

Russborough, Co. Wicklow

12 – 14 November 2021

WWF WEST WICKLOW CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL

Winter Weekend

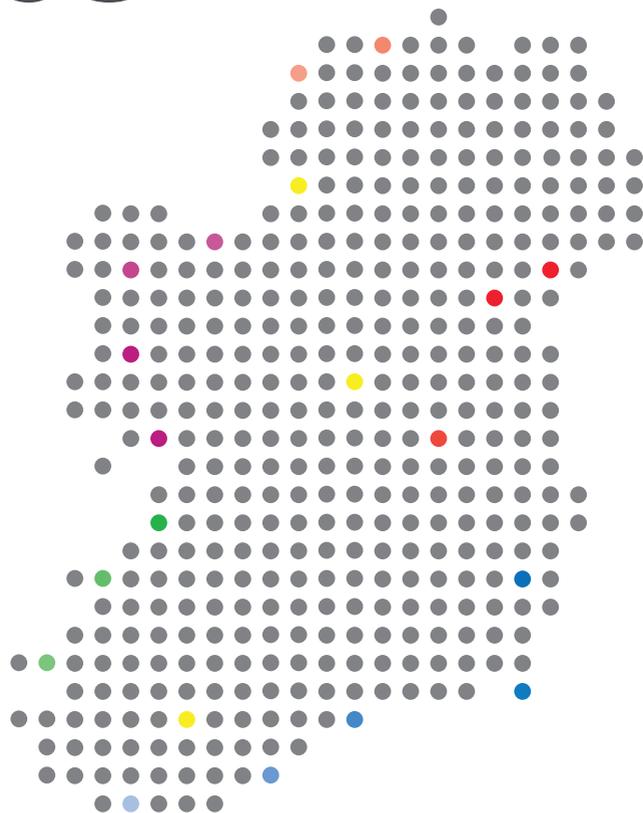


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Welcome



Welcome to the West Wicklow Festival's inaugural "Winter Weekend"! It's so wonderful to be back playing for live audiences again and it's impossible to put into words how much we've missed you all!

The idea behind the Winter Weekend was a combination of the excitement of being allowed to have audiences again but also comments we had received from concert attendees that it was a long 12 months wait between festivals each year. We of course will be sticking with our flagship festival in May and we hope that November will also prove a "keeper" in the long run!

For the opening concert on the 12th November I'm thrilled to join forces with Irish violinist Mairéad Hickey. I first met Mairéad at the West Cork Chamber Music festival over 10 years ago and it is a joy to be playing our first ever duo recital together here at Russborough. We will perform some of the greatest sonatas ever written for violin and piano by Debussy, Brahms and Strauss plus "a quarter million miles from the moon" by Irish composer Deirdre McKay. I discovered Deirdre's piece earlier this year and it fits so perfectly with this programme, the calm before the Strauss storm!

On Saturday 13th November we welcome Latvian sisters Kristīne and Margarita Balanas, a tour de force violin / cello duo, who will give their debut Irish performance. I've known these incredible artists since our student days at the Royal Academy of Music in London and I can safely say you are all in for a very special treat. Their concert will feature music by J.S Bach, Ravel, Handel, Vivaldi, fellow Latvian composer Pēteris Vasks and a newly arranged commission by Irish composer Anne-Marie O'Farrell called "A Russborough Diversion".

Our finale concert on Sunday 14th November features leading Irish artists mezzo-soprano Sharon Carty and pianist Gary Beecher. This exciting duo will present a programme of pure beauty featuring songs by Schubert, Debussy and Grieg as well as some well-known and loved Irish and American songs, a fitting end to our Winter Weekend and the perfect way to round off a Sunday afternoon at Russborough!

I would also like to extend a warm Wicklow welcome to our fantastic new festival manager Muireann Sheahan who joined the festival team in September. Muireann has been an absolute joy to work with these past number of months and I'm so excited about the journey we will both go on with the festival in the years ahead. If you haven't yet met Muireann please do say hello throughout the weekend.

As always, I would like to express my gratitude to all of our volunteers, supporters and partners without whom the festival would not be possible.

I look forward to chatting with you all over the weekend and to enjoying wonderful music and a bit of normal life together again!

Fiachra Garvey, *Founder and Artistic Director*

Friday 12 November 8pm

Programme notes © Ian Fox 2021

Mairéad Hickey violin
Fiachra Garvey piano

Brahms Violin Sonata No. 1 in G major, Op. 78

Debussy Violin Sonata in G minor

INTERVAL

Deirdre McKay “a quarter million miles from the moon”

Strauss Violin Sonata in Eb major, Op. 18

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897)

Violin Sonata No. 1 in G major, Op. 78 (“Regenlied”)

i Vivace ma non troppo

ii Adagio

iii Allegro molto moderato

Brahms was fond of visiting Pörtlach in Carinthia, where he would spend his summer holidays, which provided him with the undisturbed peace he needed for composition. The great Violin Concerto was developed there in 1878 and the following May he was back to compose a new piece for violin – this Sonata. It has sometimes been called his “Rain” Sonata because in the last movement he refers to his song “Rain” and uses a pattering like accompaniment for it. The first movement is a glorious cantabile; there is no barnstorming here, just beautifully-phrased writing for the violin. There is also a distinctly Viennese-waltz feeling to the rhythm of the opening theme; this reappears in the *Adagio* and is also employed in the first subject of the Finale; nowhere else in the music of Brahms does a single theme so dominate a work.

The second movement is in E flat and pursues the form A-B-A-B-A, with the waltz rhythm occurring in the “B” sections, now slowed down almost to a funeral march. Some commentators have noticed a similarity here to Beethoven’s last Violin Sonata. The Finale once more uses the waltz rhythm as the opening of the principal rondo theme which is itself based on his song “Regenlied” (Op. 59 No.3), completed in 1873: “*Fall, rain, fall, and bring back my childhood dreams, when the water foamed in the sand... how I would love to hear the sweet pattering of the raindrops and have my soul restored with the thrill of childhood’s innocence.*”

Surprisingly, the “rain” idea is followed by a new theme and it becomes clear that the movement is going to be a rondo. The episode that comes next, after the main theme has been brought back for another airing, is a reworking of the theme of the *Adagio*. This gives way to the “Rain” idea again until the *Adagio* material finally takes precedent and brings the Sonata to a peaceful and serene close, still reflecting the waltz rhythm in this closely knit Sonata.

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862 – 1918)

Violin Sonata in G minor

i Allegro vivo

ii Intermède (Fantasque e léger)

iii Finale (Très animé)

By the mid 1910s Debussy’s health was failing and sadly he was to die of cancer in 1918. He was unable to enlist in 1914 when the Great War commenced and was deeply concerned about making some contribution to the military effort. He wrote to his publisher, Jacques Durand: “All this makes my life intense and troubled. I am just a poor little atom crushed in this terrible cataclysm. What I am doing seems so wretchedly small”. However, his health took a turn for the better in the summer of 1915 and he produced a number of important works including two new sonatas. In another letter to Durand he commented “I think of the youth of France, idiotically mown down... the music I am writing will be a secret homage to them”.

He decided to create a series of six sonatas for various instrumental combinations but only succeeded in completing three of them: the Cello Sonata, the Sonata for Flute, Viola and Harp and his last composition: the Violin Sonata. He started work on it in February 1917 completing it that March; it received its first performance on May 5th with the young violinist Gaston Poulet and the composer at the piano. It was to be his last public appearance and his final work, as he died on March 25th, 1918, when Paris was being bombarded, with shells falling in the streets.

Despite the circumstances surrounding the work, this Sonata could not be called a morbid or melancholic final testament. In fact, it is remarkable for its elegant lightness, brevity and expressive buoyancy. There is a whimsy about the first movement, with its introspective opening phrase blossoming into a more forthright mood and presenting both a theme and counter-subject. The writing is modest but at times bursts into flight of rhapsodic fantasy. The second movement is in the style of a scherzo, with a certain “faun-like grace” as one commentator has observed, it is the last of Debussy’s typical harlequinesque interludes. Its spiciness is tempered with moments of real tenderness. The Finale opens with a recollection of the first movement and moves on to a theme that even surprised the composer; he remarked that it was “subjected to the most curious deformations and ultimately leaves the impression of an idea turning back upon itself, like a snake biting its own tail”. The integration of themes is enhanced through another reference to the opening movement right at the end, in a sprightly coda.

DEIRDRE MCKAY (b. 1972)

“a quarter million miles from the moon”

Born in Co. Down, Deirdre McKay attended Queen’s University, Belfast, and the University of Manchester, also studying privately with Kevin Volans in Dublin, receiving a Doctorate from Queen’s in 2003. She won the Director’s Choice award at the Boston Metro Opera’s 2013 International Composers’ Competition and received a coveted Paul Hamlyn Composer Award, London, in 2018. This six-minute piece was given its première at the Pavilion Theatre, Dún Laoghaire in 2016 by Chloë Hanslip, violin, and pianist Danny Driver. The composer has noted: “Since writing my third quartet... the incomprehensibly vast quietude of space has become a fixture in my thought: space, being an almost perfect vacuum, is not well equipped to support sound. In an age promising earthlings commercial flights to the moon, if you’d like to experience the sensorial beauty of skilled musicians playing live on exquisitely crafted instruments, you need to visit Planet Earth. With this thought, comes a deeper appreciation of sound as a phenomenon. It draws the ear closer, as though not a note should be wasted. Something of the weightlessness, the immense quietude of a vast soundless space, something of a renewed preciousness in each individual note is fused in this soundworld”.

RICHARD STRAUSS (1864 – 1949)

Violin Sonata in E flat major, Op. 18

i Allegro, ma non troppo

ii Improvisation: Andante cantabile

iii Finale: Andante - Allegro

Born in Munich, Strauss’s father was a famous horn player and he grew up in an intensely musical atmosphere. In his teens he was already writing substantial works. By the time he composed this sonata at the age of 23, he had completed two symphonies, concertos for horn and for violin, the suite *Aus Italien* and the fine Burleske for Piano and Orchestra. It was to be his last significant contribution to chamber music (apart from the string sextet in his opera *Capriccio* in 1941) and he was already working on his score for *Don Juan* at the time. His considerable maturity is clear in the Sonata’s splendidly expansive pages.

The first movement is a substantial piece with a strongly orchestral feel to its elegant lines. The opening theme is announced in quick succession by piano and violin, and is immediately arresting. The second theme has a passionate longing of the kind closely associated with his orchestral creations. It builds to an almost operatic climax with the themes soaring on high violin lines over busy piano accompaniments, almost as though this was a reduction of a concerto score.

The second movement was written last and is a well-established, mature creation. Its languorous, sighing phrases are full of peace and happiness. In its central section the piano seems to quote Schubert’s “Earl King”, which has to be deliberate. Soon the music returns to its initial dreamy musings to bring the movement to a gentle close.

The finale starts darkly but quickly brightens into a typically up-beat Strauss theme on the piano, in the “*Don Juan*” mode, with the violin adding busy decorations. It then presents an arching, longing melody which is treated to extensive development in a fervid climax. It brings this remarkable creation to a splendidly impassioned conclusion. Throughout there is the feeling that the young Strauss is flexing his wings as he starts the era of his remarkable tone poems.

Programme notes © Ian Fox 2021

Saturday 13 November 8pm

Programme notes © Ian Fox 2021

Kristine Balanas violin
Margarita Balanas cello

J.S Bach

Prelude, Sarabande and Courante from Suite No.1 in G major for cello, BWV 1007
 Preludio, Loure and Gavotte en Rondeau from Partita No. 3 in E major for violin,
 BWV 1006

Pēteris Vasks Castillo Interior

INTERVAL

Anne-Marie O'Farrell A Russborough Diversion (newly arranged commission)

Ravel Sonata for violin and cello

Handel Passacaglia (arr J.Halvorsen)

Vivaldi 'Summer' from The Four Seasons (arr Kristine and Margarita Balanas)

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685 – 1750)

Prelude, Sarabande and Courante from Suite No. 1 for Cello, BWV 1007

It is remarkable how the lives and whims of the aristocracy affected music during the 17th and 18th century in central Europe. Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Köthen (1694 – 1728) held a famous court, being an excellent violinist himself. He employed Bach from 1717 to 1723, resulting in some of Johann Sebastian's finest works. The exact date of composition is not certain but about 1721 seems most likely; unfortunately, the manuscript of the Cello Suites is missing, and the music is known only through the copies made around 1730 by Bach's second wife, Anna Magdalena. The opening Prelude is one of the best-known movements among the Suites and is frequently heard in films and on tv. Its deceptively simple, undulating phrases rise to an impassioned climax through the use of arpeggiated chords. The Courante is a busy creation with a fast-flowing melody, while the Sarabande presents a dignified two-part theme of Spanish origins.

Preludio, Loure and Gavotte en Rondeau from Partita No. 3 in E major for violin, BWV 1006

These are the first three movements of this magnificent Partita. The opening is the famous Prelude, which has been treated to a wide range of arrangements. It is a scintillating study in dexterity and subtle musicianship. The second movement is the first actual dance: a Loure, named after an old French bagpipe. It is a stately 6/4 creation. Next comes the best-known movement from the work, the Gavotte. Bach uses a rondo form with the sparkling theme coming around again a number of times, while contrasting episodes provide the material in between.

PĒTERIS VASKS (b. 1946)

Castillo Interior

Born in Aizpute, Latvia, Vasks trained as a violinist, completing his studies in Vilnius in neighbouring Lithuania. When Latvia regained its independence in 1990 it became possible for his music to be heard internationally, with Gidon Kramer popularising his scores, and he is now one of Europe's most highly regarded composers. He has worked with well-known musicians from many countries and has received awards and honours at home and abroad. In 1996 Vasks was awarded the University of Vienna Herder's Award and the Baltic Assembly Award. In 1993, 1997, and 2000, the composer was a laureate of the Latvian Great Music Award. In 2001 he was made honorary member of the Swedish Royal Music Academy. Vasks has mastered and synthesized many different 20th century compositional techniques and neo-romanticism is clearly heard in his works

Castillo Interior is a seven-minute meditative adagio dedicated to the mystic, Saint Teresa of Ávila. The unhurried pace of the music evokes the spirit of the Saint herself lost in devout contemplation. Twice during the piece, however, there are bursts of a faster sequence, perhaps an intrusion of the real world into the Saint's devotions. The first performance took place at the 2014 Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival.

ANNE-MARIE O'FARRELL (b. 1966)

A Russborough Diversion

Première of new arrangement, commissioned by the West Wicklow Chamber Music Festival

Dublin born Dr Anne-Marie O'Farrell holds a PhD in composition from Queen's University in Belfast and was awarded an MA in composition by Maynooth University in 1999. She has written an extensive collection of music and her works have been performed by ensembles including by the BBC Concert Orchestra and the BBC Singers. She was the winner of the BBC Baroque Remixed competition and regularly gives lecture recitals, workshops and masterclasses at international festivals and conferences. She is also a highly-regarded performer on classical and Irish harps.

Anne-Marie O'Farrell writes: "A *Russborough Diversion* is a later incarnation of a viola and cello duet entitled *Sonatín*, composed for teenage performers Carmel Comiskey and Eleanor Gaffney. This version for violin and cello has been commissioned by the West Wicklow Festival and is receiving its world premiere this evening. The piece exploits some of the colourful timbres available from this particular instrumental pairing to highlight rhythmic idioms and melodic gestures. At times its material briefly suggests romantic elegance, evocative of the ambience of a grand country house, while some ideas hint at fleeting moments of seriousness, and others are altogether more playful, allowing the musicians the opportunity to converse and interact."

MAURICE RAVEL (1875 - 1937)

Sonata for violin and cello

- i Allegro
- ii Très vif
- iii Lent
- iv Vif, avec entrain

Claude Debussy had planned to write a series of six chamber music works for various instrumental combinations. He succeeded in writing three of the set before his death in 1918. When asked to contribute to a special issue of *La Revue Musicale* in 1920 in honour of Debussy, Ravel wrote the first movement of this Sonata, following the pattern of works for small groups established by the dedicatee. Later he decided to expand the work into four movements. He was in the process of moving from Paris to the village of Montfort l'Amaury about 30 miles away and the work took some time to complete. The finished composition was sent to his publisher eighteen months later and he was given on April 6th, 1922 by Hélène Jourdan-Morhange and Maurice Mareschal. There were rows during the rehearsals with Ravel insisting on great accuracy in the rhythms and sonorities. "It's too complicated" Hélène told him, "the cello has to sound like a flute and the violin like a drum. It must be great fun writing such difficult stuff but no one's going to play it except virtuosos!". "Good" Ravel retorted, "then I shan't be murdered by amateurs!".

The first movement is a flowing sequence with the instruments intertwining sinuously. It is in a broad sonata form with four main themes to it; one of these, a deeply dropping phrase, appears prominently in all movements, in fact all the themes reappear during the Sonata. After the moderate opening the pace quickens and the rhythmic and harmonic counterpoint becomes more complex. Despite this and the basic simplicity of the largely two-line music there is a pleasant melodiousness about the writing (melody is returning to Ravel's work at this time) and a feeling of easy, relaxed music-making.

The Scherzo follows with its witty pizzicato opening. The main theme from the first movement reappears in a harsh bi-tonal variation. The ideas become increasingly hilarious until the mood darkens with the cello providing a dramatic recitative-like motto. The fun soon returns, interrupted by a strange, muted interlude, and the movement ends in uproar. The passionate slow movement is in three-part form, with a more vigorous central section. The cello launches the wistful theme again with echoes of the first movement in its structure. The violin takes up the theme in canon; the mood is not unlike the cavatina in Beethoven's late Quartet, Opus 130, though the harmonies are more astringently French. The finale presents tricky phrases in unequal rhythmic groupings as the music spins to its merry conclusion, with moments reflecting Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale* (1918).

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL (1685 – 1759)

Passacaglia from Harpsichord Suite No. 7 in G Minor HWV 432, arranged by Halvorsen

Handel's Seventh Harpsichord Suite first appeared in a book of Eight Suites published in 1720. The last movement of the Seventh Suite is a Passacaglia and its powerful originality has attracted composers to undertake transcriptions for other instruments, from orchestral settings to Halvorsen's popular version for violin and cello. A passacaglia is an old Spanish dance where a base line is repeated while variations on it are played above its repetitions, creating a powerful sweep to the music. Johan Halvorsen (1864-1935) was a leading Norwegian musician, being a virtuoso violinist, composer and conductor of the National Theatre in Christiania (now Oslo) for over thirty years. He was highly regarded across Scandinavia during his lifetime. He has arranged the four-bar melody into a sequence of twelve variations demonstrating many playing techniques. There are pizzicato (plucked) effects, guitar-like sequences and passages of spectacular display and technical challenges placing huge demands on the two players.

ANTONIO VIVALDI (1678-1741)

Concerto No. 2 in G minor, "Summer", from The Four Seasons Op. 8, RV 315, arranged by Kristine and Margarita Balanas

- i *Allegro non molto – Allegro*
- ii *Adagio - Presto - Adagio*
- iii *Presto (like a Summer storm)*

Vivaldi was Venetian born and bred. He took holy orders and was known as "the Red Priest", because of the distinctive colour of his hair. His main claim to fame however, was not as a cleric but as a musician. He taught the violin and wrote a vast amount of music, including nearly 500 concertos. For many years he was in charge of music at the Ospedale della Pietà, one of four homes in Venice for abandoned or orphaned children. It was a girls' institution and the concerts by the splendid female orchestra under his direction became a celebrated feature of Venetian musical life. After centuries of neglect the music of Vivaldi began to re-emerge in the 1950s and the attractive melodies of *The Four Seasons* quickly gained attention. It is not difficult to understand its success: the tunes are splendid; the writing is imaginative.

The Second Concerto, "Summer", opens with a hot, lazy day; everyone is sleepy and the pine trees burn in the heat. The music is suitably slow and somnolent. The soloist then introduces the cuckoo, followed by the ensemble at a gentler pace, with the soloist imitating the dove and the nightingale in a brilliant sequence. Suddenly the music rushes ahead with the suggestion of a storm; then the soloist describes a shepherd boy frightened by the prospect of lightning before the ritornello returns to end the movement. The central movement contrasts the lad's slumbers with flashes of lightning and swarms of flies, while the finale is a marvellous description of a full summer storm, one of Vivaldi's most striking creations.

Programme notes © Ian Fox 2021

Sunday 14 November 3pm

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Sharon Carty mezzo-soprano
Gary Beecher piano

Schubert Viola, Op. 123, D.786 | Die Junge Nonne, Op. 43, D.828 | Du bist die Ruh, Op. 59/3, D.776 | Gretchen am Spinnrade, Op. 2 D.118 | An die Musik, Op. 88/4, D.547

Grieg Six Songs, Op. 48

INTERVAL

Debussy Chansons de Bilitis

Hamilton Harty Sea Wrack

Joan Trimble My grief on the sea

Jake Heggie The Haughty Snail King | Animal Passion

William Bolcom Amor

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797- 1828)

Viola, Op. 123 D. 786

An die Musik, Op. 88/4, D. 547

Gretchen am Spinnrade, Op. 2, D. 118

Du Bist die Rüh Op. 59/3, D. 776

Sharon Carty and Gary Beecher begin their programme with four lyrics by one of the greatest of song-writers, Franz Schubert. "Viola" dates from March 1823 and is a setting of words by Franz von Schober, one of Schubert's close friends who later became secretary to Liszt. "An die Musik" is Schubert's great paean to the glory of music, one of his finest achievements, and again a Schober setting. "Gretchen am Spinnrade" dates from October 1814 and is one of Schubert's earliest triumphs; it is based on a scene in Goethe's *Faust* and is a miniature drama in itself. It created a whole new style for German songs or Lieder and remains a magnificent achievement especially by one so young. The poem "Du bist die Ruh" was probably written in 1819 by Schubert's friend and contemporary Friedrich Rückert. Composed in 1823, it is a deeply moving love song, all the more telling for its deceptive simplicity.

EDVARD GRIEG (1843-1907)

Six Songs, Op. 48

I. Gruss; II. Dereinst, Gedanke mein; III. Lauf der Welt; IV. Die verschwiegene Nachtigall; V. Zur Rosenzeit; VI. Ein Traum.

Grieg did not consider himself highly as a song writer, though the evidence we have is that he was a very fine creator of lyric material. "When I write songs my principal goal is not to compose music but to do justice to the poet's most intimate expressions", he once wrote. These six songs to German texts date from 1889 and it has been suggested that they were inspired by a renewed closeness to his wife Nina, after a rocky period. He had studied in Leipzig and was thoroughly familiar with the style of the German art song or Lied, and of course spoke the language well. Later, he had them translated into Norwegian.

The first song is a setting of Heinrich Heine, with the poet sending a love message to the house where violets bloom. This is followed by a sombre comment on finding eventual peace in life. The poet is Emmanuel von Giebel. A little love story is related in "Laut der Welt", a poem by Johann Ludwig Uhland, while the fourth song takes its text from a 13th century German Meistersinger, Walther von der Vogelweide and links his courtship with the song of the nightingale. A setting of Goethe follows, as the poet addresses a fading rose that had once been held by his beloved. Finally in "Ein Traum" (A Dream) Grieg sets a passionate poem by Bodenstedt about lovely dreams which seemed to have come true.

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862 – 1918)

Chansons de Bilitis

i La flûte de Pan

ii La chevelure

iii Le Tombeau des Naiades

Pierre Louÿs (1870 – 1925) was a Belgian-born French poet, novelist and photographer, partial to erotic subjects. One of his greatest publishing successes was *Les Chansons de Bilitis* (*The Songs of Bilitis*), one hundred and forty three prose poems which he claimed he had translated from a recently discovered ancient Greek text by a poetess called Bilitis, an associate of Sappho. They caused quite a sensation at the time for their eroticism and antique sensuality but it was soon discovered they were fakes from the pen of Louÿs himself; however this did not affect their popularity. He was one of Debussy's closest friends, they even planned an opera together at one stage, and the composer chose three of the poems for this 1897 sequence. Later he would write *Six Épigraphes antiques* (1914) for piano duet to accompany the reading of a number of the Bilitis poems. At first Debussy resisted having the songs sung in public but they finally were performed by Blanch Marot at the Société Nationale on March 17th 1900.

The songs are declamatory to match the prose-poem originals. The first, "Pan's Flute", will stir up memories of the great *Prélude à l'Après Midi d'un faune* of 1894, though the music bears little direct resemblance. There is a touching innocence in the setting, probably tongue-in-cheek, while the frogs gurgle delightfully on the piano at the end. The second song "The tresses of hair" is more directly erotic, rising to a splendid musical climax before sinking into a quiet recollection of the dream. The final song "The tomb of the Naiads" takes place on an icy day when all the satyrs have vanished. It is a gentle reflection on the spirit world, with a charming short postlude.

HAMILTON HARTY (1879-1941)

Sea Wrack

Hamilton Harty was born in Hillsborough, Co. Down, where his father was the church organist. Hamilton showed considerable talent and was soon playing the instrument too and was appointed to a Belfast church at the early age of sixteen. He was also showing a gift for composition and his song "Sea Wrack" was written around this time, a remarkable achievement. The poem was by Moira O'Neill a popular Irish-Canadian poet who was living in Cushendun at that time. Her daughter would later become the writer Molly Keane.

JOAN TRIMBLE (1915-2000)

My grief on the sea

Born in Enniskillen, Joan Trimble first came to attention when she created a piano duo with her sister Valerie and they became popular performers in London, with their own BBC radio programmes. By the 1940s the sisters were among the best-known musicians in these islands. She retired from music in 1967, taking over control of the family newspaper *The Impartial Reporter* in Enniskillen. Her setting of a poem by Douglas Hyde "My grief on the sea" dates from 1937.

JAKE HEGGIE (b. 1961)

The Haughty Snail-king Animal Passion

Jake Heggie is a leading American composer whose opera *Dead Man Walking* has had huge international success, with productions in 70 countries including Ireland. It is soon to receive a staging at the Metropolitan Opera, New York. He wrote the song-cycle *Songs of the Moon (Fairy tales for the children)* in 1998 for Frederica von Stade, who visited Russborough a number of times, her mother having owned a stud farm in Kildare for some years. The words are by the oddball American poet Vachel Lindsay (1879-1931) and the poem, which tells of an old fat snail who wishes for a yellow crown, is the third in his children's collection of verse. Heggie wrote his song cycle *Natural Selection* for Nicolle Foland who gave the first performance in San Francisco in 1997; "Animal Passion" is the second of the five poems setting racy lines by Gini Savage.

WILLIAM BALCOM (b.1938)

Amor

William Balcom is another American composer who became better known to Irish audiences following the production of his opera *Dinner at Eight* at the 1918 Wexford Festival Opera. He has written a series of delightful Cabaret Songs to texts by Arnold Weinstein; they have been introduced by his wife, the mezzo-soprano Joan Morris. *Amor* is taken from the First Book, written in 1978 and tells of the devastating effect a young lady has on a wide range of people.

Programme notes © Ian Fox 2021



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violin

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Celebrated Irish violinist Mairéad Hickey is acclaimed for her captivating expression, soaring tone and fearless virtuosity. Her natural ability to communicate sincerely, with beauty and integrity, entrances audiences worldwide.

As a soloist Mairéad has performed with the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra, RTÉ Concert Orchestra, Hessischer Rundfunk Sinfonie Orchester, Württembergisches Kammerorchester, Philharmonisches Staatsorchester Mainz, Kremerata Baltica, the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Camerata Ireland and with conductors such as Christoph Eschenbach in some of the major halls around the world. Her Carnegie Hall debut was described as "...magical, penetrating to the heart and soul of the music." (*New York Epoch Times*)

Mairéad is the concertmaster of the Orchestre National des Pays de la Loire and is a passionate chamber musician. Her love of chamber music led her to co-found the Ortús Chamber Music Festival in 2016 in her native Cork, of which she is Artistic Director.

Mairéad was Irish NCH Young Musician of the Year 2010 – 2012. As well as winning prizes at renowned Irish competitions, she won third prize as well as a Special Prize for the best interpretation of a virtuoso work at the 2016 International Louis Spohr Competition and first prize in the Jeunesses Musicales Violin Competition, Romania 2012. In 2017 she was awarded a Special Prize in the Berliner International Music Competition and the Manhattan International Music Competition.

Born in 1996, Mairéad began playing the violin at the age of three with Jyrki Pietila. From 2003 to 2014 she studied with Adrian Petcu at the CIT Cork School of Music, Ireland and spent a year in France studying at the Conservatoire de Nantes with Constantin Serban. In 2020 she graduated with a Masters in Performance from Kronberg Academy where she studied with Mihaela Martin, sponsored by the Hilmar Kopper Stipendium.

Mairéad has taken masterclasses and worked intensely with artists such as András Schiff, Rita Wagner, Ferenc Rados, Gidon Kremer, Dora Schwarzberg, Elena Bashkirova, Hugh Maguire, Vadim Repin, Mariana Sirbu, Ana Chumachenko, Vadim Gluzman, Steven Isserlis, Yossi Zivoni, Mauricio Fuks, Gabor Takács-Nagy, Christoph Eschenbach, Marc Danel and Ivry Gitlis among others. Mairéad also plays traditional Irish music and has won eight world Irish fiddle titles. Mairéad currently plays a 1702 Giovanni Tononi violin.

Fiachra Garvey

piano

www.fiachragarvey.com



First prizewinner at the 2012 Jaques Samuel Competition, London, Fiachra Garvey, ARAM, has performed in venues from the Fazioli Auditorium in Italy to London's Wigmore Hall. He has also been a prizewinner at AXA Dublin International Piano Competition (Brennan Prize and McCullough Bursary), EU Piano Competition Prague (concerto finalist), and 3rd Soirees-Concours Internationales de Piano a Collioure, France (Audience award). The National Concert Hall Dublin awarded Fiachra the "Rising Star" prize in 2011, which subsequently led to a series of concerto and solo debuts.

Fiachra's concerto appearances include Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* with the Janáček Philharmonic, Tchaikovsky and Poulenc with the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra and Cambridge Symphony Orchestra, Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* and Grieg with the RTÉ Concert Orchestra, Prokofiev No. 3 with the RIAM Symphony Orchestra and Grieg with the Hibernian Orchestra, working with eminent conductors including John Wilson, Duncan Ward, Theodore Kuchar, Stephen Bell and Mihhail Gerts.

Recent highlights include the first classical recital at Google Dublin, a series of solo and two-piano recitals in Japan, a tour of China during which Fiachra gave masterclasses at the Beijing Conservatory of Music, as well as appearances at Spoleto Festival Italy, Wexford Opera, Brighton Festival, West Cork Chamber Music Festival, Bridgewater Hall, Manchester and The Geneva Festival, Switzerland.

Fiachra's debut CD *For the Piano*, on the RTÉ lyric FM label "brings a deep and infectious enthusiasm, combined with insight and technical comfort." (*Sunday Times*). His second CD is a live performance from Wigmore Hall.

Fiachra is the Founder and Artistic Director of the West Wicklow Festival, Co-Founder and Artistic Director of Classical Vauxhall and sits on the board of the Dublin International Piano Competition. He is hugely grateful for the support he has received from the Arts Council (Professional Development Award 2020) and the Wicklow Arts Office (Artist Award Scheme 2020).

When not performing, Fiachra loves nothing more than returning home to help on the family farm with the yearly lambing, dipping, shearing, harvesting and all the other elegant and refined activities on the farm! Fiachra feels this makes him a more inspired and fulfilled musician.

Kristīne Balanas & Margarita Balanas

violin
cello

www.kristinebalanas.com/balanas-sisters

Latvian sisters Kristīne and Margarita Balanas are two of the most exciting and versatile artists of their generation. Known for their distinguished artistry and mesmerising stage presence, the pair have quickly earned an international reputation as critically-acclaimed soloists in the vanguard of classical music. The sisters' unique and visionary approach has penetrated the industry, paving the way for a new scene in classical music, and the duo have been praised on a global scale for their revolutionary ideas.

Together, Kristīne and Margarita have dazzled audiences with their virtuosic splendour in venues such as Carnegie Hall, Laeiszhalle Hamburg, Foundation Louis Vuitton, Royal Festival Hall, and Walt Disney Hall. Most recently they made their debut at the Berliner Philharmonie, where they performed the Brahms Double Concerto. They also performed at the Festival Radio France Occitanie Montpellier, and the upcoming season includes joint performances at the Cayman Arts Festival, Emergents Barcelona Music Festival at the L'Auditori de Barcelona with the Barcelona Symphony Orchestra, and the Joseph Calleja Charity Gala with the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra.

Kristīne (violin), who has been described by *The Times* as a musician of “eye-popping virtuosity”, is one of the fastest rising talents on the international scene and was recently recognised as Young Artist of the Year in the prestigious Grand Music Awards of Latvia. She also received the Fundacion Excelentia Young Talent Award from Her Majesty Queen Sofia of Spain. Her current season includes debuts with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Barcelona Symphony Orchestra, Malta Philharmonic Orchestra, and recitals across Germany, Italy, Israel, Latvia, Greece and France. Kristīne has appeared as a soloist with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and Orchestre de Chambre de Paris, amongst others. A regular guest soloist on Latvian National Radio Recitals, Kristīne has also performed on BBC Radio 3's In Tune and BBC One's The One Show.

Margarita (cello) who has been hailed as “powerful, delicate, intense and brilliant” (*GLAM Adelaide*) made her solo debut at Wigmore Hall at age 17 and has since established an impressive solo career on the international stage. She has performed for dignitaries and royalty, including HRH Prince Charles at venues such as Royal Festival Hall, Kensington Palace, Hattori Foundation, Ministry of Culture, and the Tel Aviv Museum of Art. Her upcoming



performances include concerts with the Israel Camerata, Cyprus Chamber Orchestra, and the IASI Philharmonic Orchestra. Other highlights include past performances at Wigmore Hall, Southbank Centre, Barbican Centre, and participation in the International Cello Festival Shanghai, Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival in Germany, and the Piatigorsky International Cello Festival in Los Angeles. Most recently she was extended a personal invitation by Anne-Sophie Mutter to tour with the Mutter Virtuosi across South America, India, and Europe. Adding to their prestige within the classical music industry, Kristīne and Margarita have been commended for their entrepreneurial insight and creativity within the greater arts community, having successfully explored their various gifts within the visual and performing arts.

The two were featured as actors and musicians alongside Robbie Williams in his music video “Different”, and in New Riga Theatre's award-winning production of *Story about Kaspar Hauser* directed by Alvis Hermanis. The Tel Aviv Museum in Israel recently commissioned a short documentary about Margarita's instrument, in which she was featured. In addition to their work on screen, the sisters modelled for *Vogue* and Molly Goddard in London Fashion Week, and since 2018, they have been sponsored by leading brands such as La Perla and GVIDO.

As soloists and chamber musicians the pair have collaborated with artists such as Anne-Sophie Mutter, Maxim Vengerov, Trevor Pinnock, Murray Perahia, Sir Mark Elder, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, Lynn Harrell, Peteris Vasks, Paul Daniel, Ainars Rubikis, Rory MacDonald, Gad Kadosh, Carlos Izcaray, and Vadim Gluzman. Kristīne performs on a 1787 Antonio Gagnani violin, and Margarita plays the 1849 Charles Adolphe Gand 'Auguste Tolbecque' cello on which Camille Saint-Saëns' Cello Concerto No. 1 was premiered in 1873.

Both instruments are generously on loan to the sisters by the Little Butterfly Foundation

Anne-Marie O'Farrell

composer
www.annemarieofarrell.com



Composer Dr Anne-Marie O'Farrell has a substantial output of commissioned work for orchestra, choir, soloists, chamber groups and young performers to her name. Her works have been performed by the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Concert Orchestra, the University of Limerick Orchestra, the Co-Orchestra Dublin, the BBC Singers, Chamber Choir Ireland, the RTÉ ConTempo Quartet and numerous international solo artists.

She is the winner of the BBC Baroque Remixed composition competition for her orchestral work, *Rann Dó Trí*. For three years she was Composer in Residence at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, funded by the Arts Council of Ireland in association with the Lime Tree Theatre. Numerous and wide-ranging commissions include a choral suite *Sevenses* for Sing Ireland, *Eitilt* for the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra for the New Music Dublin Festival, Music Network's commission for members of the Vienna Philharmonic, Dionysis Grammenos and Anneleen Lenaerts, a harp concerto for the RTÉ Concert Orchestra commissioned by RTÉ lyric fm, and a 40-minute cantata to commemorate the Irish Civil War for UCD.

She holds a PhD in composition from Queen's University, Belfast where she studied with Professor Piers Hellawell, and a first class honours MA in composition from the NUI Maynooth. She lectures in composition at the TU Dublin Conservatoire and her compositions are featured on examination and competition syllabuses around the world.

Partnering with Chamber Choir Ireland and the Department of Education, she has mentored second level teachers and students in composition, and is regularly engaged as composition adjudicator for competitions.

Sharon Carty

mezzo-soprano
www.sharoncarty.com



Irish mezzo-soprano Sharon Carty is a singer who has firmly established a reputation as a respected interpreter of both early and contemporary works, alongside maintaining a busy schedule in mainstream opera and concert repertoire. She is an alumna of RIAM Dublin, MDW Vienna, and Oper Frankfurt Young Artist Programme, and is currently an Artistic Partner to Irish National Opera as well as a Creative Associate on the Irish Arts Council pilot "Creative Schools" scheme. Most recently, she was announced as "Maynooth Campus Associate Artist" for NUI Maynooth and the Pontifical University Maynooth for 2020/2021.

Regularly praised for her musicality and intelligence, her integrity as an artist and the warmth, clarity and agility of her voice, her opera repertoire includes many of the important lyric and coloratura mezzo-soprano roles, such as Hänsel, Dido, Ruggiero, Dorabella, Cherubino, Ariodante, Orfeo and Sesto. On the concert platform her repertoire spans most of the major sacred concert works, including all the principal works by J.S. Bach as well as Handel's *Messiah*, Mozart's Great Mass in C minor and a broad song repertoire in addition to numerous chamber music works. She is also a dedicated song recitalist, most recently appearing in performances with pianists Finghin Collins, Jonathan Ware and Graham Johnson.

Career highlights to date include her London and Amsterdam opera debuts with *The Second Violinist* at the Barbican Theatre, and the Muziekgebouw in Amsterdam, her Wexford Festival Opera debut as Lucy Talbot in the European première of William Bolcom's *Dinner at Eight*, the title role in Irish National Opera's critically-acclaimed *Orfeo ed Euridice* and her debut at the Festival dei Due Mondi in Spoleto, Italy, where she premiered a new opera, *Proserpine* by Silvia Colasanti, to critical acclaim.

A regular collaborator with orchestras across Europe, her discography includes *La Traviata* on Naxos DVD with the NDR Radiophilharmonie alongside Thomas Hampson and Marina Rebeka as well as *The Mountebanks* (Gilbert/Cellier) on CD with the BBC Concert Orchestra. Her most recent CD, a disc of Schubert songs with pianist Jonathan Ware, was released in May 2020.

Gary Beecher

piano
www.garybeecher.com



Cork pianist Gary Beecher has a varied career as a soloist, chamber musician and vocal accompanist. In 2019 he scored important international competition successes, including the International Nadia and Lili Boulanger Voice-Piano Competition (Paris), the Rudolf Jansen Pianist Prize at the 53rd International Vocal Competition LiedDuo ('s-Hertogenbosch), and 2nd Pianist Prize at the International Helmut Deutsch Lied Competition (Vienna).

He was the winner of the Irish Freemasons Young Musician of the Year and has performed as soloist with both the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra and RTÉ Concert Orchestra. Venues he has performed in include the National Concert Hall and RDS in Dublin, University Concert Hall, Limerick, Cork Opera House and the Barbican and Wigmore Hall in London. Radio broadcasts include live performances on BBC Radio Three and RTÉ lyric fm.

He completed his MA at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London where he was a Fellow and staff accompanist, and was also mentored by Julius Drake and Charles Owen. He holds a BMus and MA from the CIT Cork School of Music, where he studied with Susan and Jan Čáp, Michael McHale and Gabriela Mayer; and former teachers include Jacques Rouvier (Universität der Künste Berlin) and John O'Connor (RIAM).

He is currently undertaking a Doctorate at the Royal Irish Academy of Music where he is studying with Hugh Tinney. Gary has recently been appointed Assistant Lecturer of Piano and Contemporary Keyboards at the MTU Cork School of Music.

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A further thank you to everyone who has donated any amount to the festival over the past year. Donations of all sizes are hugely appreciated.



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We look forward to seeing you again in May 2022



West Wicklow Festival is a registered charity and non-profit organisation which aims to enhance the cultural landscape of West Wicklow through high-quality, accessible events. We rely heavily on the support of the local community, our supporters, patrons and of course, our audience. All donations made to the Festival are gratefully received and can be made through our website or by contacting us directly.

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