

Keogh (néé Cleary), Doris

by Terry Clavin

Keogh (néé Cleary), Doris (1922–2012), flautist and teacher, was born on 16 April 1922 on Leeson Street, Dublin, the daughter of Victor-Louis Cleary, an insurance agent and sometime professional flute player of Rathgar, Dublin, and his wife Mary Elizabeth (née Hughes), who also had a musical background. The Clearys were a Church of Ireland family.

After her mother died when Doris was seven, she lived for four years with her maternal grandparents in Howth, Co. Dublin, before returning to her father in Adelaide Road, Dublin. Learning the flute initially from her father, she then took weekly lessons under Thomas Brown whose pedagogical lineage to the founder of the French school of flute playing, Paul Taffanel, had a formative influence on how Doris played and later taught the flute. She studied flute, harmony and piano at the Municipal School of Music and attended ballet classes at the Abbey School of Ballet, which helped her flute playing, particularly with respect to posture and rhythm.

At the age of fourteen she played the flute in public for the first time, performing a recital accompanied by her aunt Sylvia Dormer at the Mariner's Church, Dún Laoghaire, Co. Dublin. She won first prize in the solo flute at the Feis Ceoil held in Dublin in 1939 and was in 1941 a founder member of the Dublin Orchestral Players, an amateur group designed to encourage young musicians. A freelance player, she availed of the plentiful work provided by assorted Dublin theatres, becoming first flute at the Gaiety Theatre Orchestra. In 1944 a music critic said that her playing compensated in accuracy and tone for what she lacked in force and brilliance.

From 1941 she performed on Radio Éireann (RÉ), was deputy flute player from 1944 with the RÉ Orchestra and from 1948 with its successor the RÉ Symphony Orchestra. To her annoyance women members were paid less than men. The RÉ Symphony Orchestra attracted talented foreign musicians fleeing the privations of post-war Europe, which strengthened the influence of the French school on her flute playing. Certainly, her light, pure and expressive sound bore this out, especially by according with the French tonal ideal of being homogenous throughout the range. She was also a member, presumably as the permanent flautist, of the RÉ Light Orchestra founded in 1948.

In 1947 she married Val Keogh, a photographer she met at the Municipal School of Music; he was later a percussionist in, and then manager of, the RÉ Symphony Orchestra. They lived on Howth Road and had three daughters and two sons. Having all but given up orchestral work in the 1950s to concentrate on raising her family, she gradually resumed work as a freelance player in the 1960s. She also started giving private flute and recorder lessons in the early 1960s before being

appointed a teacher of the flute and recorder at the RIAM in 1969. The next year she put her extensive historical research into practice by founding Capriol Consort, a group of about twenty drawn from her students, to perform chamber music, song and dance from twelfth to seventeenth century Europe in period costume. Capriol Consort gave regular public performances and toured Italy in 1976. She also occasionally performed in public accompanied by two colleagues from the RIAM teaching staff.

Students lauded her commitment and enthusiasm, with one recalling that 'Doris was a great blend of intensity and release – a perfectionist, a demanding, supportive mentor, sustained by a great sense of humour ... who lived life to the full' ('A personal tribute'). If the next pupil failed to arrive she kept teaching the one she had until another showed up. She had 113 pupils (some in classes, some individually) in 1976. By then her influence was becoming apparent, as judges in Dublin music competitions were noting an improvement in the playing of woodwind instruments. Her protégés dominated the music scholarships awarded by the Arts Council with many going on to enjoy professional careers as players and teachers. She invited world renowned players, most notably James Galway, to hold master classes in Dublin and encouraged her students to imbibe international standards, study abroad and travel for the purposes of experiencing European culture.

She adapted to, without fully embracing, changes in flute design that prompted the general late twentieth century shift away from Taffanel's approach towards a bigger, fuller sound. Her ongoing adherence to the French school emerges in her strong preference for the French form of articulation, which had the tongue mostly at the front. Accordingly, she derived her articulation patterns from sixteenth to eighteenth century French flute books and encouraged her flute players to study the recorder, as it requires the tongue to come forward to hit the mouthpiece.

Regarded as the most influential Irish-based flute teacher of the late twentieth century, she received a millennium award in 1988 in recognition of her contribution to musical life in Dublin. In 1991 a group of her former students arranged a concert in the National Concert Hall to celebrate her career and to launch the Doris Keogh Trust Fund, a fund administered by the Arts Council, which is awarded every two years to a promising Irish flute or recorder player. On retiring from the RIAM in 1993, she was awarded an RIAM fellowship *honoris causa*.

Thereafter she taught recorder classes part-time at the DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama and gave private classes well into the 2000s. She taught the flute, recorder and chamber music seven days a week in her home while also continuing to direct the Capriol Consort. On Saturdays she had groups rehearsing in different rooms throughout the house; on Sundays she invited former students in to play the flute quartet and quintet with her.

After her death in London on 10 August 2012, her remains were cremated at Golders Green Crematorium.

---

GRO (birth, marriage cert.); *Ir. Press*, 9 May 1939; 27 Sept. 1963; *Ir. Independent*, 26 Mar., 3 June 1941; 15 June 1976; 13 Dec. 1983; 24 July 1992; *Ir. Times*, 9 Feb. 1944; 17 June 1950; 22 Dec. 1971; 12 July 1972; 17 July 1977; 23 Aug 1988; 2 Nov. 1991; 4 Sept. 2002; 17 Aug., 25 Aug. (obit.) 2012; *Cork Examiner*, 11 Apr. 1975; *Evening Herald*, 23 Feb., 10 May 1976; Richard Pine and Charles Acton (ed.), *To talent alone: The Royal Irish Academy of Music, 1848-1998* (1998); Ciaran O'Connell, 'Flute performance and pedagogy in Dublin, 1950–2000' (2003), Masters dissertation, Dublin Institute of Technology; 'Doris Keogh (1922–2012), a personal tribute to my teacher', [www.elizabethpetcu.com/doris-keogh.htm](http://www.elizabethpetcu.com/doris-keogh.htm)