

Cork International Choral Festival 2014: Seminar Programme

The Cork International Choral Festival has a long-standing commitment to foster awareness and appreciation of new choral music. With this in mind a seminar was initiated in 1962 as part of the festival programme by the late Aloys Fleischmann, Professor of Music at University College Cork, and Director of the Festival from 1967 -1987, as being central to this purpose. A number of contemporary composers were commissioned each year to write new works, which would be premiered in the Festival programme. Composer Séamas de Barra explains that *“Fleischmann was aware, however, that the reception of new music can often be problematical: in his experience, many listeners tended to find the idioms of contemporary music merely puzzling, and reaction was not infrequently one of incomprehension – a situation that was more acute in the 1960s, perhaps, than it is today. It was in order to provide a context, therefore, for the reception of the newly commissioned pieces, that he established the Seminar on Contemporary Choral Music, structured to allow for the presentation of analyses of the new-works, informal performances before the official premiers in the City Hall, and contributions from the composers and the conductors and members of the participating choirs.”*

This year the Festival presents the 46th edition of the Seminar on New Choral Music as a joint collaboration with Chamber Choir Ireland, its choir in residence. To date, 132 works from 109 Irish and international composers have been commissioned.

The Seminar on New Choral Music maintains its initial purpose of commissioning new works to provide a platform for, and to encourage the composition, and performance of new choral music in Ireland, and to support their inclusion, and that of other new music, onto the regular repertoire of Irish choirs. In the last few years the Seminar has specifically promoted the commission of new works by Irish composers to develop a wider knowledge of, and understanding of, Irish compositional life. It has also featured the winner of the *Seán Ó Riada Composition Competition* as one of the Seminar works since 2010. As performances of contemporary choral music now appear in the programmes of many choirs participating at the festival, the premiere performances of the Seminar works are now integrated into a full concert programme presented by Chamber Choir Ireland. The present style of presentation makes the seminar very accessible to all, and assists in making current practice in the performance of new choral music accessible to the wider choral sector in Ireland.

This year will see two new works featured, and given their world premieres in Cork; “*Letter to Michael*” by composer David Fennessy and “*Solomon Grundy*” by the winner of this year’s Seán Ó Riada Competition, Donal Mac Erlaine. The Seán Ó Riada Competition was initiated in 1972 in recognition of the creative life and work of Seán Ó Riada. It is a composition competition which invites the submission of new works from Irish composers in a collaboration between the Cork International Choral Festival and Chamber Choir Ireland. This year the competition received entries from 30 Irish composers, maintaining the high entry level of the past four years. Both composers will be present in Cork and play an active part in the Seminar.

Without the financial support of the Arts Council in making the commission of David Fennessy possible, and of the Ó Riada Family for its generous support of the Seán Ó Riada Competition, this seminar would not be in a position to continue to fulfil its important role in promoting the work of Irish composers and encouraging the composition of new choral music.

Rhona Clarke, a highly regarded composer in her own right and a great friend of the festival, facilitates the sessions as Seminar Chairperson, and Majella Hollywood, Chief Executive of the CCI, has been constant in her commitment to continue the involvement of Chamber Choir Ireland in this project.

This year’s Seminar Programme also features (a) a most interesting talk by Coral O’Sullivan on the history of the festival’s Seminars. Titled *From Archer to Zuk - Fifty Years of the Cork International Choral Festival Seminars*, it will detail, in a multi-faceted manner, the exhaustive research Carol has completed for her MA thesis, and (b) a Performance Reading Session with Chamber Choir Ireland, of works by Seán Doherty and Sam Perkin, selected by the Seán Ó Riada Assessment Panel.

Finally, I would direct your attention to the full collection of Seminar scores now housed in the Cork City Music Library and available for consultation. General information on the Seminar, including digitised pages of scores and full choral festival programmes are now also available for perusal on the City Library website: www.corkcitylibraries.ie/music/corkinternationalchoralfestival The contribution of James O’Donnell, is acknowledged for all his dedicated and committed work in following through on the completion of this archive.

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