



Once More With Feeling

The cover version was a way of honouring the original artist and many were successful, others best forgotten. But a few cover versions exceeded their brief and became synonymous with the covering artist, leaving the original songwriter and performer overlooked and forgotten. Who now thinks of Nilsson's *Without You* and considers the original version by the band, Badfinger? Or Sinead O'Connor's *Nothing Compares 2 U*, versus the original by Prince; *I Will Always Love You* by Whitney Houston against the original by Dolly Parton or Joe Cocker's *With a Little Help From My Friends* versus the Beatles album comic filler?

So what makes a good cover-version? What does it take for an artist to cover another artist's song and make it their own? A distinctive and identifiable vocal instrument is a key component, but not necessarily a guarantor of general critical acclaim. In the Nilsson version of *Without You*, his voice took the song to another level, whereas the Mariah Carey version had some commercial success but drew a large raspberry from the critics. Jeff Buckley took John Cale's version of Leonard Cohen's *Hallelujah* and pretty much took ownership of that great anthem; although honourable mentions are due to k. d. laing, Rufus Wainwright, Jon Bon Jovi and Alexandra Burke for their versions. Anohni – when she sang under her former identity Antony, produced a blistering version of *If It Be Your Will* at a Cohen tribute concert in Australia in the noughties.

Bob Dylan has an enviable back catalogue of brilliant material, which have been covered by the likes of his one-time muse, Joan Baez, to Jimi Hendrix, Bryan Ferry and even contemporary artists like Adele amongst many, many others, such is the high esteem his songwriting is held.

Discussing the relative merits of each version with your friends is a good way to start a row -everybody will have their own thoughts. The covering artist has to walk a fine line between honouring the original, paying respect to the artist concerned, yet bringing something new to the song – a unique interpretation that may cast a different light on it. A 'straight' cover that is a barely indistinguishable version of the original song adds nothing to our understanding and enjoyment.

Janice Joplin brought her individual style to many well-known songs, creating imaginative and distinctive versions that have withstood the test of time. it

is hard to believe at times that the songs were not actually written for her. Her version of George Gershwin's *Summertime* is a world away from the composer's original idea, yet it is not inconsistent with the tenor of the lyrics; similarly, her version of the classic *Little Girl Blue* is now so synonymous with her that a filmed biography was produced in recent times with that same title. Nina Simone also covered the song and produced a distinctive version; but it is her version of the Jacques Brel's *Ne Me Quitte Pas* that simply devastates the listener with its brutal bitterness, far from the composer's own droll narrative.

A change of gender can also bring to light nuances that the original artists were probably never even aware of. Some artists choose to change the pronouns to reflect the change in voice, as Sinéad did with the Prince song; but many people would argue that the original lyric should be left untouched, changing the gender pronoun is somehow 'sacrilegious'. Other people say to leave it unchanged creates a 'trip', as it takes the listener out of the song. What to make of the White Stripes covering Dolly Parton's *Jolene*? There is no amount of lyrical amendment that is going to alter what is unabashedly a song with a distinctly feminine perspective, yet Jack White delivers such an incredibly passionate and soulful rendition that the gender becomes inconsequential. Similarly, another gender reversal can be found with the Scandinavian sisters First Aid Kit, who covered Black Sabbath's iconic *War Pigs* at a festival, a very masculine song, yet powerfully and effectively delivered by distinctly feminine voices.

Many rap artists and so-called 'DJs' have committed crimes against the musical palate by appropriating and sometimes openly stealing parts of well-known songs for their own pallid and execrable fare. However, Eminem, with his song *Stan*, took Dido's *Thank You* and produced something memorable, using the latter's melodious ballad as a musical counterpoint to his dark, emotive rap story. The Fugees made *Killing Me Softly* a whole new adventure, diverting musically from Roberta Flack's emotive rendition. Leona Lewis took her musical life in her hands by covering *Run* by Snow Patrol (devotees of the band cordially suggested she should follow the command in the title) yet I for one find her gospel version to be powerful and moving. Recently there was a cover of Simon and Garfunkel's *The Sound of Silence* by metal act Disturbed; it divided opinion but the composer Paul Simon, publicly gave it his approval

On BBC Radio's *The Live Lounge* contemporary artists are invited to cover other artists' work and there are often some odd and idiosyncratic choices, but London Grammar have made it their own, by producing interesting distinctive versions of songs of their contemporaries, in their own style. Hannah Reid's incredible voice imbues an authenticity in the interpretation that can take the breath away in covers of *Wrecking Ball* by Miley Cyrus, *Wicked Game* by Chris Isaak and even Prince's seminal *Purple Rain*.

The secret to a great cover version, I believe, is a genuinely respectful and compassionate connection made between the covering artist and the song; like when an emotional Gregory Porter also covered *Purple Rain* on Jools Holland's *Later...* within days of the composer's sudden, unexpected death. I was at a concert a few years ago with Americana band, The Lone Bellow, who came down off their stage and amidst us all in the audience, performed Paul Simon's

Slip Slidin' Away acoustically. Kanene Doheny Pipkin's soaring vocal was augmented by an informal and unrehearsed chorus of two-hundred well-oiled Dubliners and friends, who surprisingly under the circumstances, sang with unimaginable control, pitch and tunefulness. We all left with dampened cheeks and a warming glow in our hearts.

John Llewellyn James

Featured Image: The Lone Bellow Photo by Neil Swanson courtesy of wfuv.org



Wookalily

Now and then a band appears which seems to defy any definition by genre. On Friday 26th May I was lucky enough to catch the second set of one such band, the Belfast five woman outfit [Wookalily](#) in the Gallery Bar of the Ardhoven Theatre. (For those curious about their name, the urban dictionary refers to "wooka" as meaning "very sexy woman", and "Lily" coincidentally was the name of several band members' grannies!)

Hard to define their unique quirky sound, it's a mixture of Folk and Country Blues, with walking blues speeded up to a run. In fact, this band's verve and at times raucous enthusiasm would easily get people up and dancing in an appropriate venue.

Adele Ingram is the main lyricist for the band; Sharon Morgan plays lead guitar, banjo, and bass and is responsible for designing and painting the cover of the bands debut album *All the Waiting While*; Lou Potter plays the drums with energy and panache; Clair McGreevy also plays lead guitar, fiddle, and flute, with haunting Irish traditional influences; and last, but certainly not least, lead vocalist Lyndsay Crothers creates a soulful blues sound. Her version of the Ruthie Foster song *Travellin Shoes* brought me to my feet it was so rousing, elemental and powerful:

*Death came a-knockin' on my sister's door
Singin' "Come on, sister, ain't ya ready to go?"
And my sister stooped down, buckled up her shoes
And she moved on down by the Jordan stream.
And then she shout
"Hallelujah! Done, done my duty!"*

Got on my travelin' shoes."

In the week that saw the horrendous suicide bomb in Manchester Arena happen, the choice of this song and Lyndsay's soulful rendition seemed heartachingly apt.

Some of Wookalily's impressive back story:

2011: Wookalily release their debut EP *Black Magic Doll*.

2012: Their song *Diamonds And Gold'* gains them a showcase at the prestigious IBMA World of Bluegrass Festival in Nashville.

2013: They record for Country Music Hall-Of-Famer Dixie Hall's *Pickin' Like A Girl* compilation – the only non-American band to do so.

November 2014: Their own debut album *All The Waiting While* is released.

2016: They are scouted by Warner Bros Wall to Wall Productions for a BBC4 documentary featuring Midge Ure and Rhod Gilbert and make it to the NATIONS final.

All The Waiting While is getting not only well earned local airplay but also international acclaim.

Wookalily are a cult, but they'd like to be popular!

Just one of the twelve superb tracks on Wookalily's CD *All the Waiting While, Diamonds and Gold* is an enchanting ballad describing the value of true love:

*I'm not looking for diamonds or gold
just a lover for my trouble and no trouble for my soul
no more to be like the raging sea*

and this love is liberating, a homecoming, unshackled by mercenary concerns:

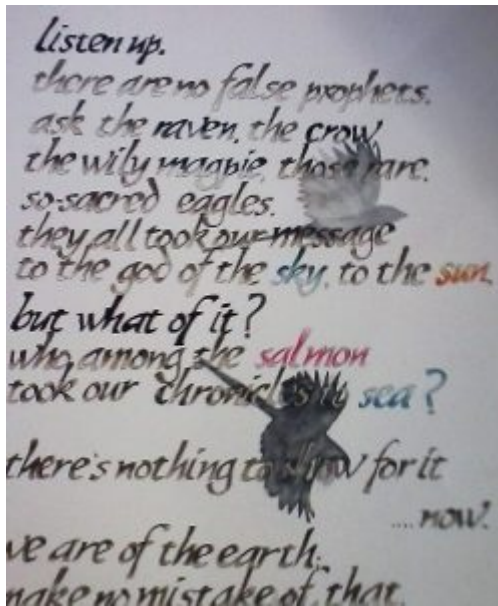
*I'm not lookin for a mansion on a hill
your heart is my home
take me where you will
with you I feel free
shack, shanty, or tepee*

Listening to *All the Waiting While* is like making a bunch of really good new friends after a period of drought and get even better with further acquaintance. However, as good as the CD is it doesn't match "Wookalily" live and wild as they are. This band of women give you a taste of unfettered freedom which is as infectious as it gets.

Catch them if you can!

Kathy May

Cirque des Oiseux: Artists & Augurs



Are Artists Augurs? asks the exhibition which opened in the *Higher Bridges Gallery* on the 7th of April and runs to the 29th. *Cirque des Oiseux* is French for *Circus of Birds* or rather the circling of birds in flight, something we notice particularly at this time of year as new migrants begin to arrive.

Just as we look for signs of Spring, the Augurs of Ancient Rome used to interpret the will of the Gods through observing the flight and the calls of birds. The association of birds and poets is even older than that; it goes right back to the origins of writing itself. According to legend, Palamedes invented eleven letters of the Greek alphabet from the shapes that migrating cranes make in flight.

The exhibition is based around the closely-observed bird poems of Enniskillen-born poet Maria McManus, two of which – [Peregrinations](#) and [Corncrakes](#) are reproduced with permission elsewhere in this issue. They are re-interpreted and complemented through the work of eight other artists in photographs, paintings, sound, video, and sculpture. This gives the whole a pleasing unity, and a diversity that is not normally seen in one-person shows. The works speak to each other, sometimes using the same words and images, but none dominates. There is no predetermined path through, an effect heightened by excellent exhibition notes which, though they number each piece sequentially and map them clearly, do not list them in numerical order but by artist.

The connection with augury is perhaps most plainly seen in the work of Helen Sharp. What at first sight appeared to be silhouettes of birds in flight *The Jackdaws of the Newtown Butler Spar* are seen on closer inspection as shapes pierced in white cloth – literal rendings of the veil. The same image is used on a set of 'Oracle Cards' laid out like a Tarot reading on a table in the middle of the room.

Others are more oblique. Catherine Gaston's mysterious oil paintings contain

no birds at all (one is even titled *No Birds Here, Winter, Lough Erne*) except for the one titled *Murmuration for Maria*. Bernarde Lynn's photographs *Caged Birds of Hong Kong 1-6* and *People of Hong Kong* invite comparisons between the brightly coloured soft-focus close-up of the birds and the invisible people – represented by several floors of the facade of a massive block of flats – as neat and regular as a repeating pattern, yet no two exactly alike.

Some of the poems are presented in handwritten form. *Emigrés* is written in a tiny book perched on a swallow's nest and protected by a bell jar, *Corncrakes* on an accordion-fold set upright so that only a few lines are visible from any one position. It is accompanied by Simon Walters sound installation in which two recordings of the poem weave together in a sort of fugue, reflecting the tenuous lives of the birds themselves.

Others are meant to be handled (white gloves are provided) most notably Irene Uhlemann's massive handmade book *In Principio Erat Verbum* (In the Beginning was the Word) which with its illustrated excerpts stands somewhat in the tradition of the *Book of Kells* and evokes some of its reverence. *Home* is a collage of handwritten letters and poems contained within a folded map, as if remembering the journeys for which it was consulted, and *Peregrinations* is typewritten on luggage labels, one per line – a device that McManus also uses in her [Label Lit](#) project.

It is strange and somewhat delightful to experience poetry in such an indirect fashion, but does that mean that poets and artists are akin to augurs? Perhaps. As with all forms of divination, augurs relied on observations that were somewhat predictable (with a good knowledge of natural history you know what to expect expect from birds)

but never entirely so. They wove a story out of commonplace and overlooked details, always keeping a eye open for the extraordinary moments that give them special significance.

And so do these artists: go see for yourselves.

The Artists:

[Maria McManus](#) [Tom Hughes](#) [Pearl Kinnear](#)

[Helen Sharp](#) [Simon Waters](#) [Irene Uhlemann](#)

[Bernarde Lynn](#) [Catherine Gaston](#) [Rosie McGurran](#)

[The Magic of Music](#)

There are so many things in this world that divide us as human beings, that seem to create conflict and strife, but if there is one thing that can be

pointed to, as bringing brings people together in a positive way, it is music.

More than any other art form, music has this great collectivising aspect. It can be enjoyed on your own, in the privacy of your home or through the plastic earpieces of your iPhone, but there is little doubt that the experience is enhanced by coming together and sharing it, either by participating or just communal listening.

Some anthropologists have speculated that early humans sang before a common language was developed. You don't always need to comprehend the precise meaning behind chants, chorals or songs, for them to touch the emotional centres of your cortex. From the ululations of the warriors of the Serengeti, to plainsong in Gregorian Chant, from the whirling Sufi dervishes to the polyphonic harmonies of traditional Georgian, the keening sorrows of Iberian Fado to contemporary Gangsta Rap – they all have the capacity to reach into our hearts and to transport us to other, more ethereal forms.

My Grandfather sang at weddings and funerals, – sadly, much more of the latter. He did it for a shilling, which paid for the following Saturday:, a ticket to the rugby or a theatre show, a few beers, a sneaky bet and fish & chips on the way home. He had a lovely lyric tenor voice, that to my biased ears, sounded like the great Enrico Caruso on the 78 that he used to played on a gramophone.

Music was always present in my home as I grew up. We had one of those old Radiograms and I used to play all my parents' records: *Favourite Arias*, Mario Lanza, Kathleen Ferrier, Frank Sinatra, Nina Simone – to *The Dubliners*. I would sit on the speaker part of it, turn the Bass wheel up to 10 on the dial (there was no 11!) and feel the deep, low vibrations through my backside.

To my parents' horror I moved on to heavy rock and metal of *Led Zeppelin*, *Queen* and *Iron Maiden*. That was was simply beyond their comprehension at the time – though I later had my father watching VHS videos with the likes of Meat Loaf, Gary Moore, *Heart*, and *Whitesnake* and thoroughly enjoying them.

This was the thing; my parents taught me not to be too 'precious' in your music listening and to try different things, my tastes remains catholic and eclectic to this day.

Live music has led me to have many wonderful experiences and come together with a diverse range of people: a week in Bayreuth, enjoying *The Ring Cycle* by Wagner and the endless conversations in the hotel bar with fellow Wagner enthusiasts; seeing *Madame Butterfly* for the first time and having my heart broke sore by her death at the end. Then there was a Manowar concert in Birmingham. where Joey DeMaio played *Sting of the Bumblebee* (his take on the more well-known *Flight*) on a 12-string Rickenbacker Bass, and the even more impossibly flying digits of Scandinavian axeman Yngwie J. Malmsteen in Bristol.

There was that time in Edinburgh seeing Scotrock band *Runrig*, when the notes of Banks of Loch Lomond struck up and I was grabbed by a leery-eyed, bekilted

native and told to 'Sing ye Sassenach gobshite ye' (I am Welsh but I did not argue the point). So we sang and pogoed until I needed a double hip replacement and – my blood roiling with Braveheart blue woad – I was rewarded with a whisky-sodden sloppy kiss on the lips. It was a little forward, but *When in Rome...* as they say.

Then in Dublin one steamy July evening, I went to see *The Lone Bellow*, a band who performed a range of self-penned Americana. At the end of the concert, they came down from the stage and in the middle of the crowd, sans electric amplification, performed Paul Simon's *Slip Slidin' Away*. Kanene Doheny's soulful vocals were met with a chorus of 200 drunken concert-goers.

Here's the thing, it was not roared out: instead there were perfect harmonies, totally unrehearsed; and we sang with restraint, gentleness and with perfect pitch. It was a spiritual experience and our cheeks were wet with tears; it was an unforgettable moment.

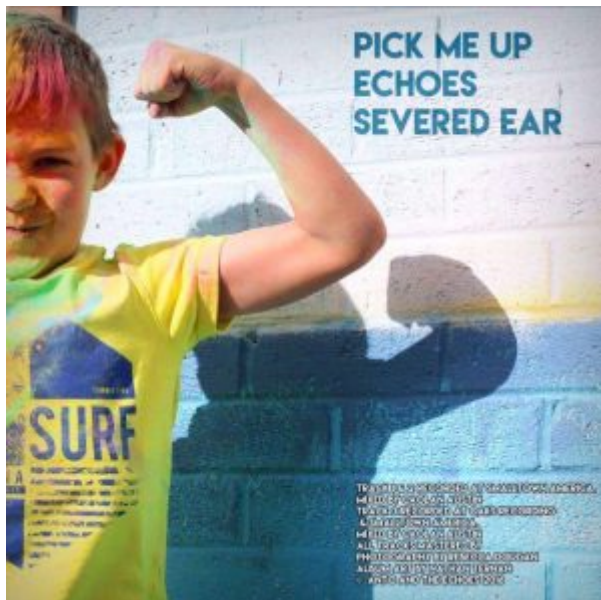
Music at its best is capable of these all things and many more besides. Music is magic and those of us blessed to be open to it, can have our lives transformed by it.

John Llewellyn James



[A Colourful Debut](#)

2016 may have been a tough year for music, but that certainly wasn't the case for emerging Fermanagh band [Anto & the Echoes](#). After only a few short months of forming and honing their sound, they took on their debut gig in July. Punters were turned away from *Charlie's* bar as the crowd reached maximum capacity early in the night. A series of well-received gigs around Northern Ireland followed, and the band returned to *Charlie's* to close the year with another sell-out show.



This year has built further on their success, after spending some time in the studio, they have returned with a short Irish tour to promote a new three-track EP titled [Youth](#). February saw the Echoes playing Dublin, Omagh, Portrush and *The Empire Bar* Belfast, finishing their tour with the release of an accompanying music video for their track *Severed Ear*.

The EP is a collection of three songs, with a vivid and engaging stadium rock sound. The first track, *Pick Me Up*, is a chaotic upbeat number, with punk & surf-rock guitar sound juxtaposed with flamboyant saloon piano reminiscent of *Mungo Jerry's Summertime*, overladen with rich harmonies and a vocal line with hints of *Queen* and *Kate Bush*.

The second track, *Echoes*, is a sentimental and nostalgic party anthem, falling in line with a more familiar stadium rock sound akin to *The Killers* and *U2*, with powerful crescendos and rich layered vocals carrying a strong sense of emotion.

Severed Ear is a love song through the eyes of a tortured painter, with a huge dynamic guitar sound played over a host of colourful lyrical metaphors. The accompanying music video perfectly captures the colourful essence of the song, with the location and cast used as a literal blank canvas for a rainbow of expression.

Frontman and songwriter Anthony Breen has worked in the film industry on *Game Of Thrones*, *Line Of Duty* and various feature films, and used his experience to envision the video and bring it to life with great help from his cinematographer Declan O'Granaah.

Caiman O'Shea is a poet and singer-songwriter, and the driving force behind [The Thing Itself](#).



Free Your Voice! Free Your Writing!

Valerie Whitworth writes:

Together One Voice are starting the New Year with a challenge to free your natural voice and increase your singing skills!

This term we will be focusing on releasing the voice, vocal development, singing skills, confidence building with some small group work on pitch, and harmony work. Many people come to my classes with stories of how they were told not to sing by a parent or teacher, or not allowed to join the choir. The truth is – if you can speak you can sing.

Like anything else in life it is a skill that can be learned and developed. To start with singing in front of others might feel a bit strange or scary, especially if its something that you haven't done for a long time and lets face it there are not many opportunities to sing once you leave school, other than in the shower or in the car, but once you give yourself permission to, there will be no stopping you !

The physical and mental benefits of singing with others is really well researched and documented now, with many articles and reports backing up what every choir member of every singing group have known for a long time. It also makes you feel happy and is great fun.

If all that sounds interesting to you DO come and join us on Thursday 19th of January 7.30 – 9.30 for a free taster session and if you like it sign up for the term. This term is twelve weeks, we have a sliding scale fee of £60 / 84 / 108 depending on your income.

Booking is essential

For more information contact Valerie Whitworth
info@togetheronevoice.co.uk

Free Your Writing!

Each year *Fermanagh Writers* (with funding from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland) organise a number of workshops in Fermanagh House.

Monica Corish: Poetry workshop, 4th February, 10am-5pm

Olive Travers: Mindfulness in Writing, 25th March, 10am-4pm

Lynda Kirby: Memoir writing workshop, 8th April, 1-5pm

Helen Wright (Blackstaff Press): Preparing a manuscript for submission to a

publisher, 20th May, 1-5pm

Claire Allan: Writing Novels, 17th June, 10am-5pm

Maureen Boyle: Poetry workshop, 9th September, 10am-5pm

Brenda Winter Palmer: Drama and scriptwriting, 7th October, 10am-5pm

Jo Zebedee: Writing Science Fiction and Fantasy, 18th November, 1-5pm

All workshops are free and open to the public (with a £2.50 charge for refreshments) but places are limited, so booking is essential.

Fermanagh Writers meet on Tuesday evening in Blakes of the Hollow, Enniskillen, and prospective new members are always welcome. Their last anthology *Tavern Told Tales* is still on sale in the Visitor Centre, Castle Barracks; and in the *Collage Collective* craft shop in the Buttermarket.

in Fermanagh

[The Vanburgh Quartet](#)

The **Vanburgh Quartet** (*Gregory Ellis, Keith Pascoe, violins; Simon Aspell, viola; Christopher Marwood, cello*) has enjoyed a successful international career throughout Europe, the Americas and the Far East. Based in Cork since 1986, it has brought string quartet music to audiences throughout Ireland and has given more than one thousand concerts in venues ranging from small country schools to the major city halls.

In 1996 the Quartet founded the *West Cork Chamber Music Festival*. Its masterclass programme offers inspiration and support to Ireland's younger generations of chamber musicians. The Quartet has consistently championed the work of Irish composers and has commissioned and performed numerous new works.

In November 2016 the Quartet was awarded the *National Concert Hall Lifetime Achievement Award* at a special gala concert.

This will be their final concert in Northern Ireland before they disband

Soloist **William Butt** has appeared with the *Irish National Symphony Orchestra*, the *Orchestra of St Cecilia* and the *Ulster Orchestra*. He has worked with conductors such as Alexander Anissimov, Gerhard Markson and Barry Douglas. He is a founder member of the Esposito Quartet. William plays on a fine cello made by Giovanni Grancino in Milan in 1690.

The Music is Amazing

The *Schubert C-Major Quintet* is one of the greatest pieces of music ever written. Seventy-two people have chosen it as the one piece of music they'd take on *Desert Island Discs*. I have loved it and played it regularly since my brother gave me the LP for my 25th birthday. We also have that sweetest of music, Barber's *Adagio*, in its seldom-heard original string quartet version. And some interesting short pieces, including one by Peter Schickele (alias P D Q Bach) with an Appalachian-and-Bluegrass-meets-European-Classical vibe. And a modern Chinese piece. All very stimulating, edge-of-your-seat stuff!

If you don't come we'll go out of business!

Not emotional blackmail: just plain fact! ***Music in Fermanagh*** is the only organisation in the county putting on serious chamber music to a world standard. We need your support and appreciation!

So, on Sunday 5th February, have an early-ish lunch and come and join us at the Ardhowen at 3 pm. Bring your lunch guests, house guests, friends, neighbours, family.

The Programme

Seán Doherty (1987-) String Quartet No.3, *The Devil's Dream*

A major influence on Doherty's work is the fiddle tradition of Donegal, a style that he describes as *aggressive, driving, and un-ornamented, the tunes are as stark as the bogland, the bowing as jagged as the cliffs*. He learnt fiddle with James Byrne and this quartet is written in memory of his teacher, who died on his walk home from a seisiún in 2008. His final walk is imagined in the slow air, *An Londubh* (the blackbird) and the reel, *The Devil's Dream*.

Doherty tells us that this reel *intrudes as a danse macabre that demolishes the air. The air comes screaming back only to be subsumed by the reel once more. After a quotation of the plainchant Dies Irae, the reel itself disintegrates. From the ashes of the Devil's Dream, the air emerges in its final, transfigured, form.*

Henning Kraggerud (1973-) *Preghiera*

Henning Kraggerud, the Norwegian composer and violinist, is a frequent visitor to Ireland. He is currently Artistic Director of the Arctic Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra. The piece we'll hear this afternoon: *Preghiera*, meaning *Prayer*, has been described as *Middle-Eastern influences mixing with the baroque*.

Zhou Long (1953-) *Song of the Ch'in*

The Ch'in is a traditional seven-stringed plucked zither, which was associated with sages and scholars. From manuscripts back to the 6th century, it appears that Ch'in playing was quite a sophisticated art and involved various ways of plucking the strings, as well as the use of ornaments, range

and timbre. These qualities are reflected in Zhou Long's *Song of the Ch'in*, which dates from 1982.

Samuel Barber (1910-1981) *Adagio*

This single piece for string orchestra began life as the slow movement for Barber's *String Quartet Op.11*, written in 1936. In January 1938, Barber sent an orchestration of the movement to the great conductor Arturo Toscanini who introduced the piece to the world in a radio broadcast later that year. It immediately became popular, with its evocation not just of sadness but also serenity, whether in the lush string orchestra sound or the more intimate and unassuming original version for string quartet which we'll hear this afternoon.

Peter Schickele (1935-) *Barn Dance*

Schickele's comic albums, under the pseudonym of P.D.Q.Bach, have tended to overshadow his own 'serious' compositions, which include more than one hundred works for orchestra, choir and chamber ensembles. *Barn Dance* is the fourth movement of his *String Quartet No.1, American Dreams*, commissioned in 1983. It shows the influence of jazz, bird song and, most noticeably in this movement, dance. It includes fiddle tunes that he played as a boy, a Navajo melody and birdsong motifs, all with an Appalachian edge.

INTERVAL

Franz Schubert (1797-1828) *String Quintet in C major D.956*

This string quintet didn't receive its first public performance until twenty-two years after Schubert's death but it is now regarded as one of the undisputed pinnacles of the Romantic chamber music repertoire. The choice of a second cello, rather than the more usual second viola of Mozart's quintets, gives a rich and distinctive sonority to the work.

Within a few weeks of completing this wonderful quintet, Schubert died at the age of thirty-one.

Richard Pierce



[When a Tree Falls in the Forest](#)

A 2,000 year old Sequoia Tree falls over in the forest and dies. No one heard

it fall. It was a famous tree – they even gave it a name, the *Pioneer Cabin Tree* and carved a tunnel through its great trunk. Yet now it lies in state on the floor of the forest.

On the same day, Peter Sarstedt also died. His song *Where do you go to (my lovely)?* struck a chord within me when I was still in nappies. I did not know the meaning, had no clue as to the story behind it, but something in his silken voice, with that laconic style he had and the wry happy-sad aspect to it, just took a hold on me.

As I grew older the story-telling aspect of the song became more resonant to me, because that was what I wished to do – to tell stories in verse and in prose. I was seduced by the Continental names it referenced, which to a small boy growing up in South Wales in the 1970's seemed exotic and exciting.

I think of these two events and at the same time, I think of Kim Jong-Un and Donald Trump rattling their sabres. Like many of the liberal literati, I am filled with despair. The Sequoia tree would have lived through many terrible times and through the terrors of many miserable men like Trump and Kim; it lived perhaps 30 times a human lifetime.

But here is the thing, I don't think the tree's thoughts would have lingered long on them, rather they would have savoured the more precious lives of storytellers like Peter Sarstedt and their wonderful creations in song, verse and prose. The root tendrils would have quivered with the plangent sound of the voices, the great branches would sway gently to the beat of the poetic lines, the mighty heart lulled into a dream-like consciousness with the exposition of the story.

A dear friend told me that the man who gave his name to the tree, a First Nation American called Sequoyah. Although himself illiterate, he invented a written syllabary for the Cherokee language – which has been adapted for many other languages, not just in North America but worldwide. Many of the ancient stories and teachings have thus been preserved, stories to be told to today's and future generations. No doubt the tree would have heard some of those stories.

The Forest Ranger, a tough phlegmatic woman, noted the tree's passing as significant. It will not be cut up for timber, but will lie untouched for perhaps another millennium, to become the home for new life. The stuff that it made of itself during its long life, will provide sustenance and nutrients to an uncountable number of creatures. I think she had the right of it.

In the throes of existential angst, especially under the dark umbra of the world's present evils, we might ask ourselves – who are we and what are we for? The answers lie in our art, our ability to tell stories in the unique way we can, because we are all mortal, our true legacy must be our art, to sustain the souls of those who come after us and to inspire them and their art, in the same way Peter Sarstedt inspired me.

Just me thinking aloud...



[Maeve Dunphy – an interview by Trevor Hodgett](#)

Omagh singer-songwriter Maeve Dunphy's debut album [Scarlet](#), which was released in 2012, was distinguished by her exceptional songwriting, with lyrics which were arresting and often startling and music which ambitiously contained elements of blues, jazz, reggae and country.

Her current CD *Don't Wait Up For Me*, a five track EP, represents a change of direction for on it she collaborates with Artie McGlynn and *The Grooveyard Shift*, on a repertoire which contains only one original, alongside interpretations of four songs by other writers.

We've captured the essence of how we sound live. Some people record very well but in the past I wasn't always one of them but I think I've done it right this time. We didn't do take after take – it was, generally speaking, quite a live recording.

Included are two tracks that Dunphy picked up from listening to Aretha Franklin – *Nobody Like You* and *Muddy Water*, a song of course which has also been covered by the likes of Jimmy Witherspoon, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee and Lou Rawls.

One wonders though if Dunphy might have felt intimidated interpreting songs which had been recorded by the sainted Aretha, knowing that her versions would have to bear comparison to Aretha's.

You have to put that intimidation aside because there's nobody like Aretha. Her versions are gorgeous and I love listening to them but I thought, "I'll never be as good as that but I'll have a go at them anyway."

More surprisingly there is also a Spanish-language song on the album, 'Amapola', sung by Dunphy in what to my monolingual ears sounds like the most perfect Spanish.

I don't speak Spanish but I found some videos on YouTube and wrote the lyrics down phonetically for myself. I didn't get them checked out by anybody who does speak Spanish – so I could be asking for a bag of kittens!

Another track *In My Girlish Days* was originally by the great, guitar-playing American blues singer [Memphis Minnie](#), whose career lasted from the 1920s to the 1950s. The legendary [Maria Muldaur](#), who Dunphy supported on a memorable tour of Ireland, turned her on to Memphis Minnie.

When I first met Maria she was going, "Oh, darling, I think you should do some of her tracks." And she gave me a CD and I did learn two of the songs and put that one on the EP.

Dunphy regards her experience touring with Muldaur as transformative. Indeed her admiration for the New Yorker, who originally performed on the Greenwich Village and Boston folk scenes with the *Even Dozen Jug Band* and the *Jim Kweskin Jug Band* before becoming a rock superstar with her hit record *Midnight At The Oasis*, is palpable.

The tour was brilliant. Maria was amazing, not just as a performer but as a person. I travelled for a week with her and her band, who were lovely people, and the craic was just brilliant.

Whenever we stopped for meals I would try and sit beside Maria to hear some of her stories but not only was I interested in her, she was interested in me too. It wasn't just one way. She was asking about myself and about my family so we had great talks.

And I never tired of listening to her and her band and how they did their show and the way it could change. You could listen to them over and over and you'd never get bored. It was very uplifting and that rubbed off on me.

Trying to make a living in Northern Ireland playing blues and jazz-influenced music can be depressing and frustrating. Dunphy acknowledges that she has struggled with that reality and the feeling of being an outsider but believes that working and hanging out with Muldaur and her band revitalised her.

Sometimes I get a wee bit disillusioned and feel disconnected from why I chose the music that I do in the first place.

You can feel a wee bit alone in your choice at times. In my teens I was listening to old, old stuff and music from New Orleans and jazz and blues and soul and Otis Redding and I was the only girl at my school that liked anything like that. Everybody else was listening to Bros so it was a lonely choice for a teenage girl and it can still be a lonely choice as you get older. You need to be surrounded by it to feel connected to it again, to make it come alive again and to remember everything that you liked about it in the first place. And that's what was really, really good about that week because they were the real deal and I was soaking it up, the whole week. It did me the world of good.

Remarkably, Muldaur has also declared that she regards Dunphy as 'the real deal.' Dunphy, not surprisingly, is thrilled with the compliment.

I was absolutely chuffed. And I don't like blowing my own trumpet but I'll tell you this wee thing: Maria's piano player heard me do a Robert Johnson song and I was telling the audience that I got it from [celebrated New York blues singer-guitarist] Rory Block and he said, "We've worked with Rory Block and I prefer your version!" So that was a huge compliment.

The Grooveyard Shift are led by guitarist Artie McGlynn, long regarded as one of Ireland's greatest and most influential musicians. Dunphy acknowledges McGlynn's greatness and his crucial role in developing the one original song on the EP, the title track *Don't Wait Up For Me*:

He's a master and we are only at his shoulders in comparison. And he really helped me shape that song. Jerome [McGlynn, Artie's son and co-guitarist in the Grooveyard Shift] and I had worked on it and we were missing something when Artie came along and sprinkled Artie magic on it and brought to it what was missing and made it so much better. And I went, "Aha, now it's happening!" He's brilliant.

The Grooveyard Shift frequently play on Monday nights in McCann's Bar in Omagh. The unassuming local provides the perfect, low-key home base for the band. "It's a great music bar and there's a great atmosphere," says Dunphy, "It doesn't have great space and there's no stage so we're all squished into a corner on top of each other but we love playing there."

Updated by **Trevor Hodgett** from an interview first published in June 2014 on [Culture Northern Ireland](#)

Maeve Dunphy and her band will soon be gigging in Enniskillen.

More information from her [Facebook page](#).



Common Ground

You and I are already connected
so deeply related – bound by invisible kinship
beyond this window into which you peer.
Let's return to common ground
to walk with each other in silence
and remember together
our place in the family of things.

I have to thank you for this opportunity to share about the arts programme developing in [Common Ground](#), the new 25 acre center in Tattenabuddagh near Fivemiletown. I have taken my writing outdoors, sat with the trees and grasses whilst planting Hazel, Rowan Birch and Willow. As a boy I used to listen to the Corncrake in these fields.

Robert Graves, in his poetic manifesto *The White Goddess*, wrote that modern poetry's function was to lay bare the results of humanity's break from the rest of nature:

Once a warning to man that he must keep in harmony with the family of living creatures among which he was born ... it is now a reminder that he has disregarded the warning, turned the house upside down by capricious experiments in science, philosophy and industry, and brought ruin upon himself and his family.

Common Ground has a mission – that the farm will be a place where people will come to deepen their awareness of their relationship with themselves and each other, with a clear primary focus on nature and the other than human beings that inhabit its spaces.

Thomas Berry, the writer and eco-philosopher proposes that we are entering the "Eozoic Age" where we must reestablish our connection to nature and work toward sustainable lifestyles that reverse the destruction we are currently inflicting on the planet. We as human beings now have that responsibility to care for and help the 'earth community' developing and flourish again.

We hope to engage all kinds of people – those new to any kind of creative/artistic activity and those already established in a practice. We know there are many ways of relating to ourselves in nature through our creativity and hence we are offering a range of expressive arts – [writing](#), [land art](#), [environmental movement](#), [music](#) and [storytelling](#). We recognize that these relationships are dynamic – our sense of connection changes, yet we are always connected in nameable and unnamed ways to the nature all around us. This is a way of engaging in the biggest challenge of our time – the unfolding reality of environmental degradation and the catastrophic effects of climate change on Earth's life.

Our primary concern is that people have the experience of being part of nature as a living breathing whole, and that they embody the experience. The expression of it does not necessarily have to be in poetry, art or prose – if they walk away changed by the experience of being here, more connected and alive – then our job is done.

‘Whatever great, beautiful, or significant experiences have come our way must not be recalled again from without and recaptured, as it were; they must rather become part of the tissue of our inner life from the outset, creating a new and better self within us, continuing forever as active agents in our [becoming].’ (Goethe)

If you would like learn more or get involved then visit the [website](#) – or come to our [Annual Gathering](#) on 20th August.

Robbie Breadon has worked in complementary health for 25 years and is co-founder of [Ecotherapy Kernow](#)