



Frederick Kelly

1881 - 1916

Kelly the Composer

A musical talent

Kelly showed talent early on as a musician and won a music scholarship to Oxford University in 1903. In addition to his rowing, he became president of the University Musical Club and gained a reputation as a talented pianist.

After finishing his degree at Oxford, Kelly studied the piano at the Hoch Conservatory in Frankfurt, and on his return to London acted as an adviser to the Classical Concert Society to promote the work of modern British composers. In 1911 he visited Sydney and gave a number of concerts, and in 1912 took part in chamber music concerts in London.

Musical compositions

Kelly began composing music around 1902 and continued to do so until his death in 1916. Most of his music at first was either songs or pieces for the piano. From 1911, he increasingly composed chamber music, particularly for strings.

His most famous composition was the elegy for harp and strings that he wrote in 1915 in memory of this friend, the poet Rupert Brooke, who died at the start of the Gallipoli campaign. Kelly was present at Brooke's funeral on the island of Skyros.



The Hoch Conservatory, c.1900.

Musical legacy

Kelly continued to compose during his time serving in the trenches on the Western Front, despite frequent shelling and gas attacks. He also organised and conducted the regimental band of the Royal Naval Reserve Division, including for a performance of Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture to the sounds of British artillery guns.

A memorial concert was held in Kelly's honour at Wigmore Hall in London in May 1919. In recent years, an increasing number of recordings have been made of his compositions and The Elegy for Strings, In Memoriam Rupert Brooke was played at the BBC Proms in 2014.



Rupert Brooke's grave on Skyros



Drawing of Kelly by the portrait artist
John Singer Sargent, 1915