



Leading the Way

**Irish National Opera's 2020-21 season sets clear markers for company's future with specially commissioned short works *20 Shots of Opera*
Bold programme also includes productions of *La bohème* and Vivaldi's *Bajazet* and first performances of works by Gerald Barry and Amanda Feery**

Innovation and imagination are always needed in a crisis. Irish National Opera is set to prove the rule with an ambitious run of new work, world premieres and new productions. The company was able to respond at speed to the Covid-19 pandemic and adapt its programme to rapidly changing conditions. Its restructured 2020-21 season, which started with the development of a surround-sound version of Brian Irvine's critically acclaimed *Least Like the Other*, continues with *20 Shots of Opera*, presented in partnership with the RTÉ Concert Orchestra. This strikingly eclectic collection of short works, newly commissioned for casts of one or two singers and an orchestra of up to eleven players, will be filmed and made available from Thursday 17 December without charge on [Irish National Opera's website](#).

Thanks to Irish National Opera's size, neither too large nor too small, and generous support from Ireland's Arts Council, it was well placed to pivot away from public performances during Ireland's first lockdown period. The creative catalyst for *20 Shots of Opera* arrived after the company was obliged to reschedule its planned staging of Rossini's *William Tell*. In answer to the question 'What next?', Irish National Opera decided to commission twenty Ireland-based composers to write compact operas. Their subjects embrace everything from Beethoven's letters about troublesome servants and laundry dilemmas to a marine biologist's meditations 'on the enigmatic figure of Libris Solar, an alchemical blend of human, non-human and neoprene'.

"We wanted to find something that was ambitious in scale and involved as many composers, writers and performers as possible," recalls Fergus Sheil, Artistic Director of Irish National Opera. "It was a painful blow to have to shelve what would have been the first staging of *William Tell* in Dublin since the 1870s. "I wanted something just as audacious and ambitious as *William Tell*, but obviously very different in approach. Something that would harness the talents of literally hundreds of artists, each working in small pods and each team contributing to a gigantic burst of creativity. *20 Shots of Opera* came out of that. Everyone I asked has rallied to it."

The list of *20 Shots* composers reads like a Who's Who of Ireland's contemporary classical music scene. Billed as one of the biggest single-event commissioning projects in the history of Irish classical music, *20 Shots of Opera* comprises works by Gerald Barry, Éna Brennan, Irene Buckley, Linda Buckley, Robert Coleman, David Coonan, Alex Dowling, Peter Fahey, Michael Gallen, Andrew Hamilton, Jenn Kirby, Conor Linehan, Conor Mitchell, Gráinne Mulvey, Emma O'Halloran, Hannah Peel, Karen Power, Evangelia Rigaki, Benedict Schlepper-Connolly and Jennifer Walshe. Conducting duties are shared between Fergus Sheil and Elaine Kelly, a member of the company's artistic development programme ABL Aviation Opera Studio.

Despite the recent resurgence of coronavirus cases in Ireland, each 'Opera Shot' remains on track to be filmed in various parts of Dublin's Gaiety Theatre. The project was able to proceed under the broadcasting category of Ireland's tough new restrictions; rehearsals and filming sessions have been carried out with the utmost care for the health and safety of all involved.

"Of course, nobody wanted this dreadful pandemic," comments Fergus Sheil. "But because of it we've made positive changes and responded by making an even stronger commitment to new work than we had before. We've already performed Donnacha Dennehy's *The Second Violinist*, gave the world premiere of Brian Irvine's *Least Like the Other* and Evangelia Rigaki's *This Hostel Life*, and we are committed to staging Gerald Barry's *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* in co-production with London's Royal Opera House next May. What we've done since lockdown began, though, has helped us reforge our identity with some unique projects, *20 Shots of Opera* among them. I hope our existing and new audiences will embrace this and be as excited as we are about bringing these pieces to life."

Restrictions imposed on international travel have also worked to Irish National Opera's advantage. The company has engaged world-class Irish artists and international singers based in Ireland to perform throughout its 2020-21 season. The casts for *20 Shots of Opera*, for instance, include Orla Boylan, Claudia Boyle, Naomi Louisa

O'Connell, Sinéad Campbell Wallace and Gavan Ring and such rising stars as Andrew Gavin, Rachel Goode, and Emma Nash.

When a planned May 2020 production of *The Abduction from the Seraglio* had to be cancelled, INO produced a creative and entertaining eight-part mini-series with the original cast and full Irish Chamber Orchestra, which is still available online. In December, the company will reassemble cast, including Claudia Boyle and Dean Power, chorus and orchestra for concert performances of Mozart's work (2, 5 & 6 December). Other season highlights include three performances of Tom Johnson's *The Four Note Opera* (29 & 30 January 2021); Puccini's *La bohème* (26 February – 14 March) and, in co-production with the Royal Opera House, Vivaldi's *Bajazet* (17 April – 2 May); Gerald Barry's *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* at the National Opera House in Wexford and the Gaiety Theatre in Dublin (Friday 21 & Tuesday 25 May); and the world premiere of Amanda Feery's *A Thing I Cannot Name* (18 & 19 June).

"Our casts show the richness of talent we have available in Ireland," observes Fergus Sheil. "There's been a great response and people are really happy to be involved. It will be interesting to see what effects this has on us in the long term, as a company that's light on our feet, adaptable and open to new work. We've laid out the vision of what we want to do in future with this season's programme. Things may yet be postponed or changed because of the pandemic. But we're ready to deal with that and will make that sure, whatever happens, Irish National Opera continues to develop compelling new works and productions."

www.irishnationalopera.ie

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The information in this press release is correct as of 10 November 2020. Please check the company's website and social media for the latest updates

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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 currently has one online mini-series, four productions and a gala concert available for streaming free of charge: 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 McIllduff, 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*, in Dublin suburbs and city centre as part of Dublin City Council's MusicTown festival.

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

20 SHOTS OF OPERA

Irish National Opera in partnership with RTÉ Concert Orchestra

Available worldwide free of charge on irishnationalopera.ie from 17 December 2020

Gerald Barry (music) **Ludwig van Beethoven** (words) *Mrs Streicher*
Gavan Ring tenor | **Stephen Irvine** tuba | **Gerald Barry** director

A setting of letters Beethoven wrote to Nannette Streicher about his laundry/food/servant problems. He whips himself into a frenzy of paranoia and is even able to make unfavourable comparisons between his maid's poor behaviour and Christ's suffering on Golgotha.

Éna Brennan (music & words) *Rupture*

Rachel Goode soprano | **Sarah Richmond** mezzo-soprano | **Jo Mangan** director | **Elaine Kelly** conductor

Sometimes we are our own worst enemy... We fall victim to a conscience poisoned by society's repressing landscape. A rupture occurs within ourselves – the timeless fight between good and evil.

Irene Buckley (music) **Jessica Traynor** (words) *Ghost Apples*

Kelli-Ann Masterson soprano | **Conor Hanratty** director | **Elaine Kelly** conductor

A scientist studying the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, a 1.26 million square kilometre floating mass of discarded plastic, has an apocalyptic vision of the future.

Linda Buckley (music) **Doireann Ní Ghríofa** (words) *Glaoch*

Sarah Shine soprano | **Gemma Ní Bhriain** mezzo-soprano | **Hugh O'Connor** director | **Elaine Kelly** conductor

When conversations occur through screens, our eyes can't meet. Our connection falters, then breaks. In these times of rift and rupture, who haunts the glitch?

Robert Coleman (music) **Mark Boyle** (words) *The Colour Green*

David Howes bass-baritone | **Holly Keating** animator | **Hugh O'Connor** director | **Fergus Sheil** conductor

Mark Boyle, having given up technology for a life in rural Galway, meditates upon his daily rituals; of writing by hand and the ease to which sleep finds him.

David Coonan (music) **Dylan Coburn Gray** (words) *Verballing*

Amy Ní Fhearraigh soprano | **Patrick Moynihan** animator | **Caitriona McLaughlin** director | **Fergus Sheil** conductor

A Garda is coached on how to answer awkward questions. It's awkward. Awkward question for you: what's the difference between answering truthfully and telling the truth?

Alex Dowling (music) **Mark O'Halloran** (words) *Her Name*

Sean Hayden boy soprano | **Hugh O'Connor** director | **Elaine Kelly** conductor

At a boarding school in Dublin City, a young boy secretly mourns the loss of his mother.

Peter Fahey (music) **Trad.**, adapted **Peter Fahey** (words) *Through and Through*

Daire Halpin soprano | **Anabelle Comyn** director | **Fergus Sheil** conductor

A traditional ballad reimagined it as a kind of fairytale in which a noblewoman murders her lover, is taunted by a magical talking bird (who has witnessed the crime) and, ultimately, is accused of witchcraft and burned at the stake.

Michael Gallen (music & words) *At a Loss*

Orla Boylan soprano | **Michael Gallen** director | **Fergus Sheil** conductor

A woman sits awake in a screen-lit room, awaiting news about her mother's imminent passing. Tuning into the tides of electrical hum around her, she wonders about the parallels between this power and the force that gives life to the body.

Andrew Hamilton (music) **Anon. medieval English** (words) *Erthe Upon Erthe*
Sinéad Campbell Wallace soprano | **Jo Mangan** director | **Fergus Sheil** conductor

A response to a terrifying walk through a Covid Hot Zone in a Birmingham hospital in April as seen through the lens of a Medieval English poem.

Jenn Kirby (music & words) *Dichotomies of Lockdown*
Aebh Kelly mezzo-soprano | **Andrew Gavin** tenor | **Aoife Spillane-Hinks** director | **Elaine Kelly** conductor

Two people navigate the various dichotomous stages of lockdown, finding beauty in the mundane, love for and fear of humanity. Separated and together.

Conor Linehan (music) **Louis Lovett** (words) *The Patient Woman*
Imelda Drumm mezzo-soprano | **Brenton Ryan** tenor | **Muireann Ahern, Louis Lovett** directors | **Fergus Sheil** conductor

Fail me not, Doc. You're all I've got, Doc. Join the dots, Doc. A three-act tragicomedy where a woman finds the strength to embrace her doctor's failure.

Conor Mitchell (music & words) *A message for Marty (or The Ring)*
Emma Nash soprano | **Carolyn Dobbin** mezzo-soprano | **Davey Kelleher** director | **Fergus Sheil** conductor

When Marty breaks her Jackie's heart, her sister takes to Facebook video. A comic short which shows what happens when Belfast girls lose their temper in a very, very public way!

Gráinne Mulvey (music) **Anne Le Marquand Hartigan** (words) *La Corbière*
Mairéad Buicke soprano | **Anne Marie Gibbons** mezzo-soprano | **Jo Mangan** director | **Fergus Sheil** conductor

The tragic, true story of a wartime shipwreck shows the dehumanising power of fear and the consequent objectification and brutalisation of a group of women.

Emma O'Halloran (music) **Mark O'Halloran** (words) *The Wait*
Naomi Louisa O'Connell mezzo-soprano | **Michael Barker-Caven** director | **Elaine Kelly** conductor

While the waters rise outside, a woman sits upstairs in her house, waiting.

Hannah Peel (music) **Stella Feehily** (words) *Close*
Rachel Croash soprano | **Raphaella Mangan** mezzo-soprano | **Sarah Baxter** director | **Elaine Kelly** conductor

Sam and Andi have been Zoom dating during lockdown but today they are meeting for the first time. Is it okay to get close?

Karen Power (music) **Ione** (words) *Touch*
Naomi Louisa O'Connell mezzo-soprano | **Gyula Nagy** baritone | **Jo Mangan** director | **Fergus Sheil** conductor

A solitary man and woman become aware that their separate worlds consist of uniquely enclosed environments, in which the sounds of five words are their only means of communication and perhaps their only means of escape.

Evangelia Rigaki (music) **Marina Carr** (words) *The Gift*
Doreen Curran mezzo-soprano | **Sean McGinley** actor | **Jo Mangan** director | **Fergus Sheil** conductor

A meditation on the love of a father for his estranged daughter. A last meeting, a reparation, a benign waiting to tell her goodbye.

Benedict Schlepper-Connolly (music & words) *Dust*
Michelle O'Rourke mezzo-soprano | **Stephanie Dufresne** director | **Elaine Kelly** conductor

A ballad of extinction, biodiversity loss and ecological collapse, *Dust* is a quiet lament from a near future.

Jennifer Walshe (music & words) *Libris Solar*
Claudia Boyle soprano | **Tom Creed** director | **Elaine Kelly** conductor

A marine biologist meditates on the enigmatic figure of Libris Solar, an alchemical blend of human, non-human and neoprene.