



**Irish  
National  
Opera**



### **An explosion of opera**

**Irish National Opera's biggest-ever season**

**Wednesday 7 July 2021 to Saturday 25 June 2022**

**58 performances in 26 spaces at 20 different locations, 9 new productions,  
6 operas by Irish composers, including 4 world premieres**

Irish National Opera's 2021-22 season is its biggest ever, and its most diverse.

"It's been a most exciting year at INO," says artistic director, Fergus Sheil. "Hectic, changeable, unpredictable and challenging. And yet peculiarly rewarding as the best laid plans had to be revisited and reshaped to keep opera alive as we found new ways of bringing it to our audience. We also wanted to make sure the creators and re-creators of opera could be remunerated for plying their craft. Opera at any time is a complex matrix to manage. And for the last 16 months we have all been grappling with extra dimensions of that complexity. The richness of our new offering is explained by us having had to carry forward productions from last season, and also branch out to find new connections with opera lovers. And also by a sizeable uplift in our Arts Council grant."

The branching out includes the company's largest-ever outdoor undertaking, Richard Strauss's epic *Elektra*, in the atmospheric setting of the Castle Yard in Kilkenny with Belfast soprano Giselle Allen making her INO debut as the vengeful heroine. She says of her character that *Elektra* is "a woman driven by the all-consuming grief of losing her father, she is hell-bent on revenge against her mother who ordered his murder," and adds, "It's a complex and difficult mother/daughter dynamic that resonates even today." Conall Morrison's new production is presented in association with Kilkenny Arts Festival, one of the many new working partnerships that have made such an enlarged new season possible. The five performances run between Thursday 5 August and Saturday 14 August.

Before that, in the new season's opening tour starting on Wednesday 7 July, there is a series of late-night outdoor screenings of Edwina Casey's new film of Peter Maxwell Davies's spooky chamber opera, *The Lighthouse*. It's one of three new films which INO produced this year when lockdown did not allow live performances with an audience. *The Lighthouse* will be screened at places as appropriately atmospheric as Hook Head Lighthouse in Wexford and Fanad Head Lighthouse in Donegal.

Later in July, INO will stream Amanda Feery's *A Thing I Cannot Name*, a new filmed opera exploring experiences of female desire, with a libretto by Megan Nolan. Amanda's work has been praised for its "zinging punch" (*The Irish Times*) and Megan's first novel, *Acts of Desperation*, applauded by fellow writer Marian Keyes for "Such brilliant writing about female desire... honest and visceral". The world premiere is being presented as part of the West Cork Literary Festival on Tuesday 27 July and will feature a conversation between the work's creators and Julie Kelleher, CEO and artistic director of the Mermaid Arts Centre in Bray, and a former artistic director of The Everyman in Cork.

*Elektra* is one of no less than nine new productions in a schedule that also includes the first national tour of Brian Irvine and Netia Jones's big 2019 hit, *Least Like The Other - Searching For Rosemary Kennedy*. This probing and disturbing examination of the fate of JFK's sister Rosemary was first presented at Galway International Arts Festival in 2019. Between Saturday 11 and Saturday 25 September it visits Dublin, Cork and Limerick in a new, 16-track surround-sound version. Like *Elektra*, it will be performed with live cast and pre-recorded orchestra.

The last of the season's three films captures the incredibly virtuosic and dizzying whirlwind of Gerald Barry's comic masterpiece *Alice's Adventures Under Ground*. This was originally planned as a live production for last season, but with the cast, sets, costumes and crew all available, the only way to get it done was as a film. With Claudia Boyle in the astonishingly demanding title role, Hugh O'Connor directs the film of Antony McDonald's visually ravishing and unfailingly witty production. The film will stream for six months from Friday 5 November on [www.irishnationalopera.ie](http://www.irishnationalopera.ie) (tickets €9) and also on [www.roh.org.uk](http://www.roh.org.uk), the website of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, co-producers with INO of the original production. At the same time a new recording of the work, on the Signum Classics label, will be issued on CD and also be available online for streaming and download.

Irish soprano Sinéad Campbell Wallace stars in the title role of the season's first totally new, indoor offering, of Beethoven's life-enhancing opera *Fidelio*, a role in which *Opera* magazine has already praised her as "remarkable... both vocally and dramatically". She says that "Leonore [disguised as Fidelio in the opera] is a character of integrity, passion, bravery and hope: a role model for the modern day woman." *Fidelio* will have five performances in Annabelle's Comyn's new production at the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin, between Sunday 7 and Saturday 13 November.

A live production of Peter Maxwell Davies's *The Lighthouse*, also directed by Edwina Casey, goes on a 10-performance tour between Saturday 15 November and Saturday 11 December. It will be seen in Dundalk, Cork, Tralee, Ennis, Navan, Dublin, Bray and Letterkenny.

The next new production is of Vivaldi's *Bajazet*, a highly-regarded 1735 *pasticcio* incorporating arias by other composers with Vivaldi's own work. It is directed by Adele Thomas and will delight fans of INO's first Vivaldi production, *Griseida*, in 2019. It features the powerful Italian bass-baritone Gianluca Margheri in the title role and marks the INO debut of Irish mezzo-soprano Rachel Kelly as Irene. After its eight performances in Ireland, the opera, which is another co-production with Covent Garden, will run for six performances at the Royal Opera's Linbury Theatre in London between Friday 4 and Saturday 12 February 2022.

One of the early operatic victims of the pandemic was INO's production of Bizet's *Carmen*, which was already four weeks in rehearsal when it had to be cancelled. The re-scheduled first Dublin performance of Paul Curran's production, again with Paula Murrin in the title role and Celine Byrne as Micaëla, is at the Bord Gáis Energy Theatre on Monday 7 March 2022, with further performances on Wednesday 9, Friday 11 and Saturday 12.

INO is delighted to be part of Elaine Agnew and Jessica Traynor's new community opera *Paper Boat*, a Galway 2020 European Capital of Culture legacy project being presented by Music for Galway. The work was specifically conceived for and themed about St Nicholas' Collegiate Church, which celebrated its 700th anniversary last year, and the world premiere production will be given there between Thursday 21 and Saturday 23 April 2022.

Two great Irish singers compete for dominance as the rival queens - Elizabeth and Mary - in Donizetti's *Maria Stuarda*, an opera so controversial and problematic in its time that it disappeared from view and didn't make it into the core operatic repertoire until the second half of the 20th century. Mezzo-soprano Tara Erraught is in the title role and Anna Devin is Elisabetta, Tom Creed directs and Fergus Sheil conducts the Irish National Opera Orchestra and Chorus. There are four performances in Dublin, at the Gaiety Theatre, between Sunday 5 and Saturday 11 June 2022, and one each in Cork (Thursday 16 June) and Wexford (Saturday 19 June).

The season's line up also includes INO's first ever virtual reality community opera. Finola Merivale's *Out of The Ordinary* is being written in conjunction with communities in Inis Meáin, Tallaght and South Dublin, and rural Ireland. This truly ground-breaking project, directed by Jo Mangan has already won the coveted €50,000 Fedora Platform Digital Prize for 2021.

*Horse Ape Bird*, by composer David Coonan and writer Dylan Coburn Gray, is INO's first-ever specially-commissioned youth opera. It asks the provocative question, "Are animals animals because they lack something we possess, or vice versa?" INO is producing it with Music Generation Kildare, Music Generation Meath and the Solstice Arts Centre, Navan, in partnership with the Music Department, Maynooth University, and it is also supported by St Patrick's College, Maynooth.

Separately from the season's offerings, Irish National Opera is delighted to have been asked by The Arts Council and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media to produce a pilot test concert in the Cork Opera House on Saturday 10 July - CASTA DIVA, An Evening with Majella Cullagh and Guests.

INO Executive Director Diego Fasciati says, "This is the first live opera event in Cork Opera House in over 15 months, and the first performance by Irish National Opera, too. It will be an emotional and unforgettable evening. Majella will be joined by soprano Emma Nash, mezzo-soprano Niamh O'Sullivan, tenor Gavan Ring and baritone Brendan Collins, accompanied on the piano by Gary Beecher. From Bellini's magical aria 'Casta diva' from *Norma* to the famous quartet from Verdi's *Rigoletto*, this unmissable operatic evening of much-loved arias and ensemble numbers will be enthralling."

Irish National Opera is funded by The Art Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon.

[www.irishnationalopera.ie](http://www.irishnationalopera.ie)

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**The information in this press release is correct as of 24 June 2021. Please check the company's website and social media for the latest updates**

**For press enquiries, please contact:**

Elena Dante at Valerie Barber PR

[elena@vbpr.co.uk](mailto:elena@vbpr.co.uk) / +44 (0)7716 302461 / [www.vbpr.co.uk](http://www.vbpr.co.uk)

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## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

### **Irish National Opera**

Irish National Opera is Ireland's newest and most enterprising opera company. It champions Irish creativity in its casting, its choice of creative teams and in its commitment to the presentation of new operas.

The company has performed large-scale productions of works from the great operatic canon by Mozart, Verdi, Puccini and Rossini in the Gaiety and Bord Gáis Energy theatres in Dublin, the National Opera House in Wexford and Cork Opera House. It has also taken touring productions of works by Thomas Adès, Offenbach, Gluck and Vivaldi - the first ever production of a Vivaldi opera in Ireland - to venues in all parts of the country.

INO was formed in January 2018 through the merger of two award-winning companies, Opera Theatre Company and Wide Open Opera. The two companies joined force in 2017 in response to an Arts Council initiative, and have delivered Ireland its first ever truly national opera company. In its first 24 months of operation Irish National Opera produced 72 performances of 14 different operas in 24 Irish venues, and its long-term target is to visit over 20 Irish venues annually.

INO is committed to taking Irish opera productions abroad. Its FEDORA—Generali Prize winning production of Donnacha Dennehy and Enda Walsh's *The Second Violinist*, a co-production with Landmark Productions, has been seen in Galway, Dublin, London and Amsterdam.

INO's *20 Shots of Opera*, 20 short operas that were conceived, composed, recorded and filmed in just six months, showcase the breadth and depth of Irish operatic talent. The project was praised in *The Wall Street Journal* as "an exhilarating jaunt through up-to-the-minute creativity" and is available to watch online on [irishnationalopera.ie](http://irishnationalopera.ie) and on [operavision.eu](http://operavision.eu). Also available to view online is Mozart's *Seraglio* mini-series, Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*, Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, Handel's *Acis and Galatea* and the company's inaugural Gala Concert *The Big Bang!*. Its street-art opera, *He did what?* by Brian Irvine and John McIlDuff, a co-production with Dumbworld, has screened at Operadagen Festival in Rotterdam, Edinburgh Fringe Festival, Dublin Fringe Festival and at New York's BAM New Wave Festival.

The ABL Aviation Opera Studio provides a platform for emerging opera artists in several disciplines. Studio members gave the much-praised world premiere of Evangelia Rigaki's *This Hostel Life* in the crypt of Dublin's Christ Church Cathedral last September, and they also presented the free, introductory show, *The Deadly World of Opera*, as part of Dublin City Council's MusicTown festival.

INO is a member of Opera Europa, Fedora and is an Operavision partner.