



## [New Releases from Conor Phillips](#)

Local singer/songwriter Conor Phillips has gone from strength to strength in the last few years, attracting a strong following with his unique musical style. Learning to run almost as soon as he could walk, Conor began songwriting the moment he first picked up a guitar around four years ago.

Starting out as a bedroom player, Conor ventured into busking and open mics around Enniskillen and Belfast, where he was quickly noticed for his sound and invited to play some headline shows of his own. After a successful gig at Enniskillen's Roadstock all-day music event he was approached by Joel Johnston of Sycamore Records, who had heard his songs and was keen to record them.

Together they recorded Conor's first five-track E.P. *Foolhardy Boy*, which was released a year and a half ago to a great critical reception. After gigging and promoting the E.P. for over a year Conor is now back in the studio with Sycamore Records and ready to bring us a new E.P., which will be released later this summer. A sample of two tracks has been released as a teaser for the forthcoming E.P., the title track *King* and its B-side *People*. Recorded mixed and mastered by Joel Johnston, the duo also produced a live video version of the song, with backing music provided by Joel's brother Jamie Johnston. In a very short space of time the live video has accrued over 5,000 views and the audio track over 1,500 listens. Both are available to stream from the Sycamore Records' [Facebook](#) and [Soundcloud](#) pages.

King was recently chosen as track of the day by music page [Sway and Breathe](#).

With a unique and memorable voice and a writing talent to match, Conor's songs have a way of burrowing into the mind, with lyrical hooks that you are sure to be left humming after a show.

If you enjoy the recordings you can find Conor playing live on Friday 10<sup>th</sup> June in Charlie's bar, Enniskillen from 9pm.

**Caimin O'Shea**

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## A Corncrake Story

In 1940, during the Second World War, a Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA), was appointed to help promote and maintain British culture. Chaired by Lord De La Warr, President of the Board of Education, the Council was government-funded and after the war, in 1946, was renamed the Arts Council of Great Britain. However, it was not until 1962 that the Arts Council of Northern Ireland was established and, in the meantime, the local version of the CEMA committee continued to promote the arts here, chaired by Captain Peter Montgomery, distinguished member of an Anglo-Irish family whose leafy estate and Jacobean-Revival pile grace the outskirts of Fivemiletown.

Captain Peter, as he was affectionately known, was unusually handsome, in a Rupert-Brooke-First World-War-poet sort of way, tall, broad-shouldered, flat-stomached, and with a flop of blond hair. He and Anthony Blunt had been lovers when they were at Cambridge together. He had founded the Fivemiletown Choral Society, which practised and performed in Enniskillen. My parents were both keen members, so it was natural that they should hear about, in the late fifties/early sixties, I can't remember the exact date, a recital, to be held in Castle Coole, sponsored by CEMA, by the Belfast-born soprano, Heather Harper.

A couple of years later she would make the musical headlines by stepping in at the very last moment to sing the soprano role in the world premiere of Benjamin Britten's magnum opus, the *War Requiem*, given in the newly-rebuilt Coventry Cathedral. The performance was to be seen as an act of reconciliation between nations after the Second World War, with the British tenor, Peter Pears, the German baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and the Russian soprano, Galina Vishnevskaya. As the performance approached it became clear that the Soviet authorities would not allow her to leave Russia so, at ten days' notice, Miss Harper learned some very difficult modern music and gave a stunning performance, with the eyes and ears of the world watching and listening.

But that was all ahead of her. The CEMA concert at Castle Coole took place on one of those rare, hot, sunny, early-summer days from which dreams of childhood are made. I was a gangly teenager, the chief chorister of the Cathedral in Enniskillen and passionate about music, so there was no question that I would not go with my parents.

Miss Harper sang, amongst other things, Ravel's *Chansons Madécasses*. I think I remember that she started off as a mezzo. It was certainly the first time I ever heard (the beginning of) these wonderful sultry songs, their mood enhanced by the heat of summer wafting in through the entrance door, which had been left wide open.

The performance was in French, so perhaps the irony of the middle of the three songs, with its strongly anti-colonial sentiments, being sung in a building erected from the proceeds of the harvesting of Caribbean hardwoods by slave labour, was lost on the listeners. It is a very angry song, but not

as angry as Captain Peter became when an audacious corncrake commenced his fortissimo opposition on the far side of the gravel sweep. Though Captain Peter was handsome and well-put-together he was not the most physically coordinated of men and, as the recital was paused to allow the removal of the unwelcome counterpoint, we all watched him zig-zagging through the long grass, waving his arms and shouting "Shoo! Shoo!"

He returned to the Hall, beads of sweat on his brow, his collar and blond quiff awry, and the concert proceeded, suffused with polite good humour. It didn't last. Mr Corncrake didn't take the hint.

Eventually three male volunteers, the teenage me included, were posted strategically in the meadow and the doors and shutters of the Hall closed against any possible audio-interruption. Captain Peter was taking no chances. The songs, set in the heat of dusty Madagascar, continued in spartan neoclassical half-light.

*Richard Pierce is a retired architect who has exhibited his watercolours, has written a novel, climbed Kilimanjaro, swims a mile a day and spends half the year in Finland with his partner.*

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*in Fermanagh*

## Music in Fermanagh

*Music in Fermanagh* is a relatively new organisation. Up until its recent merging with its neighbouring district, Fermanagh District Council regulated its arts spending by consulting its Arts and Culture Advisory Committee made up from local volunteers. Several of its members were keen for Ardhowen Theatre to present more classical music but after much discussion it became clear that it would be better if the impetus came from an independent organisation, rather than the Council or Ardhowen – and so *Music in Fermanagh* was born. The help of Ian Davidson of FODC and Jackie Owens of Ardhowen was invaluable in the setting up. We now have five board members and four advisors.

Last year we enjoyed putting on two events. The first, a two-day celebration of the life and work of the composer Joan Trimble, coincided exactly with the centenary of her birth. The evening concert, which featured her music

exclusively, was a sell-out and had a warm, festive air. The second was a performance by the RTE ConTempo Quartet. These four young Romanian musicians (two married couples) have an energy and excitement to their playing which is contagious! Their Haydn and Schumann made the audience, which was bigger than all expectations, sit forward and smile.

But it was the Janáček *Intimate Letters* Quartet which was the surprise. This could be regarded as difficult, modern music but the audience was spellbound, carried along by the charisma and technical wizardry of these young players, its sensuality and passion clearly defined. One Fermanagh businessman had never been to a classical music concert in his life but was persuaded to give it go by his musical wife. He sat on the edge of his seat enthralled. He wanted it to go on for hours. He didn't want to return to reality. He wants more and more and will be at our future concerts.

The Janáček quartet was inspired by the composer's long and spiritual friendship with Kamila Stösslová, a married woman 38 years his junior. The composition was intended to reflect the character of their relationship as revealed in the more than 700 letters they exchanged:

You stand behind every note, you, living, forceful, loving. The fragrance of your body, the glow of your kisses – no, really of mine. Those notes of mine kiss all of you. They call for you passionately...

The circumstances of the writing of this quartet was the subject of '*Performances*', the most innovative play of the late Brian Friel's later period, written in 2003. The play was memorably directed by our own Adrian Dunbar as part of Derry/Londonderry's year as European City of Culture, 2013.

So, what do we have in store for our friends and neighbours this year?

Four wonderful concerts, all at the Ardhoven Theatre:

#### **VANBRUGH STRING QUARTET**

On 4th June we have what I hear through the grapevine will possibly be one of the *Vanbrugh String Quartet's* last concerts before they disband. They have agreed to do three of Beethoven's string quartets, an early, a middle and a late, interspersing them with spoken commentary about the composer's development. We hope to have a lot of young people there.

#### **MUSICI IRELAND**

On 15th September we have *Musici Ireland* giving us a trio: flute, viola and harp, with music by Ravel, Debussy and the Elegiac Trio by Arnold Bax, expressing his sadness at the 1916 conflict between the two nations he loved most, Ireland and Britain, an admirable sentiment to note in the centenary year.

#### **ASHLEY WASS**

On 16th October we have the celebrated young English pianist, Ashley Wass, giving a matinee recital of Shakespeare-related pieces, coinciding with the

400th anniversary of the Bard's death.

### **LOVE AND WAR**

From 4th to 6th November we have a weekend, a chamber music workshop, given (along with other members of the Delmaine String Quartet) by Dublin-based Vanessa Sweeney, who is possibly the most experienced chamber music coach for young people in Ireland and a performance, on the Sunday afternoon, where the Quartet will be joined by Michael James Ford and other actors and singers, entitled Love and War, a synthesis of poetry, love letters, readings, song and music which poignantly reflects the impact of the First World War on individuals from Ireland, both North and South.

*Richard Pierce is a native Enniskillener, has sung opera professionally, and is currently preparing exhibitions of his huge, abstract photographs in Belfast, Brussels and Cologne.*