



Elizabeth Hilliard (voice) and electronics

Saturday 28th October 2023, 6pm

The Lemon Tree, Aberdeen

Programme

Ailís Ní Ríain	<i>Refuse to be wrecked (UK première)</i> [8']
Siobhán Cleary	<i>Sleepsong (UK première)</i> [10']
Gráinne Mulvey	<i>Great Women (UK première)</i> [26']

Supported by Culture Ireland / Cultúr Éireann



Programme notes

Ailís Ní Ríain *Refuse to be wrecked* (2023)

“The corridors of inordinate length where tortured thinkers thrashed each other in pursuit of truth. A deity without shape or form, of course, these were not primitives. What a terrible place this was. The little room suggestive of a gaol.”

Refuse to be wrecked is loosely inspired by the closing segments of *The Bite of the Night* [1998] a play by the British playwright Howard Barker. There is a scene at the end of this difficult, dense and often oblique play where a woman - who has been central to the play has her mouth filled with dirt. Here, it is used as a starting point to explore considerations of personal freedom and restriction - mental and physical, the perceived agency of 'choice' and a passion both intellectual and physical to survive - to refuse to be wrecked.

I imagine the psychological explorations at play in the piece resonating with Richmond Barracks myriad lives and histories in particular when it began to house families, after 1925 when the Irish Army vacated the Barracks.

The recorded part comprises altered piano performed by the composer. The piano is altered during a live recording using small objects, finger flesh, nails and knuckles.

Refuse to be wrecked was first performed at New Music Dublin (April 2023).

Siobhán Cleary *Sleep Song* (2022)

The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Gráinne is one of the greatest Irish prose narratives. A tale from the Fenian Cycle of Irish mythology dating from the tenth century. In order to avoid an arranged marriage with the much older Fionn Mac Cumhaill, Gráinne eloped from the palace of Tara with the handsome warrior Diarmuid, and they spent the next sixteen years on the run from Fionn and his army, living as nomads in the woods and valleys of Ireland. As they fled from the Fianna, Gráinne recited a protective and enchanting lullaby, for her lover, Diarmuid as he slept.

Sleep Songs, or what has come to be known as lullabies are an aspect of Irish music deeply embedded into its cultural ethos and mythology, accounting for one of the Three Noble Strains of Irish music: the *geantraí*, *goltraí* and *suantraí*. The term *suantraí* does not directly translate to the English conception of 'lullaby'. Instead, it is more accurately defined as enchanted or magical music of calm, which often, based on context, resulted in either calming into sleep or magical sleeping spells, a tool of liminality, magic, and transformation. Gráinne's narrative is driven heavily by an account of their natural surroundings with descriptions of animals who are also awake keeping watch over the sleeping Diarmuid. It is above all else a poem of great tenderness and fierce protective love.

Sleep Song was commissioned by Elizabeth Hilliard with funds provided by the Arts Council of Ireland, and first performed at the Hugh Lane Gallery Sundays at Noon series (September 2023).

Gráinne Mulvey *Great Women* (2021)

Great Women is a celebration of the strong, remarkable Irish women who have helped shape the social and political landscape through their striving for equality and liberation. The words include those of pioneering patriots Countess Constance Markievicz and Rosie Hackett, alongside such equally inspiring contemporary figures as Ireland's former Presidents Mary Robinson and Mary McAleese, extracts from whose inaugural speeches are embedded in the textures of the live and tape parts. The tape part includes readings from Markievicz's letters and excerpts from Rosie Hackett's account of events leading up to the 1916 Rising.

The readings were recorded by renowned soprano, Elizabeth Hilliard, for whom this work was written and to whom it is gratefully dedicated. Almost all sounds on the tape derive from those recordings while the live part uses many extended vocal techniques such as overtone singing, fragmentation of text, vocalise, etc."

Great Women was commissioned by the Dublin International Chamber Music Festival (Great Music in Irish Houses) with funds from The Arts Council. A special filmed performance of the work, directed by John Comiskey and Hélène Montague, was streamed to audiences on June 19th, 2021 during the Covid-19 pandemic. The first live performance was at New Music Dublin (April 2023).

Biographies

Irish soprano **Elizabeth Hilliard** is a leading exponent of contemporary vocal music, described in *Opera Today* as a 'veritable tour de force of vocal sound, experimentation and expression. She has worked in close collaboration with

composers including Gráinne Mulvey, Jennifer Walshe, Christopher Fox and David Bremner and champions Irish art, music and composers, achieving recognition in the US and UK as well as her native country.

Elizabeth's career is supported by The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon and South Dublin County Council. Highlights include: musical director of *Inappropriate Moments*, a 2-day festival of the unaccompanied vocal-ensemble music by Jennifer Walshe (Béal, 2016); musical director of Stockhausen's *Stimmung*, for which she created a Dublin version (Tonnta, 2019); E in *Slow Recognition* by David Bremner and Helene Montague, presented by her and David Bremner's company Béal at Unit 44 in Dublin (July '22); solo recital at New Music Dublin (April '23), Music Network Tour with Jennifer Walshe, Panos Ghikas and Nick Roth (September '23).

Her debut disc 'Sea to the West' (2016) was followed by 'Great Women' (2021) – both on Metier label to critical acclaim. In 2021 she presented the 8-part feature series *How The World Begins Again* on RTÉ lyric fm.

Ailís Ní Ríain is a composer from Ireland. Her work has been performed worldwide and broadcast on BBC 4, BBC Radio 3, Channel 4 and RTÉ Lyric FM. Ailís works broadly in the areas of concert music, installation and music-theatre and has collaborated with across many genres. She was awarded the Paul Hamlyn Award for Composers, the largest single artist award in Europe. A Debut Disc portrait album of her work was released by NMC Recordings in 2023 featuring a new commission for Dame Evelyn Glennie and the New London Chamber Ensemble. In 2023 she is under commission to the BBC Philharmonic, Ulster Orchestra, The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, New Music Dublin and London Sinfonietta. She has been awarded international fellowships, associate artist positions and residences in Europe and the USA. Ailís is deaf/hard of hearing and has made work referencing deafness, disability and mental health since 2006.

Born in Dublin, **Siobhán Cleary's** work has been performed and broadcast worldwide. She has been commissioned by National Symphony Orchestra, Irish Chamber Orchestra, Chamber Choir Ireland and the Vanbrugh Quartet among many others. Her critically acclaimed Opera "Vampirella" based on a story by Angela Carter premiered in Smock Alley in 2017 and ran for four nights to a soldout house. Her work has been featured at New Music Dublin, Horizons, Imagine Ireland, CultureIreland's year-long celebration of Irish arts in the United States in 2011 and Imagining Ireland 2020 at the NCH and the Barbican.

Siobhán has also written the music for films and documentaries including the score for two Roger Corman feature films. In 1996, she worked with the Ciniteca di Bologna writing music scores to restored films.

Recent premieres and commissions include works for the Dublin International Chamber Festival, Vox Clamantis for Louth Contemporary Music Festival, SplinterReeds, Crash Ensemble, New Dublin Voices, Isabelle O'Connell, Elizabeth Hilliard, Nathan Sherman and Alex Petcu, Úna Monaghan and filmmaker David Smith. She is currently working on a monodrama, "Circe" with playwright Frank McGuinness. Siobhán was elected to Aosdána, Ireland's state-sponsored academy of creative artists in 2008.

Gráinne Mulvey was born Dublin. She studied music with Eric Sweeney SETU, Hormoz Farhat TCD and Agustín Fernández at Queen’s University, Belfast. In 1999 she gained a DPhil in Composition at the University of York under Prof. Nicola LeFanu. Her music has been performed, broadcast and reviewed across the globe. She has written extensively for soprano Elizabeth Hilliard, flautist Joe O’Farrell, guitarist Katalin Koltai, pianists: Nathalia Milstein, David Bremner, Matthew Schellhorn, Finghin Collins, Máire Carroll and Thérèse Fahy amongst others. Ensembles such as Concorde, Hard Rain Soloist Ensemble, ACME in Chicago, Ensemble MISE-EN, Sepia in Poland, Crash Ensemble, Platypus Ensemble and orchestras including the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland, Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra, Northern Sinfonia, UK, and the Romanian Radio Chamber Orchestra, have all performed her music. The recipient of numerous awards, commissions and honours, she has represented Ireland at the ISCM World Music Days in 2008 and 2009 and at the International Rostrum of Composers in 1994, 2006 and 2015.

Currently Head of Composition at the TU Dublin Conservatoire, Mulvey has been a member of Aosdána since 2010.

*This year’s **sound** festival is dedicated to the memory of Angela Michael and of Ian Spink. We very much valued each of their contributions to **sound**, and they will be greatly missed.*

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