

November 2025

Irish Chamber Orchestra

Emily Davis Director/Guest Leader

Matthew Jacobson Percussion

Malachy Robinson Bass Guitar

Three Worlds



13-15 November

Dublin - Limerick - Cork



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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.

Three Worlds

Emily Davis Director/Guest Leader

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Purcell Abdelazer Suite

Ronan Guilfoyle Mani, Concerto for Percussion
and Strings

Dvořák Serenade for Strings in E major, Op.22

Thursday 13 November

Whyte Recital Hall, RIAM, Dublin

Friday 14 November

University Concert Hall, Limerick

Saturday 15 November

Curtis Auditorium, MTU Cork School of Music, Cork

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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Clíodhna Ryan
Anna Cashell

André Swanepoel Principal 2nd Violin
Oonagh Keogh
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Emily Nenniger
Louis Roden

Viola

Joachim Roewer Principal
Mark Coates-Smith
Robin Panter
Giammaria Tesai Palacio

Cello

Aoife NicAthlaoich Principal
Richard Angell
Peggy Nolan

Double Bass / Electric Bass Guitar

Malachy Robinson Principal

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Emily Davis

Director/Guest Leader

Emily enjoys a vibrant international career as an orchestral leader, soloist, chamber musician and teacher. Based between the U.K. and Norway, she is Concertmaster of the Stavanger Symphony Orchestra and is regularly invited as guest leader with orchestras including the Oslo Philharmonic, Singapore Symphony, Odense Symphony, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Aurora Orchestra, Bergen Philharmonic and the RTÉ Symphony Orchestra.

As a soloist, Emily has performed worldwide, with highlights including *Fratres* by Arvo Pärt with Vasily Petrenko at the Pärnu Festival, Piazzolla's *Four Seasons* at the Bergen International Festival, the Cuban premiere of Vaughan Williams's *Lark Ascending*, and concertos by Szymanowski, Prokofiev and Tchaikovsky. She has broadcast live as a soloist on BBC, NRK, RTÉ and other international radio stations, and was previously Concertmaster of the European Union Youth Orchestra.

Passionate about chamber music and directing from the violin, Emily co-founded Thirteen North, a Scottish ensemble blending classical and folk traditions and committed to reaching new audiences. Other directing highlights include projects in Havana, Gothenburg and Trondheim. She was also a founding member of the Artesian Quartet, performing at Wigmore Hall, Kings Place and the BBC Proms, and has collaborated with Patricia Kopatchinskaja, Paul Lewis, Julian Rachlin and Lars Vogt.

Emily is frequently invited to play with leading chamber ensembles such as the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Aurora Orchestra, Scottish Ensemble and Scottish Chamber Orchestra, performing in world-renowned venues including Carnegie Hall, Suntory Hall and the

Musikverein. Dedicated to education, she has taught at St Mary's Music School, the National Children's Orchestra of GB, the Ferrara Chamber Academy and numerous youth ensembles across the U.K. and Norway.

Emily plays on a Ferdinand Gagliano violin kindly loaned to her through the Beare's International Violin Soc Ronan Guilfoyle is a major figure on the Irish jazz scene and has developed an international reputation as a performer, teacher and composer. He began his career with Louis Stewart's group in the early 1980's and studied at the Banff Centre for the Arts in 1986 and 1987 where his teachers included John Abercrombie, Dave Holland, and Steve Coleman.



Ronan Guilfoyle

Composer

Ronan Guilfoyle is a leading figure in Irish jazz and an internationally respected performer, composer, and educator. A pioneer of the acoustic bass guitar since the early 1980s, he has performed with renowned artists including Dave Liebman, Kenny Werner, Joe Lovano, Kenny Wheeler, Brad Mehldau, John Abercrombie, Benny Golson, and Jim McNeely. He has led his own ensembles since the mid-1980s, touring extensively across Europe, Asia, and North America, and has recorded prolifically both as a leader and sideman, including the award-winning *Devsirme* (1997).

As a composer, Ronan has created a substantial body of work that bridges jazz and classical traditions, often combining improvisation with written forms. His commissions include works for the RTÉ Concert Orchestra, the Opus 20 String Orchestra, and the European Jazz Youth Orchestra, as well as pieces for soloists such as David Liebman, Michael D'Arcy, and Dermot Dunne. His music has been performed by

major international jazz musicians, and in 1997 he won the Julius Hemphill Jazz Composition Competition in the United States.

Ronan is also internationally recognised for his teaching of advanced rhythmic concepts in jazz improvisation, including metric modulation and odd metre playing. His influential book, *Creative Rhythmic Concepts for Jazz Improvisation*, is considered a standard text in the field. He has been invited to teach at Berklee College of Music, The New School, and the Royal Academy of Music, and has lectured for UNESCO. In Ireland, Ronan is the founder and head of the pioneering jazz department at Newpark Music Centre in Dublin, the country's only post-secondary jazz programme.

Matthew Jacobson



Matthew Jacobson

Percussion

As well as composing for and performing/recording with his own groups ReDiviDeR and Insufficient Funs, Matthew also co-leads Roamer, a 4tet of Ireland's most internationally recognised improvisers and performs regularly at home and abroad with Anna Mieke; UMBRA; Clang Sayne; Berri; Ensemble Ériu; SlapBang; Origin Story; BigSpoon; AERIE (DE); hyperlynx (CH); Fireplace Dragon (US) and Ms Mercy (UK) among others. Matthew is co-director of Diatribe Records, Ireland's leading independent record label for new sounds and between 2011-2020 was the Irish producer of European exchange tour and event network Match&Fuse. He is also a full-time Jazz Lecturer in Dublin City University – specialising in drum skills, ensembles, free improvisation and music business.

He has received numerous grants from the Arts Council of Ireland including Travel and Training awards, Project awards, Bursary awards, Commissions awards, Recording awards and Touring awards and

has received several Culture Ireland awards to present new Irish works all around the world. He received a Fulbright Scholar Award in 2013 to spend a nine-month period in New York developing compositional and improvisational skills. He was also selected as Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown's inaugural Musician-in-Residence in October 2015.

He received a BA in Jazz Performance at Newpark Music Centre, Dublin, an MA in Music Performance from Lucerne University, Switzerland and completed a practice-based PhD at Ulster University, exploring improvisational approaches to motivic compositions.

Malachy Robinson



Malachy Robinson

Electric Bass Guitar

Malachy Robinson is a dedicated chamber musician, attracted to conversational music of all genres. He is a founder of the Gregory Walkers, in which he plays the viola da gamba, and is director of the Robinson Panoramic Quartet. Principal double-bass with the Irish Chamber Orchestra since 1995, he is also a founder member of the cutting-edge Crash Ensemble. A founder member too of the Irish Baroque Orchestra, he has appeared with period-instrument orchestras such as The Sixteen, the English Concert, the OAE and the Academy of Ancient Music. He has appeared as a guest with many chamber ensembles, including the Vanbrugh, Callino, Parisii, T'ang, Con Tempo, Navarra and Vogler String Quartets. Along with accordionist Dermot Dunne he was a member of the quintet Lunfardia led by Argentinean guitarist Ariel Hernandez, and together with the ICO's Katherine Hunka, they constitute the super-eclectic Far Flung Trio who are favourites at festivals around the country. He released his solo album *The Irish Double Bass* in 2021.

Programme Notes



Henry Purcell (1659-95)

Abdelazer Suite

- | | | | |
|----|----------|----|----------|
| 1. | Overture | 5. | Air |
| 2. | Rondeau | 6. | Jig |
| 3. | Air | 7. | Hornpipe |
| 4. | Minuet | 8. | Air |

The prolific Henry Purcell was regarded as England's greatest composer for nearly 300 years until the emergence of Edward Elgar and Benjamin Britten in the 20th century. It was a status that Britten memorably paid tribute to in his own *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* in 1946, its memorable theme borrowed from Purcell's *Abdelazer Suite*.

Commissioned in 1695, the last year of the 36-year-old Purcell's short life, to write incidental music for a revival of Aphra Behn's bloody tragedy, *Abdelazer*, or the Moor's Revenge, at London's Drury Lane Theatre, Purcell later spun from it a nine-movement suite. Originally scored for string ensemble and harpsichord, it is lit up by the dance-led rhythms, decorated drama and ornamented emotion that made the bristling mid-period of the Baroque era so satisfying.

Drawing on the dominant French style of the period, the 'Overture' is one of Purcell's finest. Bolstered by bold, assertive chords and dotted rhythms, its slow, ceremonial opening gives way to a faster, more animated section where excited, high voices are tempered by lower registers. The overall effect is stately and serious.

The 'Rondeau' that follows, and that inspired Britten three centuries later, is intricately designed. Listen for how the main melody is repeated before a new theme is introduced, repeated again prior to a second theme making its appearance, after which the movement returns to its beginning.

What follows is a succession of pointedly off-kilter 'Airs', an elegant 'Minuet' and a bracing 'Jig' that bend familiar Baroque forms to the dramatic and emotional needs and nuances of Behn's play. You might recognise the penultimate movement, the brief 'Hornpipe', a jaunty country dance also known as 'The Hole in the Wall' and 'St. Martin's Lane'. A last 'Air' brings things to a dignified if subdued conclusion.

Michael Quinn © 2025

Ronan Guilfoyle (b.1958)

Mani - A Concerto For Percussion and Strings

The composer writes:

"This piece is dedicated to the late great Indian percussionist T.A.S. Mani. South Indian classical music has one of the most sophisticated and complex rhythmic systems on earth, and Mr. Mani, as he was known to everyone, was a master of it. He was not only the keeper of a tradition, he was also an innovator and founded the Kamataka College of Percussion in Bangalore, an institution that is now more than 50 years old. He was also known, along with his wife, as the brilliant singer R.A. Ramamani, for his collaborations with jazz musicians, and in the mid-1990's, I was lucky enough to play with him, and from then onwards we had a very fruitful musical relationship, from which I learned so much.

He passed away at the beginning of the pandemic, just around the time when I was beginning to think about writing this piece, and it seemed such an obvious thing both to dedicate it to him, and to use material that I had learned from him as inspiration for the piece.

The piece itself is for percussion and strings, and is roughly in a three-movement form, fast – slow – fast. It opens with a 'Korvai', a traditional South Indian rhythmic composition. The one I'm using here was created by Mr. Mani, and a lot of the material in the first section is based off this rhythmic composition.

In working with the percussion, I decided to use it in several different ways; as the main soloist of course, but also in dialogue with the strings and, in the final section, as a provider of a groove over which the strings play a melody derived from the Poorvi raga, also from South Indian music. In the central section, the percussion has a whole solo feature, which leads into the final section.

The percussion setup itself is a kind of hybrid drum set, and this was deliberate on my part because I wanted the feeling of groove that drums can give to a piece of music, in addition to the color that other percussion instruments can bring. I also used bass guitar rather than double bass in this piece because bass guitar can really have a 'hook-up' with drums, and provide a great feeling to the music, and I use this hook-up many times in the piece.

Having said all that about percussion and the bass guitar, I wouldn't like to give the impression that the strings are bystanders – they have a lot of work to do in this piece! They always interact with the percussion and provide colour and counterpoint, and various kinds of intrigue as the piece goes on. Having the brilliance of the ICO at my disposal was incredibly helpful in exploring the possibilities of a string orchestra with percussion.

I was delighted to have Matthew as a soloist, I have collaborated with him in many situations, particularly in the world of jazz, but he also studied South Indian music in India, so he was the perfect choice for this piece. Malachy Robinson, being so adept at the bass guitar, was also immensely helpful in exploring what was possible in this piece.

The piece finishes as it began, with Mr. Mani's Korvai bringing the piece to a dramatic conclusion. I hope you all enjoy listening to the piece as much as I enjoyed writing it."

Ronan Guilfoyle © 2025

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

Serenade for Strings in E major, Op.22

- I. *Moderato*
- II. *Menuetto: Allegro con molto*
- III. *Scherzo: Vivace*
- IV. *Larghetto*
- V. *Finale: Allegro vivace*

Legend has it that Dvořák composed his Serenade for Strings in just 12 days in the Spring of 1875. Not that you would know from its relaxed, free-flowing melodies and largely carefree, lyrical demeanour. Or that in the same year, Dvořák, coming into his compositional maturity, had also composed his Fifth Symphony, Second String Quintet and First Piano Trio. It is less difficult to imagine in its mellowness and warmth something of the satisfied glow of a father welcoming the birth of his second child just as his career and family life were beginning to improve.

The Serenade form grew out of a burgeoning demand in the late 18th century for music to accompany al fresco evening soirées of an emerging well-to-do keen to entertain and impress. Light and uncomplicated with contrasting tempos and moods, it was the 'muzak' of its day; intended to be heard (if not listened to) as a gentle background soundtrack to the social goings-on.

Dvořák's Serenade can claim considerably greater sophistication and appeal than mere accompaniment to merry-making. There is something mellow and tranquil about its delicately charming opening where violins, violins and cellos take turns to introduce and savour a relaxed, fluid melody. It's as if the relieved new parent is basking in the afterglow of the safe arrival of his child. That might explain the hushed, lullaby-like

softness of its ending after a brief ecstatic burst of dance-like energy.

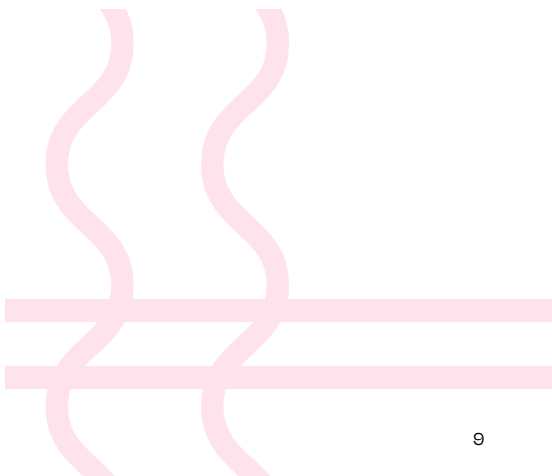
Reverie resumes in the graceful waltz of the second movement with its elegant variations on the Serenade's main theme. Listen out for the sudden change of mood, as if parental exhaustion has triggered moments of agitation and anxiety, voiced by the stabbing high voices of the violins in the central Trio section. It leaves a lingering aftertaste that disturbs the movement's surface calm, worrisome thoughts blotting it with a bittersweet tang.

Troubles discarded, the Scherzo sets off with a lively, playful melody shared by the full ensemble. A second, more romantic, theme follows, low cello voices softly coming to the fore, and in turn a new melody on high, light as air ensemble voices. The effect is of the different instrumental sections teasing and chasing each other with sudden darting changes of direction. The movement comes full circle, returning to its opening melodies at its end, the whole orchestra in accord with itself again.

The slow Larghetto finds Dvořák turning inwards for the Serenade's emotional heart. It's a moment of relaxed reflection – a father musing on his hopes for his infant children – that glosses echoes of the second movement's lilting waltz with comforting warmth and tenderness in the work's most yearning passage.

The Finale casts doubts aside for an exuberant dance laced with rustic accents from Dvořák's native Bohemia. It finds the orchestra at its most animated, syncopated rhythms carrying along a playful call-and-answer dialogue between the string sections. The ghost of the sedate, sweet-sad Larghetto flickers for a moment before a breezy rush towards a joyful conclusion that returns to the same three repeated chords that concluded the first movement. It's a snapshot of a composer and parent satisfyingly at peace with himself and the prospect of a burgeoning career and growing family.

Note by Michael Quinn © 2025



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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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