantees a certain kind of [outcome]. You can fall on your face, certainly.

AK: Do you find that there are significant points of change, that you surprise yourself so much that you find you've actually turned a corner and you're going down a completely different path? Or is the next work likely to come back to being what the others were like, in a way.

JC: I think sometimes I've had a lot of difficulty with the idea that I wanted the work to be A and it turned out in the

process to be taking itself in the direction of B, and I'd go obediently with the piece and then end up disliking it because it wasn't the way I set out to make it, and then had to get converted to it later on. That's happened quite a bit. And you know, people say 'there's nothing wrong with this piece', but I don't like it – it's not what I wanted it to be. And yet there have been other pieces which I've felt very happy with, which nobody liked. And I was very pleased to see that Schumann had the same experience: that all the pieces he really was fond of, nobody else liked. That's very strange.

AK: Well, let me end with another quotation from the Michael Oliver article, because I wanted your reaction to it. It says:

How on the one hand is a young composer to find his own voice amid today's Babel of musical styles, schools and dogmas? And when he has found it, on the other hand, how is he to make it heard? The temptations to derivativeness are great. The chances of finding originality are much smaller. There's no generally accepted *lingua franca*. And the chances of being dismissed as *déjà-vu* or ignored as insufficiently extraordinary are daunting.⁶

Is that something you feel you might have agreed with at that time?

JC: I think everybody who writes music would have to take all those things into account, if only to put them all together in the same corner of the mind, where you pay them no attention at all. You have to ignore all that. There's no point in thinking about it for five minutes. You know, reflection is actually very destructive in that sense. I mean, composing is a matter of action. Of course there's reflection as well. You're going to do plenty of that. The whole question of whether one is original or not is not a question of anything except how you are. It's like Schoenberg said: of course a soul you have to have. And, fortunately, I'm not particularly unconfident about that: I know I've got a soul, so, you know, so long as I do the job reasonably well maybe some of that will come out in the music. But, certainly, if you looked at it from the point of view of all those things being problems – if you started from that end, you could never do anything. And it seems to me that – maybe that's what composing is about in this age: that you have to have something to say and you have to be strong enough to say it. And if you are strong enough to say it, you will undoubtedly find people who listen to it. There's never any doubt about that. It's what I tell my students, and I really believe it as much today as 20 years ago.

AK: Well it strikes me as a comment that could have been written yesterday about the latest generation of composers.

JC: I don't think that changes very much – I mean, there are more composers now, and they're probably better than

⁶ Oliver, 'Miscellany', p. 162.

they've ever been before, but there are fewer opportunities for them. So, you know, it makes the same sort of difficulty in the long run. Things don't improve. The circumstances, the balance changes slightly – again, it's a historical process. I think it's just hard to be a composer at any time. It was in the nineteenth century; it is now.

I've got one more thing to add to what I was saying earlier, which is perhaps really a purely personal and hardly a professional thing at all, and it's this: I abandoned one profession – the law, which is very closely knit in certain kinds of ways, and has a lot of inner connections, and is very much kind of a family thing – and I joined another profession in which over 30 years of activity has brought me great joy, not just in professional life, but in terms of human friendship and the fact of a sense, particularly in the area of music in which we're all interested, of rowing in the same direction, often against adverse currents. But I've always felt strengthened very much by the companions that I found on this voyage, and I'd like to thank you all very much – both those who are present, and other friends who are not here tonight. I think when one gets to 60, one is still very young these days, I'm glad to say. I'm certainly looking forward to another ten thousand Evenings with Justin Connolly myself. You've only had to endure one! [laughter]

AK: Justin, thank you very much, and let me congratulate you on reaching 60 this year.

A conversational coda

JC: I don't think I really explained anything very well, but then, of course, I would like to let the music talk. . .

AK: You always said that when you came out of the studio having made a brilliant broadcast!

JC: Well, you know, actually, many composers don't like talking, and there are always a few exceptionally weird people who happen to be composers and also like talking: I'm one of those, obviously – as anyone who knows me knows. But the fact is that I think one of the reasons that one talks is because you always think that just around the corner the perfect formulation of the idea is waiting for you. And so you're always reaching towards this – and instead of despairing of it and remaining mute, I'm always trying to hunt it down, but when I've hunted it down (sometimes I do find it) I have to rely on other people to tell me this, because I never know. And afterwards they say, 'that was a good explanation of it', and I say, 'Oh? Was it?' I'm absolutely innocent that way, which is kind of silly. But it's not a self-congratulatory thing: it's just the way I happen to like those ideas, and like hunting for them.

AK: Well, let me congratulate you on reaching 60 this year. Thank you for talking to me.