

Bach to Bowie

Find your groove with Jess Gillam!

Jess Gillam
Saxophone

Katherine Hunka
Director/Violin

Thursday 6 February
Galway

Friday 7 February
Balbriggan

Saturday 8 February
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.

Jess Gillam Saxophone

Katherine Hunka Director/Violin

Bach to Bowie

Mendelssohn: String Symphony No. 2 in D major MWV N2

C.P.E. Bach: Flute Concerto in A Minor: III. Allegro Assai

Dave Heath: The Celtic

Elaine Agnew: Twilight

Boulanger (arr. Vennart): Cantique

Bowie (arr. Vennart): Life on Mars

John Harle (arr. Perkin): RANT!

Thursday 6 February

Town Hall Theatre, Galway

Friday 7 February

The Lark Concert Hall, Balbriggan, Dublin

Saturday 8 February

University Concert Hall, Limerick



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.

Led by the incredible **Katherine Hunka**, we aren't afraid to push the boundaries of classical music. Since joining us as Principal Conductor/Artistic Partner in May 2022, **Thomas Zehetmair** has opened a new chapter in our work, stamping his own hallmark on our repertoire. Together, we have performed trailblazing new commissions from some of Ireland's finest composers and explored wonderful new ways of seeing and understanding 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.

See upcoming events —
we've saved you a seat!

irishchamberorchestra.com



Violin

Katherine Hunka *Leader*

Nicola Sweeney

Diane Daly

Kenneth Rice

Clíodhna Ryan

André Swanepoel *Principal 2nd violin*

Anna Cashell

Louis Roden

Oonagh Keogh

Anita Vedres

Viola

Joachim Roewer *Principal*

Mark Coates-Smith

Robin Panter

Ed Creedon

Cello

Aoife NicAthlaoich *Principal*

Richard Angell

Peggy Nolan

Double Bass

Malachy Robinson *Principal*

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Jess Gillam



Jess Gillam Saxophone

From Ulverston, Cumbria, Jess Gillam is celebrated as a leading saxophonist. She has been forging her own adventurous path since she shot to fame becoming the first saxophonist to reach the finals of *BBC Young Musician* and the youngest ever soloist to perform at the *Last Night of the Proms*.

Jess is also a TV/Radio presenter with her own weekly show on BBC3, *This Classical Life* which has won the prestigious *ARIA Award for Best Specialist Music Show*. She has guest presented for BBC Radio 2 and co-hosted a mini-series for *BBC Radio 4's Today Programme*. Jess presented a series of Cumbrian Chats on *BBC Radio Cumbria*. TV presenting includes the *BBC Proms* and *BBC Young Musician*.

Jess is the first saxophonist and only saxophonist to be signed exclusively to Decca Classics with both of her albums reaching No. 1 in the UK Classical Music Charts. She is a recipient of a *Classic BRIT Award*, has been nominated for *The Times Breakthrough Award* and awarded an *M.B.E. for Services to Music*.

A free spirit in style and character, Jess advocates for the power of music in society. A patron for Awards for Young Musicians and *London Music Fund* she enjoys working and performing with young musicians.

Her infectious enthusiasm and passion for classical and non-classical music lights up stages with world-class orchestras including the NDR Hannover, Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, Iceland Symphony Orchestra, Minnesota Symphony Orchestra, Munich Philharmonic, Lahti Symphony Orchestra and the UK's leading orchestras. Her Jess Gillam Ensemble showcases brilliant musicians who share her bold, uplifting and open-minded approach. She has performed live at the *BAFTAs* to millions of viewers at home and is currently Artist in Association at the Royal Albert Hall and a Vandoren UK Artist.

Katherine Hunka



Katherine Hunka Director/Violin

Born in London, Katherine studied at the Royal Academy of Music and at Indiana University where she also acted as teaching assistant to her professor, Mauricio Fuks. She has since returned to Indiana as a guest Professor and been made a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music in London.

Katherine has been Leader since 2002 and regularly directs from the leader's chair. As director and soloist, with the ICO, she has toured Germany, China, and Singapore, and appeared at festivals including the West Cork Chamber Music Festival, and the Kilkenny Arts Festival.

Katherine directs ICO national tours, which take the orchestra all over Ireland. She works closely with composers of contemporary music and in 2024 will be performing a piece written for the ICO and solo violin by David Fennessy.

In 2020, Katherine released a solo CD recording with the ICO of Piazzolla's *the Four Seasons of Buenos Aires* and *Schubert's Rondo in A* which received glowing reviews. She co-founded the Solas String Quartet in 2020. Her group *The Far Flung Trio* with accordionist Dermot Dunne and bassist Malachy Robinson celebrates its tenth anniversary this year. Katherine was Artistic Director of the SCS Killaloe Music Festival 2020-2024. She is also a regular guest at chamber music festivals in Ireland and the UK.

She was a member of the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, touring with the group across the globe. She has been a regular guest leader with orchestras across the UK and Ireland and gave the world premiere of Benjamin Britten's *Double Concerto* at the Aldeburgh Festival in the UK.

Katherine is currently a Lecturer at the MTU Cork School of Music and Artistic Director of the ConCorda chamber music course.

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Programme

Notes

Felix Mendelssohn (1809–47)

Sinfonia No.2 in D major

- I. *Allegro*
- II. *Andante*
- III. *Allegro vivace*

A child prodigy the likes of which had not been seen since Mozart, between the ages of 12 and 14 Mendelssohn wrote twelve string symphonies – or sinfonias – and had sketched plans for a 13th. It helped, of course, that his father could afford the luxury of hiring a string orchestra to assist his son's precocious talent and energy. But even so, his youthful accomplishments prompted an admiring Beethoven (although the two never met) to confidently predict "Mendelssohn – 12-years-old – promises much".

The Sinfonia No.2 was composed, along with five others, in 1821. All are miniature examples of the mighty symphonies that had come to dominate the 19th-century concert hall. It begins in brisk, bright, bristling fashion, scurrying strings carried along by a remarkable confidence for one so young, the brief interlude contrasting high and low voices in a brilliant dialogue before rushing excitedly on only to be reined in and conclude in genteel accord.

The slow middle-movement suggests a maturity beyond Mendelssohn's tender years. Listen for the depth of feeling in the interplay between first and second violins, and how delicately he suspends notes – rising to a point of expected resolution but holding off or refusing it altogether, like an interrupted sneeze – to ink in a greater expressiveness. The finale returns to the spirit of the opening, lacing it with a delightful sense of playfulness and sheer joy in making music.

C.P.E. Bach (1714–88)

Flute Concerto in A minor – *Allegro Assai* (Arranged for saxophone)

The son of the great Johann Sebastian, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach's substantial output for the flute owes much to his long employment in the court orchestra of Frederick the Great in Berlin. Both his royal employer and his teacher, the composer Johann Joachim Quantz, favoured the instrument.

Originally composed for cello, the Flute Concerto in A minor was transposed by Bach himself soon after. Its final movement bristles with Baroque energy in a sparkling conversation between saxophone and orchestra. While the saxophone seems to float on thermals of warm air with its lark-like song, the orchestra sounds as if it is jealously trying to keep everything grounded. Listen for the increasingly energetic tug-of-war where the saxophone soars ever higher leaving the reluctant orchestra no choice but to join in and follow its flight of fancy.

Dave Heath (b.1956)

The Celtic

- I. *Ceilidh*
- II. *Lament for Collessie*
- III. *The Cooper of Clapham*

Composed in 1995 as a violin concerto, The Celtic takes its musical inspiration from traditional and contemporary Scottish folk music, the composer referencing fiddler Aly Bain and the band Capercaille as influences on its writing. "What I like most about Celtic music is its rhythm and purity of expression," explains the Manchester-born Heath.



Those qualities come together and to buoyant life in The Celtic, Heath's own arrangement for saxophone revelling in the instrument's expressive, singing quality across its three contrasted sections.

The first, Ceilidh, Heath says, "is intended to reflect a lone figure appearing over the top of one of the Scottish glens and seeing in the distance through the twilight, the glow of a light in the window of an inn." That eerie image is conjured by shimmering strings before the saxophone introduces a bright and lively tune that casts an infectious spell as if the figure were racing through cloying mist towards the light. Once inside the inn, the saxophone quickly whips proceedings up into a delirious frenzy.

Lament for Collessie, as its title implies, is a slow movement brimming with soulful nostalgia for the village in Fife that Heath and his family had reluctantly departed. It's an exercise in mood and emotion that opens with a doleful duet between keening saxophone and soft, sympathetic strings. See, as the movement progresses, if you can hear in the saxophone line the sound of "distant bagpipes" intended by the composer. It ends with an extended, heartfelt, and moving elegy for the idyllic life that has been left behind.

The final movement, The Cooper of Clapham, is an animated, dancing tribute to the titular Albert Cooper, a revered maker of flutes, on his 70th birthday. Based on the Scottish folksong The Wee Cooper o'Fife, the saxophone gleefully channels the freewheeling fluidity of a country fiddle and its ability to create moments of bewitching beauty. It concludes with a final, soaring flourish by the saxophone.

Elaine Agnew (b.1967)

Twilight

Commissioned by the Irish Chamber Orchestra, Elaine Agnew describes Twilight as "an atmospheric, quiet piece that evokes a peaceful time of meditation, after sunset before sunrise."

To achieve that state of falling into quiet reverie, music relies on two key schemes to concoct a sense of the conscious mind falling into inner contemplation. The first frames Twilight with a series of muted pulsing chords suggesting the rhythmic beating of the heart. The second, heard in its central section, is a free-flowing reverie of rich, expressive string voices that tempt a drift into stillness, as if halved by the soft glow and becalmed quiet of the moment just after sunset or before sunrise.

Listen out for the last few bars when a solo cello echoes the solo violin as if the shimmering sun was hovering just below the horizon in a moment that seems timeless, as if the sun could decide to rise or to set.

Nadia Boulanger (1887-1979)

Cantique (arr. Alistair Vennart)

The 34-year-old Nadia Boulanger abandoned composing to become one of the 20th century's greatest teachers of composition. The lengthy list of her students who went on to achieve fame included Aaron Copland, Leonard Bernstein, Astor Piazzolla and Philip Glass.

Dating from 1909, Cantique sets a poem taken from an earlier play, *Soeur Béatrice*, by Maurice Maeterlinck (whose *Pelléas et Mélisande* had prompted Debussy to write his only opera). It is based on a 14th-century legend about a nun seduced into leaving her convent and later abandoned. In her place, a statue of the Virgin Mary comes to life to assume the nun's appearance and sing a hymn of pardon for the errant Sister. When the nun returns to the convent, the Virgin becomes a statue again and a miracle is declared.

Boulanger treats the sour-sweet episode with a melody that is as tender as it is exquisite. It is supported by soft chordal harmonies in strings washing against and supporting it that conjures the most ravishing image of glistening stars sparkling in the night sky.

David Bowie (1947-2016)

Life on Mars (arr. Alistair Vennart)

Whether you first encountered him as Ziggy Stardust, Aladdin Sane or the Thin White Duke, David Bowie was one of pop music's most individual stylists. A one-off musical chameleon whose stamp on popular music went far beyond the characters he often hid behind. Life on Mars (taken from his 1971 album *Hunky Dory*) is, Bowie said, about "a sensitive young girl's reaction to the media" and her disappointment when the dreams it promises fail to materialise. Talking the place of its lyrics, the saxophone imbues their strange sense of yearning and frustration with long euphoric lines that seem to stretch into the stratosphere, and dolefully snappy, stabbing gestures full of questions left unanswered.

John Harle (b.1956)

RANT! (arr. Simon Parkin)

A "rant" in traditional British folk music is an energetic dance and means to "make merry." Featuring melodies taken from old and new Cumbrian folk tunes, John Harle's RANT! was written for Jess Gillam. It is also, the composer says, a depiction of the young saxophonist, "her energy, her sound and her presence, painted in music from her own part of England."

See if you can hear how the opening quotation from Cumberland Nelly weaves its way through this characterful and playful portrait, and how it returns with a bracing flourish at its end.



Education and Community Engagement

ICO Schools

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.

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
[irishchamberorchestra.com/
what-we-do/education-community](https://www.irishchamberorchestra.com/what-we-do/education-community)

Programme Highlights

As we reflect on 2024, ICO Education and Community Engagement are delighted to share the remarkable journey that ICO Schools and ICO Youth have embarked on. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to each of you who played a pivotal role in making 2024 a resounding success. Together, we have achieved significant milestones that not only fill us with pride but also set the stage for an even more impactful future.

In 2024, our education and community programmes made the following impact:

- 9,117 audience members engaged with our programmes
- 4,450 hours of free-to-access teaching were delivered
- 1,545 students from Limerick participated in free music education
- 45 students successfully passed their Royal Irish Academy of Music exams
- 4 concerts were performed by ICO Youth across Ireland and Europe
- 9 concerts were presented by ICO Schools



For more information on ICO's Education and Community Engagement programmes, please contact Dr. Simon Thompson at simon.thompson@ul.ie

or go to irishchamberorchestra.com/support/donate



ICO Youth

Give the Gift of Music 21 in 25

How it Works:

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Pledge €250

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Your €250 pledge grows to €362.33 under the Charitable Donation Scheme

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Provides 20 music lessons for up to 400 children

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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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March

Beethoven 4

Thomas Zehetmair Conductor

Mick O'Brien Uilleann Pipes

Thurs 13 March

Royal Irish Academy of Music, Dublin

Fri 14 March

Christ Church Cathedral, Waterford

Sat 15 March

University Concert Hall, Limerick



April

Vivaldi's Four Seasons

Henning Kraggerud Director/Violin

Thurs 10 April

Whyte Recital Hall, RIAM, Dublin

Fri 11 April

University Concert Hall, Limerick

Sat 12 April

St. Patrick's Church,
Newport, Mayo



May

Chora

Luail - Ireland's National Dance Company

Maria Campos, Guy Nader, Liz Roche,

Mufutau Yusuf Choreography

Katherine Hunka Director/Violin

Fri 9 May

Wexford Opera Festival

Tue 13 May

Bord Gais Energy Theatre

Sun 18 May

Lyric Theatre, Belfast

Wed 28 May

Cork Opera House



May

Britten's A Midsummer Night's Dream

Blackwater Valley Opera Festival

David Brophy Conductor

Mon 26 May - Mon 2 June, Lismore Castle, Waterford



June

Beethoven Piano Concertos 2 and 4

Kristian Bezuidenhout Director/Piano

Thurs 19 June

University Concert Hall,

Fri 20 June

Stamsa Tire, Tralee, Kerry

Sat 21 June

Whyte Recital Hall, RIAM, Dublin

