

May 2011

ASPIRO NEWS



Rehearsals for Shelter Me From The Rain

SHELTER ME FROM THE RAIN - An Opera for Carlow

All the hard work and the fantastic commitment of our members will bear fruit when they take to the stage for this magnificent and unique occasion in the George Bernard Shaw Theatre this week (Thurs to Sat).

Over 100 singers, aged twelve to eighty will take part under the direction of Fergus Shiel and the RTE National Symphony Orchestra.

Shelter Me From The Rain is a New Opera by Brian Irvine (music) and John Mcilduff (text) and was commissioned by Carlow Local Authority Arts Office under the % For Art Commissioning Scheme.

Stories told by Carlow people from around the county have been woven into this compelling performance using the medium of Opera.

This is a uniquely Carlow event and one Aspiro are honoured to be an integral part of.

Having the opportunity to work with composers of the calibre of Brian Irvine and John Mcilduff, conductor Fergus Shiel and the RTE Concert Orchestra is a fantastic experience for Aspiro members that will live with them forever.



Above: Jack Sheehan and Kevin Fogarty
Top of Page: Niamh Kelly, Aisling Phelan, Laura Birney and Nicole Lambert.

Irish Times Preview

LAURA IS GETTING ready for her hen night. Sorcha and Kevin are breaking up. Teenagers are texting like crazy about who fancies who – plus, wasn't the sunny weekend just fabulous?

Love and weather are great things to sing about. Think of *It's Raining Men*, *Always Take The Weather With You* – and any opera by Puccini you care to name. Now Carlow has its very own opera, *Shelter Me From The Rain*, based on stories told by the people of the county to composer Brian Irvine and librettist John McIlduff.

First mooted by conductor Fergus Sheil in January 2008, this is a massive undertaking which brings 100 singers aged eight to 80 – some of whom have never sung anything, let alone contemporary opera, before – together with the Aspiro choir and the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra.

"It's a bit crazy, isn't it?" says Sheil, who was invited by Carlow County Council to propose some music projects under its Per Cent for Art budget.

"They had done a lot of visual art and wanted to broaden out to other art forms, so they asked some people – including myself – to float some ideas.

"This one was added on at the end as a sort of an afterthought – as in, 'If you wanted to be really crazy, you could do an opera'. But somehow this was the idea that people gravitated to." And not just in Carlow; when he approached RTÉ to get the NSO involved, Sheil found himself pushing an open door. "It's only 12 players – well, that's all that would fit in the pit, anyway," he says. "But they were really, really open to it. I think they understand things are changing out there. That they need to be, first of all, doing things outside of Dublin. And second, doing things that engage with the public in ways that are outside of the normal Friday night concert hall gigs."

The process of putting the opera together has been documented in a series of podcasts which reveal not just the energy and enthusiasm of local people but the quirkiness of the score, which invokes everything from the Nokia ringtone to moments of classic choral beauty. For Sheil, this kind of community project may have a major role to play in the future of classical music, raising personal goalposts as it challenges assumptions and prejudices. "We went around the county meeting people in pubs and parish halls. We could have written 10 operas with the material we got." Now there's a thought. An opera for every county in Ireland? Or are we just going to sit back and leave the lateral cultural thinking to Ireland's second littlest county?

Shelter Me From The Rain – An Opera for Carlow will be at the GB Shaw Theatre, Carlow from May 5th to 7th. Catch the podcasts at podcastingireland.ie



Back l to r: Kevin Fogarty, Caroline Roche, Claire Dwyer, Aoife Kavanagh.
Front l to r: Macdara Burke, Kate Bradley, Megan Ryan, Cillian McManus.



Brian Irvine and John McIluff (above) collect items for The NEST. Funded by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, the NEST is the Northern Ireland winner of a £190,000 commission for Artists Taking the Lead, one of the major projects for the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad. Fergus Shiel and Brian Irvine rehearsing for Shelter Me From The Rain (Below)



Fergus Shiel

Fergus began orchestral conducting in 1989 when he formed the Trinity Chamber Orchestra while still at college. In 1995 he won the BRI Conducting competition run by the National Association of Youth Orchestras in the UK. He has appeared in concert with the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland, the RTE Concert Orchestra, the Ulster Orchestra, the Northern Sinfonia (UK), the Irish Chamber Orchestra, the Orchestra of St Cecilia, Orchestra 2000 (Cape Town) and many other groups. A former Head of Music of Opera Ireland, Fergus has also worked as chorus master and assistant conductor at Wexford Festival Opera, Opera Ireland and Scottish Opera. He has also worked as assistant conductor for the National Youth Orchestra of Ireland's 2002 performances of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

Fergus Shiel is also dedicated to contemporary music. In 2002 he became director of Crash Ensemble, Ireland's leading contemporary music group. With this ensemble Fergus has appeared throughout Ireland as well as in Denmark, Sweden, UK, Estonia and Holland – and highlights have included the world première of Michael Gordon's 2003 version of his video opera *Van Gogh*, in collaboration with the composer.

As well as performing throughout Europe, Fergus has undertaken engagements in South Africa (1999 – 2001) as a director of the Amateur Chamber Music Player's orchestral concerts in Cape Town's City Hall, and in Australia where he worked as assistant conductor with the Australian Youth Orchestra's 2005 performance of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* at the Queensland Music Festival. In 2002 Fergus made his North American début in New York's Carnegie Hall in the opening concert of a tour of highlights from the "Irish Ring" – *The Bohemian Girl*, *The Lily of Killarney* and *Maritana*.

Fergus conducted *Aspiro* in November 2009 for *The Armed Man* in Carlow Cathedral.



Aoibhín Hyland, Emmet Jones, Jack Sheehan, Jessica Kennedy (choreographer), Kevin Fogarty and Macdara Burke. Photos courtesy of Stephen Harland.



Brian Irvine

Brian's huge body of work includes orchestral works, chamber music, operas, film scores as well as solo and ensemble pieces. His work has involved commissions and collaborations with many international artists ranging from opera companies and orchestras to filmmakers, choreographers, DJs and free improvisors. He is currently the Associate Composer with the Ulster Orchestra and together with his own 12-piece ensemble, has conducted and performed all over the world and appeared at many international festivals to widespread critical acclaim. He has won a number of awards for his music including a British Composers Award for his opera *The Tailor's Daughter* and a BBC Radio 3 Jazz Award.

John Mcilduff

John is a writer/filmmaker and stage director. A graduate of Queen's University, Belfast and L'École de Theatre Jacques Lecoq, has worked throughout Europe directing productions including an adaptation of Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, a French language version of *A Streetcar named Desire* and the hugely successful Italian production, *Mucche Ballerine*. He has made films about fighting cows, pear trees and irresponsible parents which have been screened in festivals from Tehran to Clermont Ferrand, directed commercials for well known brands of washing powder and been awarded the Prix de Qualité from the CNC. As a writer John has written for both opera and soap opera most recently for the French television series *Un Meilleur Monde*.

Brian Irvine and John Mcilduff of Dumbworld have been selected as the Northern Ireland winner of a £190,000 commission for Artists Taking the Lead, one of the major projects for the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad.



Shelter Me From The Rain

A Field Guide to Love in an Irish Town

A New Opera by Brian Irvine (music) and John McIlhuff (text)
commissioned by Carlow Local Authorities Arts Office
(Part of the % For Art Commissioning Scheme)

Brian Irvine's eccentrically individual music creates a sensitive and sympathetic space in which the operatic characters can find a voice. Through the opera's many moments of humour and pathos, it can maybe provide us with a sensitive little glimpse of whatever heaven is to us.

(Culture Northern Ireland review of previous opera by Brian Irvine and John McIlhuff)

Thurs 5th May 2011 8pm Fri 6th May 2011 8pm Sat 7th May 2011 3pm Sat 7th May 2011 8pm

Venue: GB Shaw Theatre, Carlow Booking: 059 917 2400 www.gbshawtheatre.ie
Tickets: €18 / €15 (Concession) Website: www.sheltermefromtherain.ie

