Irish Chamber Orchestra and ICO Youth 30th Anniversary

Henning Kraggerud Director/Violin

Concert

Mel Mercier Percussion Niall Vallely Concertina



Saturday 18 October University Concert Hall, Limerick







The Arts Council

More People, More Places, More Spaces

The Arts Council is the national agency for funding, developing and promoting the arts in Ireland. It was established by statute in 1951. The Arts Act 2003 provides that the Arts Council stimulates public interest, promotes knowledge, appreciation and practice and assists in improving standards in the arts. The Arts Council is an autonomous expert body for funding and promoting the arts, steering its development, and offering advice on arts and cultural matters.

The Arts Council's objective over the next three years is to nurture, support and fund More People, More Place and More Spaces across the country. We want to work alongside artists, arts organisations and partners to develop practices, strengthen capacity and audience engagement. This supports professional development, innovation and adaptability.

We are also implementing and monitoring our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy. This will make sure that the arts sector and the Arts Council support a greater diversity of audiences, participants and artists.

The Arts Council proudly funds Irish Chamber Orchestra.





30th anniversary concert

Henning Kraggerud Director/Violin
Niall Vallely Concertina
Mel Mercier Percussion

Mel Mercer and Micheál Ó Súilleabháin

(Must be More) Crispy

Kraggerud

Liten Suite I Gammel Stil (Little Suite in Old Style)

Piazzolla Oblivion

Sam Perkin Inspirit

interval

Atterberg Suite No.3, Op.19, No.1 For Solo Violin & Viola **Grieg** String Quartet G minor, op.27 (Arr. Tognetti)

Saturday 18 October

University Concert Hall, Limerick





































Three Decades of Connection, Creativity, and Community

Thirty years ago, the Irish Chamber Orchestra arrived in Limerick with a powerful vision of what music could mean, not just for audiences, but for an entire community. At the heart of that move was John Kelly, our former CEO, whose ambition, and commitment brought the ICO to the University of Limerick in 1995. Alongside his sole employee Margaret Kelly, and with the inspired support of Professor Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin, they envisioned an orchestra that could do more than perform, it could belong.

John's leadership secured a new home for ICO and laid the groundwork for transformation. He was instrumental in fundraising for our purposebuilt ICO Studio, which opened in 2008 and continues to shape how we work, rehearse, record, and connect with our community.

Appointed CEO in 2012, I inherited more than an organisation, I inherited a legacy. Having previously worked as ICO's Orchestra Manager, it has been my honour to build on that legacy, carrying this extraordinary ensemble into its next chapter with the same boldness, openness, and integrity that has always defined it.

Over three decades, ICO has become unique in Ireland's cultural landscape. From our home at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, we've forged artistic partnerships and educational programmes that reach far beyond the concert hall. Our ICO Schools, ICO Youth, and ICO Teach initiatives continue to empower children through free access to music education, reflecting our belief that music is for everyone.

We've toured nationally and internationally, premiered new works, and collaborated with some of the world's most inspiring musicians.

Yet no matter where we travel, Limerick remains

our creative home, our source of energy and inspiration. We are proud to be woven into the cultural life of this city, not just as performers, but as teachers, mentors, collaborators, and neighbours. Our musicians work here and care deeply about the communities around them. That connection makes us who we are.

To everyone who has shaped our journey, our musicians past and present, our loyal audiences, dedicated team, board, funders, partners, friends, the University of Limerick, and above all the Arts Council of Ireland - thank you. Without their vision and support, this orchestra would not exist.

As we mark 30 years in Limerick, we celebrate not only what has been achieved, but all that lies ahead. More voices to hear, more stories to tell, more music to be made. Here's to the next 30 years, and to the enduring power of the arts to connect, inspire, and unite us.

Míle buíochas,



Gerard KeenanChief Executive Officer

Irish Chamber Orchestra

We're the orchestra that invites you in. That saves you a seat. That wants you to feel the same heart-stirring, hair-raising, on-the-edge-of-your-seat feelings that we feel. We do so by pouring heart, soul, and no small measure of skill into our art. By playing old, by playing new, by playing everything with guts and fire.

You'll find us each season in Limerick and Dublin, touring regularly in the far corners of Ireland, as well as at some of the most prestigious halls in the world. From playing the classics, to performing with theatres, operas, DJs, or dance companies, we forge new pathways to bring you unforgettable experiences, whoever you are, wherever you are.

We are not afraid to push the boundaries of classical music. Since joining us as Artistic Partner in August 2025, **Henning Kraggerud** has brought a fresh warmth and an adventurous spirit to our work, championing artistic diversity and placing emotional connection at the heart of every performance. His inclusive vision is reshaping our repertoire, inspiring bold new commissions from some of Ireland's finest composers and offering vibrant, human-centred interpretations of the classics.

Most importantly, we believe that music is for everyone. That's why we're also a charity, with a series of successful community engagement programmes. After 16 years, our ICO Schools initiative continues to provide valuable free music lessons to children and young people in Limerick City while our ICO Youth provides an orchestral platform for teenagers. ICO Teach, our online tutorial website gives tutors and children access to free, outstanding music education, worldwide. We are also deeply immersed in the MA Classical Strings Programme at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance at the University of Limerick, where we are proud to be orchestra-in-residence.

It's our rich creative musical heritage that inspires us. It's our unstoppable enthusiasm for what we do, and the people we do it with. As Ireland's national chamber orchestra, we are lucky to call the University of Limerick home and are funded by The Arts Council of Ireland/An Chomhairle Ealaíon.

Whether it's your first time or your hundredth time, we are the Irish Chamber Orchestra, and you are in for a treat.

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Sadie Fields Guest Leader Nicola Sweeney Principal Emily Nenniger Kenneth Rice Louis Roden

André Swanepoel Principal 2nd violin Clíodhna Ryan Oonagh Keogh Anna Cashell Diane Daly

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Henning Kraggerud Director/Violin

Norwegian violinist Henning Kraggerud is Artistic Director of the Arctic Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra. His extraordinary reach as an artist is a result of his versatility and passion for music as well as the genuine quality to his playing and beauty of his performances. His teaching and educational writings provide fascinating insights into his multifaceted approach to music-making, while his composing, arranging, and improvising — frequently bringing his own works into the concert hall — recall the spirit of the old masters such as Josef Suk and Eugène Ysave. Henning's eminence as a soloist and play-director have led to invitations time and again to many of the world's most significant orchestras. most recently the Royal Danish Opera Orchestra, Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, Deutsche Kammerakademie Neuss, Toronto Symphony, Baltimore Symphony, Danish National Symphony, Tonkünstler Vienna, BBC Scottish Symphony, Tasmanian Symphony, and Macao orchestras. In past seasons, Henning has performed twice at the BBC Proms in London's Royal Albert Hall as well as with the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl and the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra at Carnegie Hall.

Henning is a prolific composer whose works are performed by many prominent musicians and orchestras around the globe. His largest-scale work to date is entitled Equinox: 24 Postludes in All Keys for Violin and String Orchestra. Commissioned, premiered, and recorded by the Arctic.

Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra with Henning as soloist, the work was composed as a musical counterpart to a story specially written by world-

famous author Jostein Gaarder and has been hailed as "a fascinating composition to return to over and over again" (MusicWeb International). In 2017 Henning composed a version for violin and piano, premiered in Norway in 2018 with pianist Clare Hammond and Jostein Gaarder narrating.

His most recent composition, **Romantarctica**, was co-commissioned by the Arctic Philharmonic and the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, the world's northern and southernmost professional symphony orchestras respectively. The work received its world premiere in Tromsø in February 2021 and its southern hemisphere premiere in Tasmania in May 2023.

Sadie Fields



Sadie FieldsGuest Leader

Sadie Fields, Canadian/British violinist based in Brussels, enjoys a multifaceted career as soloist, chamber musician, curator, and artistic director. Her love for the violin began at age seven after hearing a Stradivarius from the renowned Axelrod collection, sparking a lifelong dedication to the instrument.

She performs extensively across Europe and North America, with appearances in Asia, the Middle East, and New Zealand. Deeply committed to chamber music, she was founding leader of the Castalian String Quartet, violinist of Trio Khnopff, and founder of the Belgium-based Flash Ensemble. She is a member of Canada's Festival Trio, recently formed a duo with Italian accordionist Luca Piovesan, and in 2023 became leader of the distinguished Edinburgh Quartet.

Her acclaimed discography includes recordings for BIS and Champs Hill Records, with honours such as BBC Music Magazine's Editor's Choice and Chamber Disc of the Month, as well as the German Record Critics' Award. Recent highlights include Trio Khnopff's Weinberg – 1945 and Flash Ensemble's complete László Lajtha trios (Pavane, 2023, 5 stars in Diapason).

Founder of Brussels' Mini Concerts series and artistic director of Music in Rannoch (Scotland), Sadie also teaches and gives masterclasses internationally. She holds a PhD from the Royal Academy of Music and performs on a 1687 Gioffredo Cappa violin.



Mel Mercier Composer

Mel Mercier is a multi-disciplinary, award-winning, Tony-nominated artist with an international reputation as a performer, composer and sound designer. Renowned as an innovative musician, rooted in traditional music, he is committed to collaborating across artforms, music genres and traditions. He is director of the Irish Gamelan Orchestra, MÓNCKK new music ensemble and PULSUS, the first Irish traditional percussion ensemble. Mel was Lecturer/Professor of Music at University College Cork from 1992 to 2016, and inaugural Chair of Performing Arts at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, University of Limerick, from 2016 to 2022.



Niall Vallely Concertina

Niall Vallely, born in Armagh in 1970, is acclaimed worldwide as one of Ireland's foremost concertina players and composers. Taught from childhood at the Armagh Pipers' Club, he developed a distinctive style that has shaped both traditional and contemporary music. Since studying music at UCC, he has toured internationally and recorded with Nomos, Bille, Karan Casey, Paddy Keenan, Tim O'Brien and Cassandra Wilson. His tunes are widely played in sessions and appear on over 80 recordings. As a composer he has created major works for the RTE Concert Orchestra, Boston Pops, Crash Ensemble, Fidelio Trio and Vanbrugh Quartet. He holds a PhD in composition and currently performs with Newel Tsumbu and Liz Knowles, with an album due in 2025.

Mel Mercier



Sam Perkin Composer Sam Perkin is an Irish composer based between France and Ireland whose music bridges classical and experimental traditions, exploring themes of wonder and awe. Performed in over 20 countries, his work has been championed by the Irish Chamber Orchestra, RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra, Crash Ensemble, Fidelio Trio, Vanbrugh Quartet, Marmen Quartet and Miranda Cuckson. Recent highlights include Piano Trio Freakshow (Wigmore Hall, 2023), now performed over 40 times worldwide, and Le Monde des Adults, commissioned for the Clara Haskil International Piano Competition (2025). A graduate of Cork School of Music and CNSMD Lyon, where he received the Prix Salaberry, he has collaborated with major festivals across Europe and the U.S.

Programme Notes

The Song of Wandering Aengus with Improvisation by Henning Kraggerud

W.B. Yeats The Wind Among the Reeds (1899)

The Irish Chamber Orchestra's long-standing connection with the Irish World Academy at the University of Limerick dates back to the glory days of Micheál Ó Súilleabháin. Among ICO's earliest recordings from those days was Silver Apples, a graceful tribute to the University of Limerick, which proudly weaves the closing lines of W.B. Yeats's The Song of Wandering Aengus into the fabric of its campus architecture.

Carved into stone on the Foundation Building are Yeats's immortal words: "And pluck till time and times are done, The silver apples of the moon, The golden apples of the sun." These lines with themes of creativity, longing, and the pursuit of beauty, embody the university's deep commitment to the arts. They also resonate profoundly with the spirit of our own musical journey over the years. Tonight, on the Feast of St Luke, patron saint of the arts, Dr. Helen Phelan, Director of the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance at UL, and wife of the late Micheâl Ó Súilleabháin will deliver this deeply symbolic poem.



I went out to the hazel wood,
Because a fire was in my head,
And cut and peeled a hazel wand,
And hooked a berry to a thread;
And when white moths were on the wing,
And moth-like stars were flickering out,
I dropped the berry in a stream
And caught a little silver trout.

When I had laid it on the floor I went to blow the fire a-flame, But something rustled on the floor, And someone called me by my name: It had become a glimmering girl With apple blossom in her hair Who called me by my name and ran And faded through the brightening air.

Though I am old with wandering
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,

I will find out where she has gone, And kiss her lips and take her hands; And walk among long dappled grass, And pluck till time and ticles are done, The silver apples of the moon, The golden apples of the sun.

Mel Mercier/Micheál Ó Súilleabháin

(Must Be More) Crispy for Strings (1992)

Mel Mercier writes;

"In 1992, Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin suggested to me that we co-compose a new piece of music to add to our piano and traditional percussion duet repertoire. Delighted with the idea, I began the process by creating a rhythmic composition based on patterns of North Indian drum language - mnemonic syllables that can be used to 'speak' and memorise complex rhythm patterns. Mícheál learned this rhythmic composition by playing it on a Nigerian mbira, a small African thumb piano, and from there he transposed it onto the piano, where it took on a melodic and harmonic guise. Meanwhile, I transposed the North Indian rhythms onto the bodhrán and bones. We named the piece '(Must Be More) Crispy', a catchphrase made popular by my American friend Dan Morris, who quoted it, mischievously, from his South Indian percussion teacher, who often said, 'very good, Dan, but must be more crispy', when Dan played the South Indian lizard-skin drum called kanjira in his lessons.

'Orispy' was an audience favourite from the start and Micheál and I played it often over the next twenty-five years. Listeners seemed to enjoy the exhilarating roller-coaster twist and turn, climb and drop of its asymmetrical rhythms just as much as we loved playing

it. We often told the audience the story of howwe made the piece together (one of only two pieces we co-composed) and we always invited them to join in the chorus to whisper the word 'crispy'.

'(Must Be More) Crispy' was recorded for Mícheál's 1992 album Guised/Flowing, performed by Mícheál on piano, myself on bodhrán and bones, with Irish Chamber Orchestra playing Mícheál's string arrangement for the piece. It also exists in arrangements for symphony orchestra and soloists, piano trio, and Javanese gamelan. In this evening's performance we present an arrangement for concertina, bodhrán and bones, and strings. In 2022, this version was performed for the first time by the virtuoso concertina player Niall Vallely, with myself and members of ICO, for the documentary film about Mícheál, Between Worlds. This evening it receives its first live public performance. Mícheál will, no doubt, be tuning in, and listening out to hear a nice 'crispy' from the audience in the choruses."

Mel Mercier © 2025

Liten Suite I Gammel Stil (Little Suite in Old Style)

Henning Kraggerud

- I. Allegro Maestoso
- II. Andante Cantabile
- III. Moderato
- IV. Presto

The composer writes:

"I composed Liten Suite I Gammel Stil when I was eighteen, as one of three works for string orchestra with flexible instrumentation to suit varied ensembles. From the beginning, I wanted it to be both educational and inclusive. Quite often, youth and amateur orchestras face a shortage of violas and double basses, so I wrote the piece in such a way that it can be performed without them, while still sounding complete.

The work is a modem take on the Baroque suite. Traditionally, most of the movements in a suite would stay in the same key, but here the four movements move through E minor, C major, A minor, and return to E minor. In this way, it has more in common with the structure of a string quartet or symphony. My aim was always to write as idiomatically for the instruments as possible, so that the focus in performance could rest on interpretation rather than difficulty.

Over the years, I have performed this piece with many different ensembles: professionals alongside young players, amateur orchestras, and mixed groups. Each performance has confirmed a belief I hold very strongly, that performing art should not be reserved only for

professionals. Everyone's life can be enriched by artistic expression, and music, perhaps more than anything, can be a bridge between people of different ages, backgrounds, and experiences. This little suite was written in that spirit."

Henning Kraggerud © 2025

Oblivion

Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992)

Astor Piazzolla was born in Argentina but spent much of his youth in New York City, surrounded by the sounds of jazz, classical music, and, of course, tango. He grew up in a world where cultures and rhythms collided, and he carried that energy throughout his life.

Piazzolla played the band eon, a cousin of the accordion that's central to tango music. World-famous pianist Arthur Rubenstein heard him play and encouraged him to study music more seriously. That advice led Piazzolla to study with some of the greatest music teachers of the time, including Alberto Ginastera in Argentina and Nadia Boulanger in Paris. It was Boulanger who encouraged him to stop trying to sound like European composers and instead embrace the music of his roots.

When Piazzolla returned to Argentina, he broke away from traditional tango, blending it with jazz and classical elements to create something bold and new, nuevo tango. During the political turmoil in Argentina in the 1970s and '80s, Piazzolla lived in Italy. In 1984, he wrote one of his most hauntingly beautiful pieces, Oblivion, for an Italian film called Enrico IV. Written in the style of milonga, a predecessor of tango, Oblivion has become one of his most beloved works. It's been performed by countless musicians around the world and continues to move audiences with its quiet, aching beauty.

"Inspirit" (2013) For String Orchestra and Body Sounds Sam Perkin (b. 1985

Written especially for the 20th anniversary of ConCorda, this piece is a youthful and vibrant composition that is dedicated to Hugh and Tricia Maguire. It was commissioned by The Irish Association of Youth Orchestras and first performed in Castalia Hall at ConCorda Chamber Music Course for Strings.

The work contains many playing techniques and body sounds. We hear: Foot stamping, finger clicks, string slaps, blocked string pizzicato, instrumental body taps, rubbing of hands, use of voice, whispering, inhalation/exhalation and many other sounds that the human body can make.

The orchestra stands up in the intensely emotive inner

section, which is in honour of the name "Maguire" which the composer has codified in pitch form. This builds to an exceptionally energetic finale in which all the percussive and vocal elements reappear consecutively. For more information, www.samperkincomposer.com

Sam Perkin August © 2018

interval

Kurt Atterberg (1887-1974)

Suite No.3, Op.19 No.1

- I. Prélude. Adagio
- II. Pantomim. Moderato
- III. Vision. Allegro moderato Con moto

Although self-taught, Kurt Atterberg placed himself at the centre of 20th-century Swedish music as a conductor, critic, and founder of the Society of Swedish Composers. Today he is better known as a composer who blended the songful soulfulness shared with his Scandinavian peers, Alfvén, Grieg and Sibelius, with the lush European accent of Brahms.

Suite No.3 grew out of incidental music for Maurice Maeterlinck's Sceur Béatrice at Stockholm's Royal Dramatic Theatre (where Atterberg was appointed composer and conductor in 1916). Set in a convent, the play focuses on Sister Beatrice who has been abducted by her lover while praying beneath a statue of the Virgin Mary. Interceding, Mary takes the nun's place, the divine intervention going unnoticed. Nearing the end of her life, Beatrice reappears to confess her sins and acknowledge the holy forgiveness she was granted.

Originally restricted to only a violin, viola, and harmonium, in 1921 Atterberg re-cast the harmonium part for string orchestra for his three-part Suite. The opening 'Prélude' is a keening Adagio in, the composer said, a certain sacral style,' the beseeching solo violin lighting up and offering help to the aching low voices of the accompaniment. Heart-slowing moments of near silence heighten the movement's confessional intensity.

The expressive 'Pantomim' casts violin and viola as the errant Beatrice and her lover in an ardent and intimate dialogue supported by discretely passionate string accompaniment.

The animated 'Vision' is a fantasy of what might have been. Listen to how the accompanying strings become ever more insistent as if trying to separate the two lovers. And how the memories of Beatrice's sinful past keep disturbing the would-be bliss with slicing interjections and unsettling rhythms. A reverie forever out of reach –

as all tragic love stories are – the two lovers are isolated by their own guilt and the mournful, knowing melancholy of the surrounding strings.

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)

String Quartet No.1 in G minor, Op.27 (Arr. Tognetti)

- I. Un poco Andante Allegro molto ed adagio
- II. Romanze: Andantino Allegro agitato
- III. Intermezzo: Allegro molto marcato
 Più vivo e scherzando
- IV. Finale: Lento Presto al Saltarello

Of the three string quartets Grieg attempted, the first is lost, the third left unfinished. Only the second – catalogued as No.1 – serves as an example of what he might have done with this most traditional – and testing – of forms.

Premiered in 1878, it is one of the most remarkable works of the string repertoire, its liberal use of Norwegian folk music idioms lending a late-romantic gloss to a score that anticipates the darker preoccupations of early modernism

Grieg's own intentions for it were clear. In a later letter to a friend, he insisted it was not 'intended to deal in trivialities for petty minds. It aims at breadth, flight of imagination, and above all sonority for the instruments for which it is written'

Beneath its surface drama and beauty lies complex music marked by formidable technical challenges that caused Grieg's publisher to balk from issuing it in print. The first of its four movements sets out its stall in no uncertain manner. The textures binding together all four voices – two violins, viola, and cello – feel glue-like, so intensely and tightly they bind one to the other. It carries itself with a richness bordering on the orchestral, and a beseeching quality that makes it sound like an impassioned opera aria.

Don't be startled by its dramatic opening, where all four voices sing the same doleful song together. Or the agitated confrontations between them that follow in the quartet's longest movement. Listen, instead, to how Grieg allows time and space to the separate voices to

say their piece, even as he weaves them together in a dialogue as intimate and intense as any scene from theatre, film, or opera.

Announced in the opening unison declaration, the melody that binds the quartet together is borrowed from Grieg's earlier song, Spillemænd (Minstrel), depicting a woeful musician separated from his beloved. Absent in Grieg's own life at the time was the happy-ever-after that marriage had promised. The them returns to various treatments and guises throughout what follows, most notably in its transformation into the tranquil second theme. If you think you can hear in it an echo of Grieg's signature Piano Concerto, you'd be right.

The second movement 'Romanze' is light and flirtatious, although don't be alarmed by its sudden changes of mood. Such are the vagaries of love and desire. Largely gone are the bruising angles and sharp edges of the quartet's opening. Instead, all four voices, like kittens at play, gleefully join in until, exhausted, they fall into slumber.

The animated 'Intermezzo' third movement serves for the expected scherzo. The key elements to listen for are Grieg's use of varied rhythms and pizzicato (plucked) strings, and how the excitable outer sections contrast with a relaxed central section delighting in Norway's buoyant traditional Halling folk dance.

The spirited Finale mirrors the quartet's opening: a slow introduction giving way to a final dance. Listen to how its shift from minor to major key alters the relationship between the individual voices and affects emotional response and mood. After many hurdles and struggles, the quartet ends with a last, optimistic sounding of the theme borrowed from Spillemænd.

Notes by Michael Quinn © 2025 unless stated otherwise

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ICO Schools is a ground-breaking Irish Chamber Orchestra initiative that offers free music lessons to hundreds of schoolchildren.

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The ICO Youth is our free youth orchestra for children aged 12-24 years. It focuses on orchestral participation and performance, as well as small chamber music groups with individual lessons boosting confidence and skills.

ICO Teach

ICO Teach is our ground-breaking and freely available online teaching resource. Teachers and children can download sheet music, watch video demos featuring Irish Chamber Orchestra musicians, and much more.

MA in Classical String Performance

A unique two-year full-time programme offering advanced tuition in violin, viola, cello and double bass. Focusing on musicianship and chamber music skills, the MA is run in conjunction with the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance at University of Limerick.

Community Visits

Throughout the year, ICO musicians give time to visit local voluntary organisations and charities to perform for audiences who are unable to attend concerts.

Find out more at

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Novembe

Emily Davies
Director/Guest Leader

Matthew Jacobson

Percussion

Three Worlds

Works by Purcell, Ronan Guilfoyle and Dvořák

Thurs 13 November

Whyte Recital Hall, RIAM, Dublin, 7:30pm

Fri 14 November

University Concert Hall, Limerick, 7:30pm

Sat 15 November

MIT Cork Schook of Music, Cork, 7:30pm



December

Christian Curnyn Conductor



Messiah

A majestic, sacred, oratorio filled with dramatic and triumphant music

Thurs 11 December

St. Mary's Church, Dingle, Co. Kerry

Fri 12 December

St. Mary's Cathedral, Limerick







