

February 2026

Irish Chamber Orchestra

Abel Selaocoe
Director/Cello

Home



3 February University Concert Hall, Limerick
5 February National Concert Hall, Dublin



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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.

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Tuesday 3 February

University Concert Hall, Limerick

This concert will be recorded for future broadcast on RTÉ Lyric fm

Thursday 5 February

National Concert Hall, Dublin



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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Abel Selaocoe

Director/Cello/Vocals

South African cellist Abel Selaocoe is a leading voice in reimagining classical music. Redefining the parameters of the cello, he moves across genres from collaborations with world and jazz musicians to concertos and solo performances. His work combines virtuosic playing with improvisation, singing and body percussion, and he is committed to composing works and curating programmes that connect Western and non-Western musical traditions, broadening classical music's reach. In 2023, he received the RPS Instrumentalist Award for performances and collaborations that "blaze with creation, sending audiences home on a high".

Selaocoe thrives in exploratory settings and collaborates widely with artists including Bernhard Schimpelsberger, Seckou Keita, Manchester Collective, Giovanni Sollima and Dudù Kouaté. In 2016 he formed Chesaba, a trio specialising in music from the African continent, and in 2022 founded the Bantu Ensemble, who perform his music internationally.

In February 2025, Selaocoe released his second album on Warner Classics, *Hymns of Bantu*, following his acclaimed debut *Where Is Home (Hae ke Kae)*. In August 2025, a live recording of his solo cello concerto *Four Spirits* was released, recorded with Aurora Orchestra at London's Queen Elizabeth Hall after performances with orchestras including the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra

and London Symphony Orchestra.

Selaocoe is Artistic Partner of The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra. In 2025/26, he embarks on an international solo recital tour featuring new commissions by Selaocoe with Michel van der Aa and by Ben Nobuto, premiering at Princeton University Concerts and touring major European venues. He also tours the UK and Europe with his Bantu Ensemble following their Glastonbury debut. Abel plays a 2020 copy of a circa 1735 Montagnana by Robin Aitchison and is an exclusive Warner Classics recording artist.

Nicola Sweeney



Nicola Sweeney

Leader/Director

Nicky is a highly sought-after freelance chamber and orchestral musician in the UK, where she has lived since graduating with a First-Class Honours performance degree from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. She studied with David Takeno and won every violin competition during her time at the Guildhall.

She has held Assistant Leader and Principal Second positions with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, the Nash Ensemble, Manchester Camerata, and the London Mozart Players. In London, she regularly records for television, film, and pop projects, and relishes the opportunity to perform across a wide range of musical styles. Career highlights include recordings and live performances with Stevie Wonder.

Nicky has been Assistant Leader of the ICO for over twenty years and treasures her strong connection with Ireland. She has led the orchestra on major international tours to South America, Europe, and the USA, and has performed numerous concertos, double concertos, and chamber works with her esteemed colleagues.

Her recording of Moeran Violin Duos with Darragh Morgan was selected as Gramophone magazine's Editor's Choice and also received high praise in *The Strad*.

Alan Keary



Alan Keary

Bass Guitar

Alan Keary (aka Shunya) is a multi-talented musician who draws on his Irish heritage to create a music full of wonder and magic. Playful and ethereal, his live shows showcase his ability to slip seamlessly into different styles and genres, balancing between recklessness and precision. Live performances display varying arrangements ranging from a five-piece band to solo.

Keary features as violinist, bassist and vocalist whilst also delivering the texture and backbone using drum machines, effects and live sampling through Ableton.

Keary – described by critics as an »enigmatic new discovery – is an internationally touring artist and collaborator who has worked with some of the most exciting talents in world music – including South African cellist Abel Selaocoe. He is also son of legendary Irish guitarist and producer

Dave Keary (Van Morrison, Jerry Lee Lewis, Emma Bunton). In 2021 he was commissioned to arrange music for orchestra for Selaocoe's debut BBC Prom Africa Meets Europe, at the Royal Albert Hall, a show Keary also performed in and which was met with universal praise. The same year, he provided a remix for acclaimed jazz trio Go Go Penguin's album GGP/RMX. Despite featuring on the project alongside electronic heavyweights such as Squarepusher, Clark and 808 State, Keary's reworking of To The Nth was described as "almost stealing the record".

Keary released his debut album *I Have Aspirations For Dragonflies* in May 2023 under the Name Shunya. He has released three previous EPs and two singles – with track *Wonder NWane* feat. Hayley Williams receiving support from Huw Stephens, BBC Radio 1.

Bernhard Schimpelsberger



Bernhard Schimpelsberger

Percussion

Austrian Percussionist & Composer Bernhard Schimpelsberger is a modern catalyst of rhythm. His profound studies of Indian classical rhythms, and their translation into Western music gave him a unique artistic voice. His well-balanced musical sensitivities made him a sought after collaborator with master musicians from all around the world.

Schimpelsberger, described as "one of the most technically gifted and tasteful players we have seen in a long time" (Drummer Magazine UK) – performs on a uniquely multi-layered and

melodious drumkit. He creates "percussive soundscapes" (Süddeutsche Zeitung) with a fascinating "interweaving of colours and elements, of virtuosity and surprising twists" (Augsburger Allgemeine).

Schimpelsberger studied the complex rhythmic system of Indian classical music under master drummers Suresh Talwalkar and Trilok Gurtu. Collaborations with stars of Indian music including Anoushka Shankar (sitar), Akram Khan (dance) and Nitin Sawhney (film composition) have helped him to develop a drumming "style true to that of a tabla virtuoso" (Confluence Magazine).

His extensive travels and musical curiosity led to international collaborations with Spanish

flamenco dancer Israel Galvan, Cuban Percussion masters Osain del Monte or Brazilian guitar virtuoso Yamandu Costa. Bernhard currently is a guest soloist with South African cellist Abel Selaocoe and many orchestras around the world.

His audio-visual music project Rhythm Diaries, documenting his collaborations and studies in Brazil, India, South Africa and all across Europe, has been critically acclaimed and received numerous awards around the world.

Schimpelsberger's original compositions have been performed at Beethovenfest Bonn and Rowing World Cup Championships Ottensheim/Linz, and by the Britten Sinfonia Orchestra and Malta's National Dance Company.

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Programme Notes



Leoš Janáček (1854-1928)

Suite for Strings

1. *Moderato*
2. *Adagio*
3. *Andante con moto*
4. *Scherzo & Trio*
5. *Adagio*
6. *Andante*

Janáček was just 23 and recently appointed choirmaster of the Brno Music Society when he composed the Suite for String Orchestra in 1877. Eclipsed by the following year's *Idyll*, also for string ensemble, the Suite offers an early glimpse of qualities that would come eloquently to the fore in his later chamber works and operas.

Conceived as a six-part Baroque suite with the inner movements emulating a period dance, Janáček soon abandoned the notion of creating a pastiche of the old in favour of what would come to be a presage of the new.

Retaining the six-movement structure, the Suite pursues its own individual path to become an exercise in mellow mood music spun out with an assured elegance and flair that belies Janáček's youthful years.

The opening *Moderato* in G minor ushers in a warm, lyrical wash of sound and feeling that owes a debt to the harmonic world of Dvořák, its flowing string textures dotted with short motifs and speech-like phrases.

The tender, songful surface of the *Adagio* that follows masks rich inner voices and long breathed lines carrying themselves with becoming hushed intensity. Lighter in tone and character, wispy and welcoming as a Spring breeze, the all-too brief

Andante con moto is a thing of exquisite pastoral delicacy and charm, floating on gentle rhythms and transparent scoring.

Occupying the Suite's centre is a dazzling *Scherzo and Trio*. Retaining some of the preceding movement's bucolic colour, it is cut from a very different cloth, lit up by technical daring, bold imitative responses, and bright contrasts of tone. The second *Adagio* is surely the Suite's troubled heart, hewn out of dark harmonies and heart-stopping suspensions of melodies and phrases.

If the concluding *Andante* seems bowed by the melancholic B minor that haunts it, it ultimately resists its lowering gravity, reaching out instead with high, imploring voices that eventually win the day. A gently animated dance draws together the Suite's melodic ideas to conclude with a final flourish.

Note by Michael Quinn © 2026

Abel Selaocoe (b.1992)

Qhawe (Hero)

Qhawe Qhawe means "hero", and this song is dedicated to my nephew. It speaks of finding refuge in the playfulness and infectious energy and spirit of children. In the Apostolic (Postola) Church tradition of South Africa it is the children who are largely responsible for the music-making: without their singing, nobody moves, and when the children sing, everyone dances.

They are in charge of providing the spiritual impetus for the whole ceremony – a powerful role. The nature of this Postola music is incredibly and beautifully rhythmic. There is often a woman beating a large bass drum on either side throughout a song, providing an impulse as the children sing along.

Note by Abel Selaocoe

Abel Selaocoe (b.1992)

Ibuyile iAfrica (Africa is back)

Ibuyile iAfrica (Africa is back) in the language of isiZulu is a traditional hymn that was sung in apartheid times about the struggle to conquer that regime. Those events took so much from South Africa, but they also left us with so much hope. This hymn tells the youth: now is the time to define our voice, to cherish our own traditions and create the Africa we want for our children. I came up with this wonderful arrangement as an ode to one of South Africa's legends, Desmond Tutu. He and other icons like Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela fought for our freedom, and I stand on their shoulders. When I go to Europe, when I perform anywhere in the world, it's because of their efforts that I'm allowed these experiences. I'm also really honoured to have had one of my role models, cellist Yo-Yo Ma, play on this song.

Speaking of identity, he's someone who has paved the way for more cellists to seek out their own identities, find their voices and have a reason to touch and to reflect the society around us.

Note by Hugh Morris

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Cello Sonata arr. Bosso

1. *Prologue: Lent, sostenuto e molto risoluto*
2. *Sérénade: Modérément animé*
3. *Final: Animé, léger et nerveux*

The Sonata for Cello and Piano, composed in

1915, was intended to be the first of a cycle of six sonatas, unfinished due to the composer's premature death three years later.

The experience of listening to music conceived for certain instruments, and performed by others, allows us to perceive different levels of its essence. A polyhedron with a thousand and one faces. All composers have felt the need to present their own music and that of others through a different lens. Claude Debussy himself presented Erik Satie's *Gymnopédie* in a highly singular orchestration, where the exploration of timbres gives the short compositions an aesthetic far from arousing nostalgia for the original thought.

I have created three different arrangements of Debussy's *Sonata for Cello and Piano*, two for string orchestra and a third for symphony orchestra. I didn't try to shape his music and make it my own, but rather I followed his gesture almost as if he had written it himself. I proposed a similar path when I transcribed Richard Strauss's *Sonata Op. 18* for the renowned violinist Dora Schwarzberg, performed at the Martha Argerich Festival in Lugano.

I was born in Buenos Aires. Abel Selaocoe is a child of this time, where music opens frontiers and transforms a concert into a space for dialogue between cultures and the sharing of purpose. Debussy's music itself draws on distant musical worlds. Because it is through understanding the will of others that miracles happen: and geometry, a polyhedron with a thousand and one faces, becomes the key to understanding the marvelous adventure that is the human experience.

Note by Jorge A. Bosso © 2026



Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)

Romance in C major

As his career began to attract the plaudits and acclaim he had long hoped for, Sibelius found himself increasingly seduced by the distractions of his new celebrity. By 1903 his heavy drinking and debts incurred by his endless socialising were so obvious that his worried family were prompted into action. Persuaded to leave the dubious allure of Helsinki, the following year he moved to a secluded spot beside Lake Tuusula where he would be free from temptation and able to focus on composing. There he built Ainola (named after his wife), the house that would become his home and where he would die and be buried in its grounds, aged 91, in 1957.

One of the first products of Sibelius attempting to change his life was the emotionally searching Romance in C major, composed for strings in 1903 as part of a fund-raising concert conducted by Sibelius himself. Modest in scale, intimate in tone, it proves to be a veritable whirlwind of emotions in miniature, running the gamut from self-reproaching anguish to soul-bearing tenderness and longed-for serenity and calm.

Marked Andante, its moderately slow pace seems only to intensify the conflicting emotions in play. It begins unsettlingly with a dark, unison string line, its melodic contours caught between restless, sombre E minor and warming C major. That sense of uneasiness, of troubling undercurrents threatening to break the otherwise tranquil surface, colours all that follows.

Even as singing phrases bloom above, unsettled harmonies lurk beneath, stirred by vexed chromatic inflections and darkening textures. The approaching storm comes closest to breaking in a late dramatic section of contrasting dynamics that builds in urgency, stopping short

of boiling over into dangerous turmoil. Instead, a slow retreat into introspective reflection and quiet finds the violins falling silent as restrained, mahogany-dark lower voices gradually subside into silence.

Note by Michael Quinn © 2026

Abel Selaocoe (b.1992)

Lerato (Love) arr. Thomas

The word simply means "love" in Sesotho. It can be used as a name for a child or to tell people we love them: "lerato". Through this song I was searching for something universal within the human race, and that is love. We are all made in one image, possessing the qualities of the world that are pure, that are full of love and that can be translated in all languages.

The sound world of the song comes from a South African hymn-singing scene. In my home church we have a way of singing all our own – one that is really rhythmic. We sometimes take out our Bibles and beat on them as a group, creating this wonderful bass sound, and that's what you hear all the way through, plus a kind of sway, a kind of rhythm that feels like it just lives within the space of the song. In this way lerato lives within you, within me and within all people. Seipone This title means "mirror" in Sesotho. When you're alone in a room, you're allowed to be whoever you want to be. You can look at yourself in the mirror, spend time with yourself, engage in a solitary dialogue. This gets at the very essence of improvisation: finding ways to converse with all the influences you have inside you and in doing so hitting upon new creativity. I find that when I begin to improvise and don't stop, I end up speaking a language of my own.

I take you through various influences as I improvise in this song. For example, the way I play



with the bow at times draws on the technique of a bowed zither from Lesotho called the segankula. It's a one-stringed instrument that is bowed in a circular fashion, up and down the string's length, creating rhythmic grooves. The more I look at myself in this way, the more I explore different worlds. I think about how to make the cello sound otherworldly, how to create rhythms within that sound to fashion music that seems to come from a very different place.

Note by Abel Selaocoe

Abel Selaocoe (b.1992)

Kea Morata (I Love Them So) arr. Thomas

Hymns of Bantu feels more like a homecoming. It "speaks of an idea of celebrating those that have come before us," he says. And, with that realisation – that home can be felt in the past as much as the present – Selaocoe breathes and takes stock, before the cycle of ancestral recall and renewal repeats again.

Kea Morata (meaning "I love them so") is Selaocoe's reminder "to give people their flowers" while they are still in this world. Emmanuele's groove feel remains, but it morphs into something slightly edgier here – the tempo increases, textures thin, and string lines dart, bulge and flourish, never quite stabilising.

The space opens up for Selaocoe the cello improviser to explore, building back into a jagged unison ensemble texture, before all elements – vocals, glassy string sounds, layers of insistent rhythm on top of wide-open grooves – unite for a fierce close.

Note by Hugh Morris



Abel Selaocoe



ICO Youth collaborated with **The Dance Academy**, Limerick, on a festive programme led by **Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker** and favourite musical selections.

This performance marked a milestone as our rehearsal space was transformed into a performance venue for the first time, welcoming over 200 audience members nightly at the ICO Studio, 3–6 December.





Education and Community Engagement

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

ICO Youth

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.

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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
[irishchamberorchestra.com/
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Here at the ICO we are lucky to have wonderful support from our Friends and Patrons. Each year we perform all around Ireland and abroad, while also delivering music education outreach to hundreds of school children in Limerick through our free music education initiatives. Our Patrons and Friends play a vital role in our story, and enjoy a range of exclusive benefits.

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Saturday 7 Mar Dublin



April

Mozart's World

Henning Kraggerud

Director/Violin

Thursday 16 Apr Limerick

Friday 17 Apr Cork

Saturday 18 Apr Waterford

Sunday 19 Apr Dublin



May

Brothers Haydn

Carolin Widmann

Director/Violin

Thursday 14 May Limerick Friday 15 May Dublin



June

French Reverie

Henning Kraggerud

Director/Violin

Thursday 18 June Dublin Friday 19 June Limerick

