The Norman O'Neill Edition: General Statement

A collection of Norman O'Neill's papers, including autograph manuscripts for most of his extant compositions, was donated to the Royal College of Music by his granddaughter, Mrs Katherine Jessel. The first batch arrived at the RCM in 1970, the second in 1996. As the donor was a relative, there is little doubt as to their authenticity. The works are catalogued in two sections, reflecting the two donation dates: the first collection is RCM MS 4351-4433, and contains primarily orchestral works and music for theatrical contexts, as well as some of the chamber works; the second collection is RCM MS 7334-7374, and consists of chamber works and songs. The complete catalogue can be found as part of the RCM's list of 'Additional Manuscripts', available at www.rcm.ac.uk/media/RCM%20Library%20-%20Additional%20Manuscripts%20List.pdf. For the works that have not previously been published, these manuscripts represent the only sources from which to make an edition.

O'Neill's manuscripts present considerable editorial challenges. Most pieces are only represented by autograph scores and/or parts, but even these limited sources are highly internally inconsistent. There are lots of missing or conflicting detail in the full scores, particularly in the dynamics and articulation. The sporadic markings over small-scale repetitions raise questions about how precisely they should be understood. Large-scale recapitulations are often minimally notated, occasionally with radical changes. It can be unclear whether O'Neill is simply taking the detail as read from the earlier version, or whether he really wanted a different feel for the material on its reappearance. The autograph parts suffer from the same problems, and add further degrees of confusion in that the markings often differ from what is given in the score. There are also extensive disagreements between instrumental parts, even in the same musical gestures.

There seem to be a number of factors here. Firstly, most of the manuscripts appear to have been copied in a relatively hurried manner. With so much of O'Neill's work coming from teaching and (later) theatrical commissions, perhaps the need to create clean performing copies of the chamber music fell down the priority list. It might have been a task fitted in between other commitments rather than something to which he could devote detailed attention.

Secondly, there is a sense from the parts that O'Neill was constantly rethinking the expressive dimension of his music, both within and between parts. Although he was obviously copying the notes from a pre-existing score (all the material and rehearsal figures all correctly line up), he seems to have felt certain phrases differently each time he wrote them out. The variations between score and parts therefore might represent different interpretive possibilities.

Thirdly, some of the disagreements between parts represent O'Neill's genuinely independent treatment of the different lines in a chamber work. For example, the more detailed markings on one part often reflect the fact that it has more important material than the more sparsely-marked accompanying lines. These are clearly musical choices rather than accidents, but they can be difficult to detect when so many of the conflicts between and within score and parts really are just inconsistency.

Finally, the markings very occasionally betray different feelings for different instruments, with more emphatic markings in cello parts compared to violin parts, for example. These

may have been tailored to particular performers, adapting to their interpretational quirks. However, as with so much else in these manuscripts, it is not consistent.

The extensive differences between these manuscripts mean that choosing just one to serve as the copy text would result in overlooking information from elsewhere. Flexibility is the best approach, with decisions over which version to prioritise made on a case-by-case basis. Sometimes there is a consensus among several sources, allowing that version to override something different elsewhere. At other times, one manuscript seems to provide the template that all the others should follow. A compromise that blends several versions of a passage can sometimes be found, while at other times the overall musical sense implies something that the sources do not show. As noted above, sometimes the correct answer is reproduce the conflicting markings as written, as they are justified by a musical logic.

At root, the present edition is aimed at performers, and therefore privileges clarity over totally faithful reproduction. A decision has been reached over every instance of conflicting sources, usually one favouring consistency between individual parts and musical sections, and the results are presented with a minimum of visual clutter. A score that used extensive editorial brackets or footnotes to show multiple expressive options per passage would be confusing for a player to read. Moreover, members of a chamber group would have to spend considerable amounts of precious rehearsal time deciding between them which version to follow. As long as O'Neill remains relatively obscure, such difficulties would probably put off performers from engaging with his music. As these pieces become more well-known, those who wish to find out more or to challenge this edition can access the manuscripts and make their own decisions.

It would take too much space to document each minor editorial correction and the deliberations that lead to it. However, general practices have been outlined below to give an overall sense of the process.

Pitch

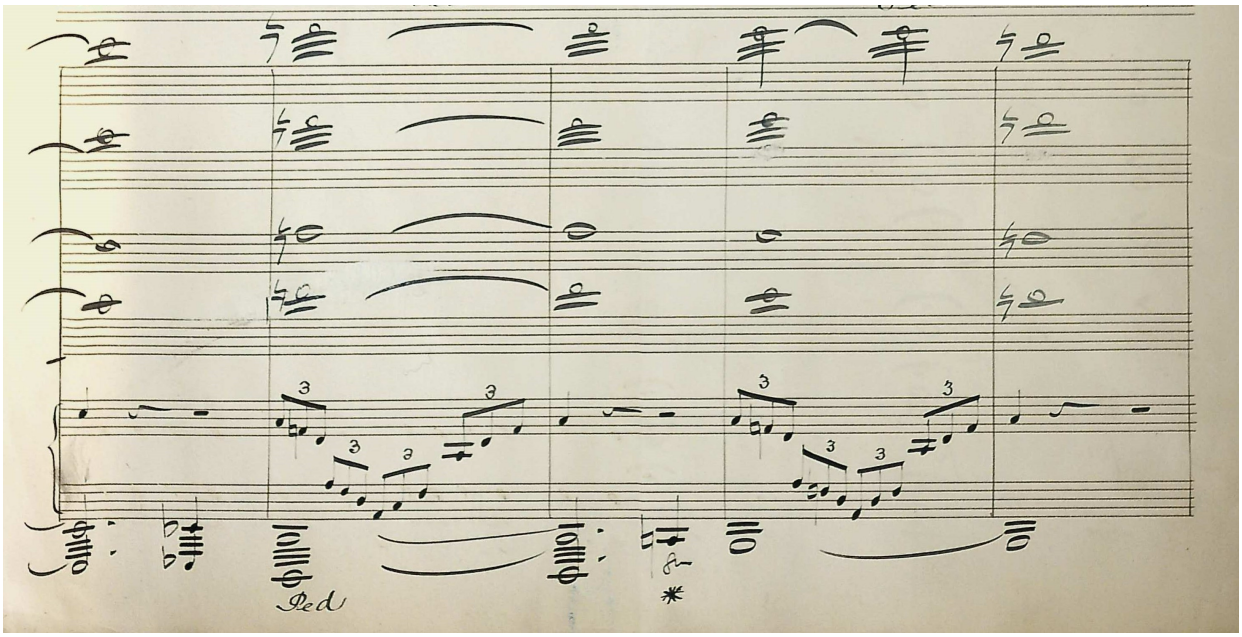
O'Neill's notation of pitch is generally clear and consistent. The broadly tonal harmonic language makes occasional mistakes easy to identify, the most common case being the need to add an accidental to notes that appear in multiple octaves in a bar. Some cautionary accidentals have also been added to ensure complete clarity as O'Neill tended not to include them himself.

More harmonically adventurous passages very occasionally contain ambiguities, such as in ex.1 below, taken from the Piano Quintet. Here O'Neill's seems to have been tripped up by his hasty omission of the key signature. Strictly speaking the Ds in the piano arpeggios and left-hand octaves ought to be sharp, as there is a D sharp in the key signature and they are unmarked in the autograph score. However, this would break the clearly-implied descending line in the left hand: the D sharp would repeat the E flat at the end of bar 265, and the move to the C natural and the end of bar 267 would become rather awkward. Moreover, D sharps in the right hand arpeggios in bars 268 and 269 would then clash with the unison E and D natural in the strings. (The lighter colour of ink for the string lines compared to the piano suggests that he wrote them out at a separate, possibly later stage, so the fact that he wrote naturals in front of the Ds there does not rule out the possibility of him forgetting to add them to the piano part.) It therefore seems preferable to present the

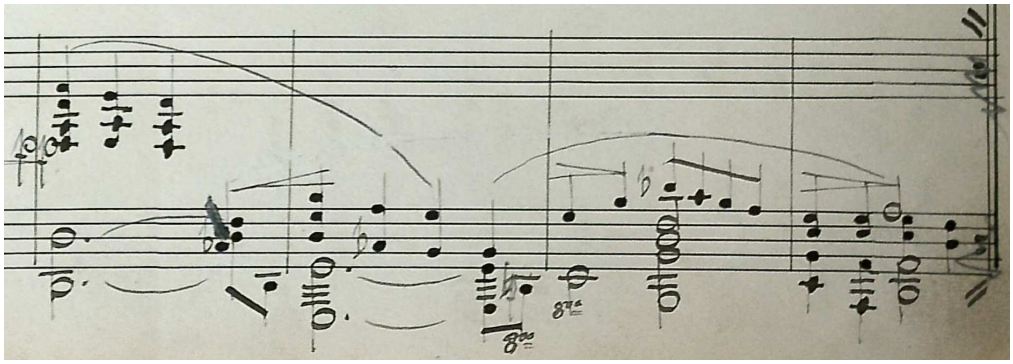
entire passage with D naturals in the piano part, as it produces a much more intelligible harmonic motion. Corrections of this kind have only rarely been necessary.

The other main change to O'Neill's pitch notation practice is the slightly greater use of clef changes, especially in the cello and piano parts. For the former, tenor and treble clefs are used to make high-register passages clearer. For the latter, clef changes are used to separate out material that O'Neill had condensed into a single stave (see exs.2a and b from the Theme and Variations on 'Pretty Polly Oliver'). In most cases, the manuscripts already include such clef changes, so this is only a matter of slightly extending O'Neill's own markings.

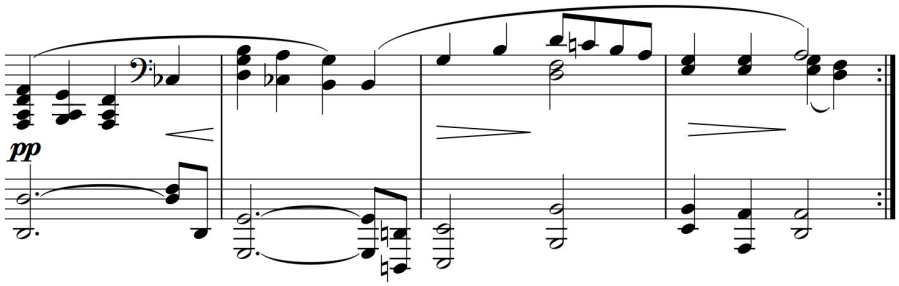
Ex.1: mm.265-269 in 4th movement of Piano Quintet Op.10, MS 4335



Ex.2a: mm.146-149, piano part in Theme and Variations on 'Pretty Polly Oliver', MS 4421



Ex.2b: the same passage in the present edition

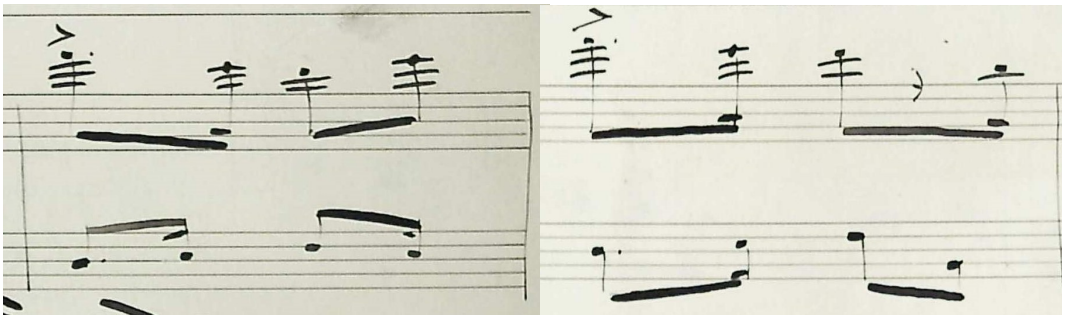


Rhythm and beaming

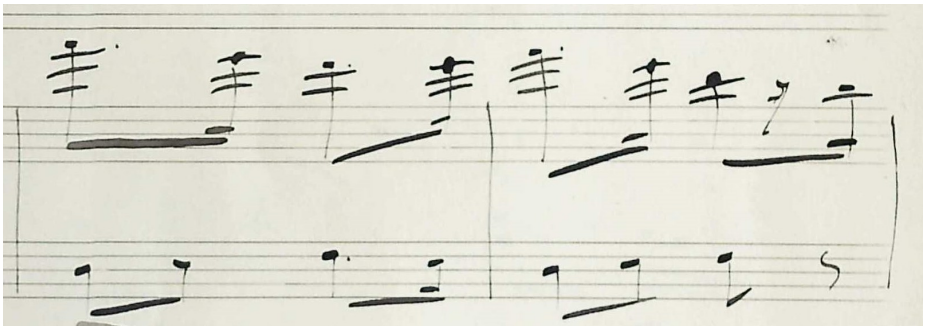
O'Neill's notation of rhythm and beaming is mostly clear, though there are more inconsistencies in this area than there are with pitch. Even within a score, let alone between parts, the rhythm of a musical gesture will often be written in multiple ways. This sometimes serves a clear musical function, for example a motif written with shorter note values for a more declamatory version. However there are a number cases where interventions have been necessary to create consistency both between parts and for multiple appearances of material, especially in the case of beaming.

Major changes to the rhythm have very occasionally been necessary. An example is bars 25-28 and 180-183 in the final movement of the Piano Trio. The autograph score shows rhythmic disagreement between the parts, between the two consecutive statements of the phrase, and between the first statement and the recapitulation (see exs.3a and b). The score and the instrumental parts also do not correspond in these passages. It seems very unlikely that the mismatched rhythms were O'Neill's intention, so one version has been chosen as the template for all appearances, justified by the fact that it is the same rhythm as the motif that opens the movement (shown in ex.3c).

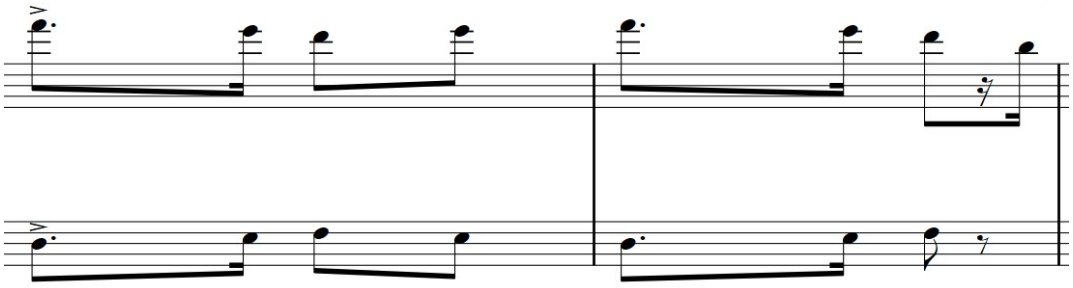
Ex.3a: mm.25-26 in 4th movement of Piano Trio Op.7, violin and cello lines, MS 4397



Ex.3b: mm.180-181 in 4th movement of Piano Trio Op.7, violin and cello lines, MS 4397

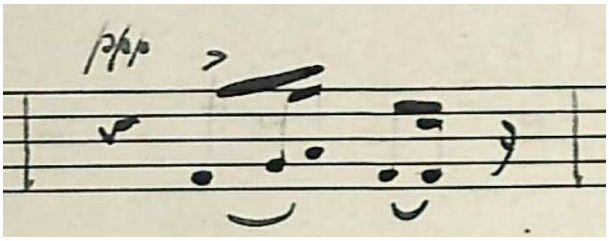


Ex.3c: mm.25-26 from the present edition, duplicated at mm.180-181

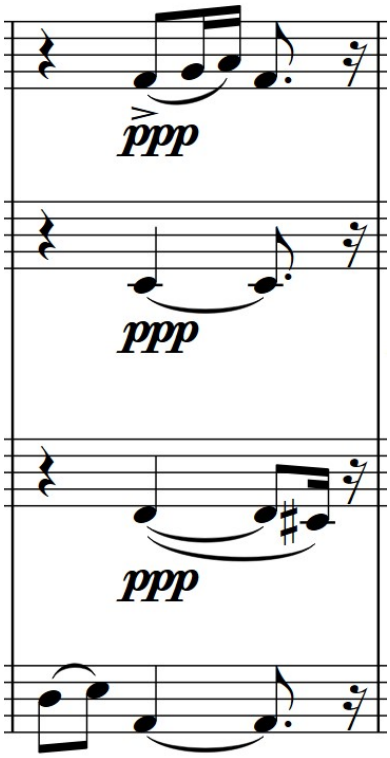


Aside from questions of consistency, there have been two further modifications to O'Neill's rhythmic notation. The first of these concerns cases where O'Neill indicates a very precise ending for a held note by tying multiple notes together. An example is given below from the slow movement of the String Quartet (ex.4a). O'Neill is clearly showing that he wants the end of the held notes to correspond with the semiquaver movement in the viola (as shown in the excerpt from the score for the present edition, ex.4b). However, this notation is likely to confuse performers, who might question whether this indicates some kind of re-articulation. In these cases, the tied notes have been condensed into a single note of the same value. As well as being clearer to read, the appearance of these notes is still precise enough to indicate O'Neill's intention.

Ex.4a: m.2 in 2nd movement of String Quartet, Violin 1 part, MS 4417i

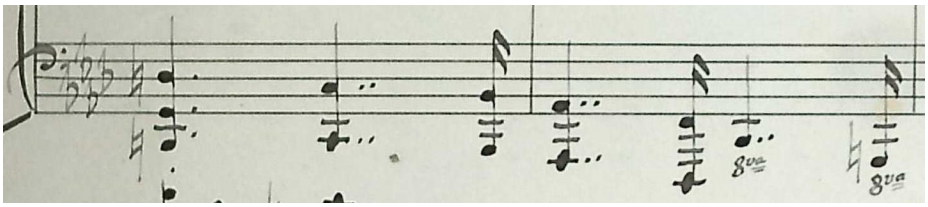


Ex.4b: the same passage, full score in present edition



The second modification is to correct a rhythmic error in the Variations, as shown in ex.5a. The double-dotted crotchets that O'Neill uses actually add up to a greater value than the 6/8 bar by themselves, and certainly do not leave space for the semiquavers. From the placement of the semiquavers we can infer that O'Neill actually intended crotchets tied to semiquavers, as shown in the excerpt from the edition (ex.5b).

Ex.5a: mm.178-179 in Theme and Variations on ‘Pretty Polly Oliver’, piano part, MS 4421



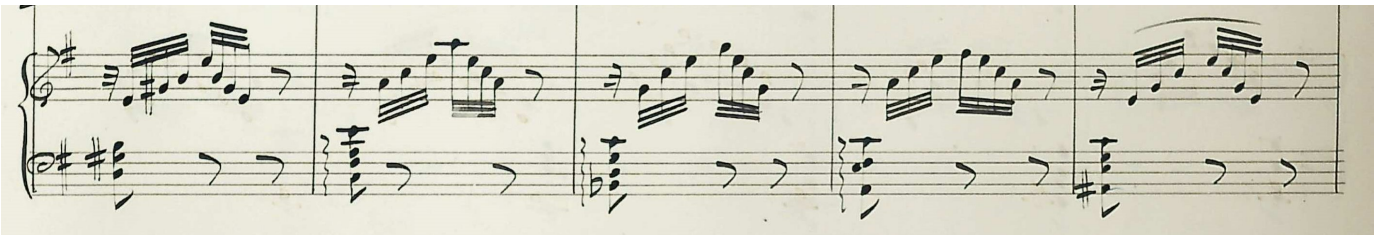
Ex.5b: the same passage in present edition

Articulation

This is a particularly problematic area for O’Neill’s manuscripts, as the notation is often highly inconsistent. There are extensive disagreements between the parts and the score, as well as between the parts. The phrasing marks in the individual string parts, if they have been preserved, are often more idiomatic in terms of bowing than the versions which appear in the score, and have generally (though not always) taken precedence. Significant interventions have been required, both in terms of adding and removing markings. Either a majority of parts agree, suggesting that that rest should match, or one line seems to show what all the others should be doing.

This process has been especially necessary for any kind of repetition. If a gesture appears multiple times, even within the same bar, O’Neill often omits or even changes the articulation. For very extended passages, his markings might appear only sporadically, as we see in the Piano Quintet (see ex.6). Here the slurs and arpeggio lines in the piano part cannot appear just in the places that O’Neill marks them, as it would make little musical sense. Consistency has been the guiding principle in this edition, making parts and score match each other wherever possible.

Ex.6: mm.156-160 in 2nd movement of Piano Quintet Op.10, piano part, MS 4355



The same difficulties appear for large-scale repetitions. If the material reappears later in a movement, it might be missing articulation, or feature completely different markings, in spite of every other factor being identical. Since O’Neill seems to have preferred identical recapitulations (no significant musical changes), the overall approach has again been to

make the articulation match when material reappears. The template might come from an earlier or later version of a passage, as O'Neill sometimes marked recapitulations more clearly than the original statements. In every case, priority has been given to whichever version makes the most musical sense.

It is important to note that the interventions in this area only go as far as consistency. Long passages have been left unmarked, as that is how they appear in both autograph score and parts. This does go against what O'Neill might have been expecting, as contemporary editorial practice seems to have been to leave very few notes unmarked. The published version of his *Trio in One Movement* (Schott, 1909), for example, is very heavily marked-up, and the scores in the present edition might seem rather bare by comparison. Nonetheless, the temptation to fill up the blank space with extra articulation has been resisted in favour of faithful representation of O'Neill's markings. As long as what is in the manuscripts makes musical sense, it has been left as it stands.

Dynamics

Alongside articulation, this is the other area in which the manuscripts show considerable inconsistency. Again, significant interventions are often required for consistency between parts, especially in passages where it is clear that all parts feature the same musical gesture. Correspondingly, the same decision-making process is used here: look for a majority to determine the rest, or find one part which serves a good template for the others.

However, unlike articulation, a substantial number of conflicts are caused by O'Neill's independent treatment of individual instrumental lines. Where one part has more important material than the others, he frequently marked it as louder and provided it with more expressive hairpins than the accompaniment lines. If one part has a counter-melody, it is given a dynamic marking somewhere between the primary melody and the accompaniment. Hairpins will sometimes show that one part is becoming less important as another part is simultaneously moving into the foreground. Dynamics are sometimes omitted for a new entry if the level is the same as the end of the previous passage. All of these markings seem to be part of the flow of his music, giving the players important information about their place in the texture, and therefore need to be included.

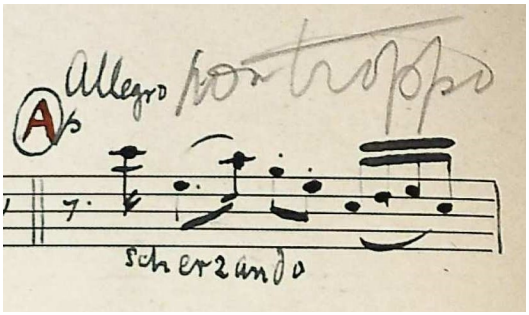
Of course the manuscripts do not always agree on exactly what these dynamic distinctions should look like. The part might show a louder dynamic than the full score, for example, and a decision has to be made over which should take precedence, possibly relying on contextual information from other parts. Nonetheless, consistency between parts has been sacrificed as long as there is a reasonable musical justification for doing so.

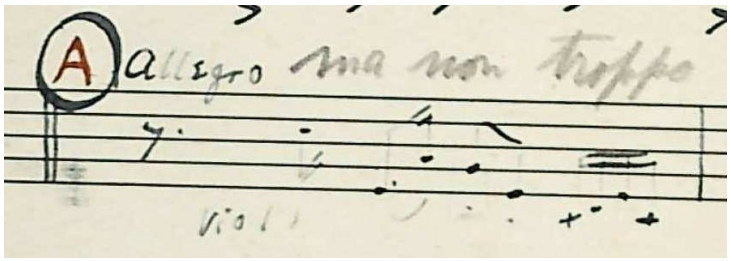
Tempo

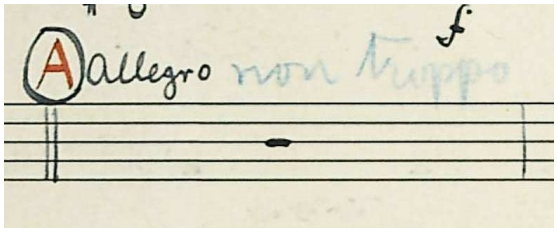
O'Neill's tempo markings are generally clear and unambiguous. Fluctuations in tempo (*ritardando*, *accelerando*, etc.) are sometimes inconsistently written within parts, both in terms of horizontal placement and their position above or below the stave, but the overall sense is rarely in conflict. Standard practices have been adopted here, with all indications for flexibility of tempo placed above the stave in bold.

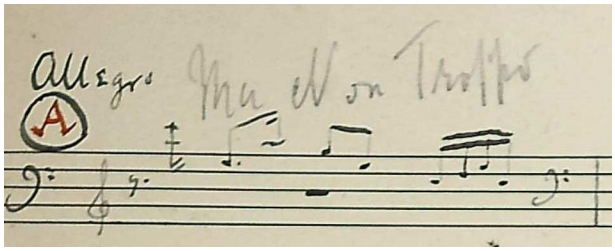
The manuscripts for the parts sometimes show modifications to the tempo markings in other hands, presumably those of the players who used them. Where only one player has made an emendation, O'Neill's original marking has been privileged. However, there are occasional instances where all of the parts contain the same correction, each in a different hand (see ex.7 from the String Quartet). This suggests that, in rehearsal, the players had agreed on a different marking, and this is likely to have been requested by O'Neill himself. In these cases, the high degree of consensus (a rare quality in these parts) has prompted the adoption of the new version.

Ex.7: m.12 in the 1st movement of the String Quartet, as appears in each part, MS 4417i-iv









Layout and Formatting

The portrait layout of all the works in this edition matches O'Neill's own practice, but the exact dimensions have not been maintained. Although the larger-than-average paper that O'Neill often used allowed for a more spacious presentation of the material and fewer page-turns, it would be difficult for anyone to reproduce now with a personal printer. The only way to replicate it would be to use a smaller staff size, which would be more difficult for a performer to read. Instead, a standard A4 layout and a reasonable staff size has been adopted throughout.

Instrumental parts have been formatted to facilitate page-turns wherever possible. The fairly continuous writing for piano in the chamber works that include it means that neat page-turns were not always possible to arrange in the full scores.

Dr. Bruno Bower