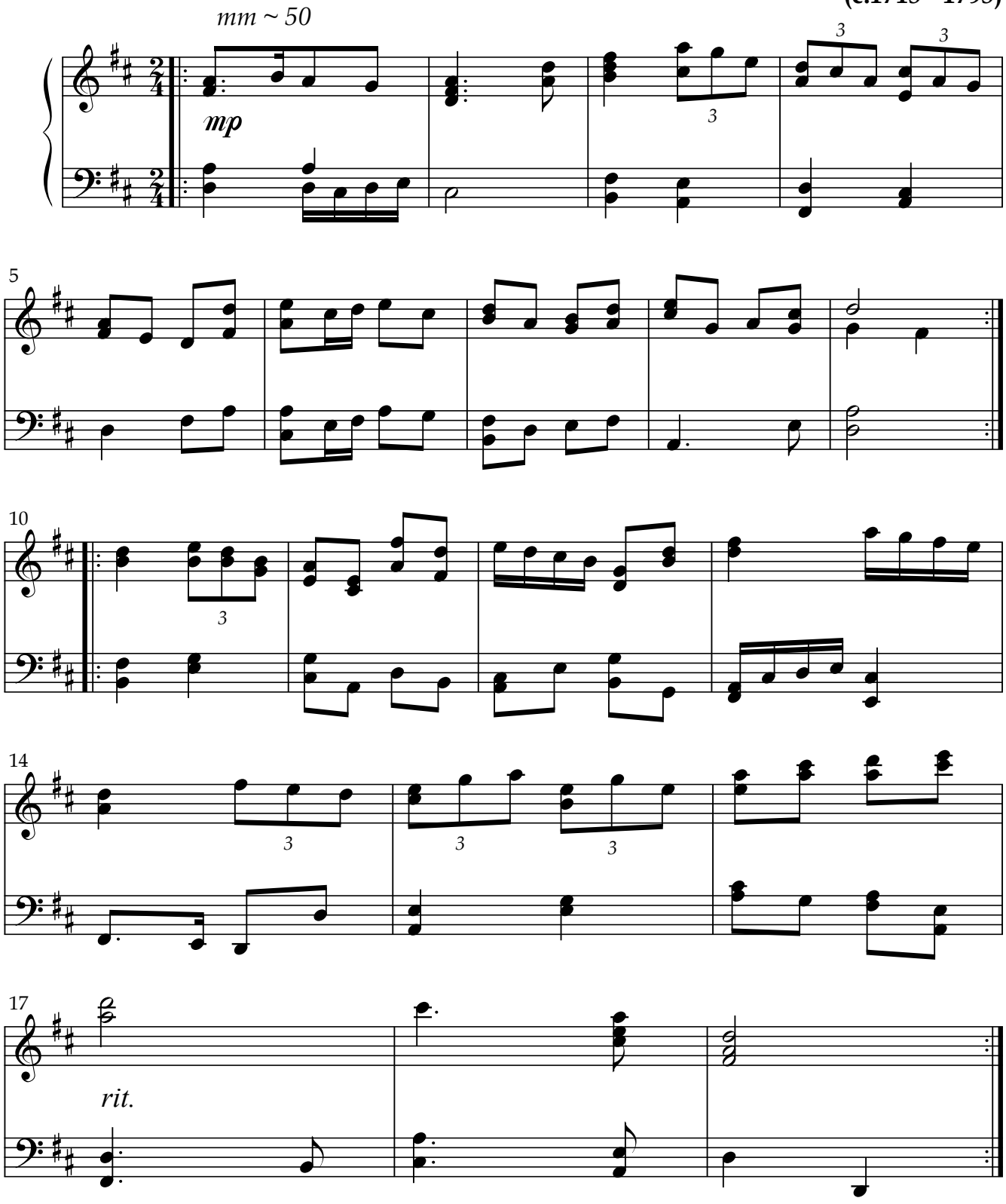
HYMN to the HEART of JESUS

Duan Chroi Iosa

Tadhg Gaedhlach O Suillebháin
(c.1715 - 1795)



HYMN to the HEART of JESUS

Light of my heart / Thy heart, O Lord divine!
Pulse of my heart / Thy heart to have for mine!
And since for love of me / Thy Sacred Heart did fill
Within my heart fast-bound / Thy Heart be still!
- Donal O'Sullivan translation

It is a fact of history that the Irish, despite the undoubted strength and resilience of their religious faith and their unquestioned skills as poets and musicians, did not compose as many pieces of religious music as might be expected. While this might appear to be a paradox, one must always remember that the historical milieu in Ireland was for centuries not favorable to such expression, as both the Irish language and the Catholic religion were viewed as seditious by those exercising political power in Ireland.

The infamous Penal Laws are the clearest evidence of this antagonism. In spite of official restrictions, however, songs of a clearly religious nature did appear and often achieved great popularity among the Catholic peasantry, although they were often at first circulated orally or in manuscript. "Duan Chroi Iosa", a composition of Tadhg Gaedhlach O Súilleabháin (= Timothy O Sullivan "the Irishman") is one such. O Sullivan was a poet from the Munster (southern) area of Ireland whose religious works were rooted in a personal conversion experienced in his mid-life.

While the words of these religious songs can usually be clearly attributed, less certain is the source of the music. In the absence of any information to the contrary, we have to presume that the the poetry and the melody to which it was set were the work of a single person; the historical evidence indicates that these pieces were so considered by those closest to them.