

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.