

THE DEVIL'S DREAM

CHAMBER MUSIC BY SEÁN DOHERTY

Sonoro Quartet | Sylvia O'Brien | Mark Redmond | and others



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1.	The Devil's Dream	13:38
	Lament for the Poets	
2.	I. The Tidings	5:45
3.	II. Sojourn in the Whale	9:36
4.	III. Lament for the Poets	7:31
5.	No Go	10:38
	Drochshaol	
6.	I. Fr. McCarthy's Lament	3:46
7.	II. Prof. Boole's Farewell	2:48
8.	Paddy's Rambles through the Gravel Walks	3:26

Total playing time 57:26

Composer Introduction

I am, at heart, a fiddle player. Irish traditional music is my native tongue. In any idle moment, a jig is going round in my head or my fingers are tapping out a hornpipe on my palm. Growing up in Derry, I had wonderful teachers in both traditional and classical music. I find it only natural to express myself through their combination.

These pieces are programmatic. In the tradition of the *seanchaí*, each tells a story. Two are a meditation on death (*The Devil's Dream*, *Paddy's Rambles through the Gravel Walks*), and three explore pivotal moments in Irish history: the Easter Rising (*Lament for the Poets*), the Troubles (*No Go*), and the Great Famine (*Drochshaol*).

I have a huge debt of gratitude to both the Vanbrugh String Quartet and West Cork Chamber Music Festival in supporting my passion for chamber music. Their joint composition workshops, the West Cork Chamber Music Young Composers' Competition, and support through commissions were the start of my output this genre.

I am grateful to Dublin City University for allowing the use of the beautiful All Hallows Chapel as the recording venue, especially the Estates and Security teams. I acknowledge the support of the DCU Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Creative Output Scheme. I also acknowledge the support of The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon, Traditional Arts Project Award, in bringing this project to fruition.

Programme Notes

The Devil's Dream (2015)

The Donegal fiddle tradition is distinctive in Ireland: not like the languid lilt of the Clare style nor the light patter of the Galway style, the Donegal style looks outwards, across the sea, for its closest kin—to Scotland and to Nova Scotia. Aggressive and driving, the tunes are as stark as the bogland, and the bowing as jagged as the cliffs. A leading exponent of this tradition was my teacher, the fiddle player James Byrne. This string quartet is loosely based on two tunes that I learned from his playing: *An Londubh* and *The Devil's Dream*. Byrne died on his walk home from a *seisiún* in the early hours of 8 November 2008 near his home in Mí na Croise.

This piece imagines this walk. Half-remembered fragments of the slow air, *An Londubh*, slowly coalesce until its full form is reached, into which the reel, *The Devil's Dream*, 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. This piece is written in memory of James Byrne (1946–2008), and for his partner Connie, and their daughters, Séana, Aisling, and Merle.

Lament for the Poets (2016)

This work is collection of three contemporaneous responses to the Easter Rising, imagined as an interconnected *Aisling* or 'dream'—a genre of political poem in which the poet, asleep, sees a vision of a beautiful young woman, who represents Ireland. She tells the poet of her sadness at being repressed by foreigners and seeks the poet's help to free the country. In this modern *aisling*, the allegorical *spéirbhean* (sky-woman) embodies the fierce spirit of the radical revolutionary poet Lola Ridge (1873–1941), who only laments that she is not in Dublin to mount the barricades (*The Tidings, Easter 1916*). In her *Sojourn in the Whale*, Marianne Moore (1887–1972) tells Ireland that the injustices and indignities she suffered and suffers are unbearable; Ireland has passed the point of no return by entering the belly of the beast.

In his *Lament for the Poets*, Francis Ledwidge (1887–1917) sees the *spéirbhean* in her incarnation as the *sean-bhean bhocht* (the poor old woman), mourning the loss of her ‘blackbirds’, which represent the Nationalist rebels—in particular, Ledwidge’s friend and fellow poet, Thomas MacDonagh—who have been destroyed by the ‘fowler’, the British Empire, and their loss is lamented by Ireland in her lowliest guise. I have used the traditional Irish slow air *The Lament for Staker Wallace* in the final movement. Patrick ‘Staker’ Wallace was an Irish freedom fighter, brutally executed for pro-independence activities in 1798, who gained his moniker posthumously, when his decapitated head was hoisted onto a stake to discourage further insurrection. As the original lyrics of this air are long since lost, *Lament for the Poets* serves as a contrafactum.

No Go (2016)

That was at the checkpoint. Meanwhile, the trail was beginning
to leak and waft
Away, but the sniffer dogs persevered in their rendition
of *The Fox-Chase*, lapping
And snuffling up the pepper-black Stardust fibrillating on
the paper, till
The interview was thwarted by Aquarius, a blue line on the
map that was
Contemporaneous with its past. *Skirl girn a snaffle birdie*
girdle on the griddle howlin —

Ciaran Carson, from *Bagpipe Music*

These last, seemingly nonsense, words beat out the rhythm of a traditional Irish dance tune. It is one of the many ciphers used by the poet Ciaran Carson to portray a fugitive hiding from the British Army during the Troubles. *The Fox Chase* is one of the few descriptive pieces in Irish traditional music. This series of tunes, linked by the eponymous narrative, is well known as a virtuoso showpiece for the uilleann pipes, and has been recorded by renowned players such as Seamus Ennis, Liam O’Flynn and Finbar Furey. The title, *No Go*, is the ringing refrain of *Bagpipe Music* by poet Louis MacNeice, to whom

Carson was paying homage with his own poem of the same name. This is my imagining of a new *Fox Chase*, in which a human is being hunted.

Drochshaol (2018)

These pieces were written for the National Famine Commemoration 2018 at University College Cork. The Famine was contemporaneously known in Irish as *an Drochshaol*, which literally translates to 'the bad life' or 'the hard times'. Each piece is based on a letter from the Famine years (1845–49) to mark the launch of Great Famine Online, a ground-breaking project of digital archives: the first from one Fr. Eugene McCarthy, the second from Prof. George Boole.

On 1 March 1847, Father Eugene McCarthy wrote a letter to the editor of the Cork Examiner that detailed the horrific conditions in his parish of Watergrasshill, after a week in which eleven of his parishioners had died from diseases caused by the Famine. These nightmarish scenes are related in a matter-of-fact manner: a man dies from exposure while gathering brambles to use as firewood to warm his freezing family; a woman and her grandson die in short succession in a roofless house; a man calls to the back door of the parochial house, begging for some food that would give him the strength to bury the dead girl he carries on his back.

In *Fr. McCarthy's Lament*, the uilleann pipes play a *caoineadh* for the dead and the dying of the parish. This *caoineadh* contains the first intoned phrase of the plainchant Mass: 'Kyrie eleison' (*Lord have mercy*). This prayer becomes more insistent, urgent, and impassioned until the *caoineadh* is revealed as the unadorned Kyrie plainchant, a final plea for mercy from God.

Prof. Boole's Farewell: George Boole was the first Professor of Mathematics at University College Cork. He is most recognized as the inventor of Boolean Logic, which is the basis of modern digital computer logic. On 25 October 1849, Boole wrote to his sister to tell her of his safe arrival in Cork, and his first impressions of his new home. On his train journey from Dublin to Cork, he observed the ravages of the Famine: '...it is impossible to speak

in terms too sad', he wrote, 'there is over the whole country an air of utter destitution and abandonment'. *Prof. Boole's Farewell* takes inspiration from Boole's seminal book *The Mathematical Analysis of Logic*, and its presentation of the influential idea of the 'Universe of Discourse', in which he represents the individual members of classes of objects with the letters x, y, and z. In this piece, these classes of objects are represented by three distinctive tunes, each in its own time signature, which are combined to form a cohesive system of relations. These tunes then drop out, one by one, reflecting the deserted countryside that Boole witnessed on his train journey.

Paddy's Rambles through the Gravel Walks (2023)

This piece weaves together two tunes from the Irish fiddle tradition of County Donegal: 'Paddy's Rambles Through the Park' and 'The Gravel Walks to Granie'. The former is a slow air; the latter is a reel. The celebrated Donegal fiddler John Doherty told the story of the eponymous Paddy who was crossing through a *pairc* (meaning 'field' in Irish), on his way home late one night.

Farm hands had cleared the fields of stones and had piled them into cairns. From the nearest of these cairns, Paddy heard the searing lament of the Banshee, a fairy woman who heralds the death of a family member. He looked behind the cairn and found nothing. On approaching the next cairn he heard it again, and again he looked for but did not find the singer. Doherty said this pattern repeated itself 'through the park all night till a little while before daylight in the morning. And the song that the Banshee sang, Paddy had it all learned, and it's called "Paddy's Rambles through the Park".'

Graine is a remote, uninhabited glen between Ardara and Glencomcille, southwest County Donegal, where locals used to graze their sheep during the summer. When they went to herd them in autumn they would access Granie by climbing up the gravel paths. This piece imagines Paddy's search for the ghostly singer around this mountainous landscape.

Lament for the Poets

I. The Tidings (Easter 1916)

Censored lies that mimic truth...
Censored truth as pale as fear...
My heart is like a rousing bell—
And but the dead to hear...

My heart is like a mother bird,
Circling ever higher,
And the nest-tree rimmed about
By a forest fire...

My heart is like a lover foiled
By a broken stair—
They are fighting to-night in Sackville Street,
And I am not there!

Lola Ridge (1873–1941)

II. Sojourn in the Whale

Trying to open locked doors with a sword, threading
the points of needles, planting shade trees
upside down; swallowed by the opaqueness of one whom
the seas

love better than they love you, Ireland—

you have lived and lived on every kind of shortage.

You have been compelled by hags to spin
gold thread from straw and have heard men say: 'There
is a feminine

temperament in direct contrast to

ours, which makes her do these things. Circumscribed by a
heritage of blindness and native
incompetence, she will become wise and will be forced to
give

in. Compelled by experience, she

will turn back; water seeks its own level'; and you
have smiled. 'Water in motion is far

from level.' You have seen it, when obstacles happened
to bar

the path—rise automatically.

Marianne Moore (1887–1972)

III. Lament for the Poets: 1916

I heard the Poor Old Woman say:
'At break of day the fowler came,
And took my blackbirds from their songs
Who loved me well thro' shame and blame.

No more from lovely distances
Their songs shall bless me mile by mile,
Nor to white Ashbourne call me down
To wear my crown another while.

With bended flowers the angels mark
For the skylark the place they lie,
From there its little family
Shall dip their wings first in the sky.

And when the first surprise of flight
Sweet songs excite, from the far dawn
Shall there come blackbirds loud with love,
Sweet echoes of the singers gone.

But in the lovely hush of eve
Weeping I grieve the silent bills'
I heard the Poor Old Woman say
In Derry of the little hills.

Francis Ledwidge (1887-1917)

Biographies

Seán Doherty

Seán Doherty is an award-winning composer from Ireland whose captivating compositions are fast becoming a favourite of audiences worldwide. His music has a deep connection to text, often with strong moral and social themes. Seán's work has been described as 'unfailing gripping' (Irish Times) and music of 'power, subtlety and richness' (Josep Vila i Casañas: World Youth Choir).

He was first introduced to music through the Irish fiddle tradition of his hometown of Derry. As a teenager, singing in a performance of Duruflé's Requiem inspired him to begin composing. He went on to read music at St John's College, Cambridge, after which he completed a PhD in musicology at Trinity College, Dublin. His compositions draw inspiration from a wide variety of musical influences, from arcane medieval techniques to electronic dance music.

Seán's choral works have been performed by choirs including the Stellenbosch University Choir, the National Youth Choir of Scotland, Ex Cathedra, the Choir of Clare College, Cambridge; New Dublin Voices and the World Youth Choir. His music has also garnered numerous awards including the Choir and Organ Magazine composition competition and Béla Bartok Competition, Hungary.

Seán's chamber and orchestral works have been performed by the Vanbrugh String Quartet, Barry Douglas and Camerata Ireland, and the Kensington Symphony Orchestra. Seán is an assistant professor of music in Dublin City University. He is represented by the Contemporary Music Centre, Ireland.



Seán Doherty

Sonoro Quartet

Sarah Jégou-Sageman, Violin

Jeroen De Beer, Violin

Séamus Hickey, Viola

Léo Guiguen, Cello

Founded in 2019, Sonoro Quartet is one of the leading young string quartets of its generation. Hailing from France, Ireland, and Belgium and performing over 40 concerts annually, their repertoire encompasses classical masterpieces alongside works and commissions by contemporary composers. In 2022, Sonoro Quartet was chosen as ECHO Rising Stars for the 2023–24 season, embarking on a concert tour that includes 17 performances in leading European halls. The quartet has also been selected to join the MERITA Platform, where they will present concerts throughout Europe, featuring an innovative artistic project.

In 2023, they made their debuts at Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Musikverein Vienna, Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, Kölner Philharmonie, and Philharmonie de Luxembourg, amongst other prestigious venues. In July 2023, they made their debut in New Zealand performing 11 concerts in venues across North and South Islands. In October 2021, the Sonoro Quartet received the 3rd prize and two special prizes at the Bartók World Competition for String Quartets in Budapest.

Their energy, dynamic interpretation and musical maturity left a lasting impression on the audience and the jury. Sonoro has since returned to Budapest to perform Bartók's Quartets in the Bartók Memorial House. The quartet is currently studying at the Netherlands String Quartet Academy in Amsterdam, receiving guidance from renowned artists, such as Marc Danel and Gilles Millet (Quatuor Danel) and Eberhard Feltz. They have also studied with members of Quatuor Ebène, Pavel Haas Quartet, Belcea Quartet, and Artemis Quartet.



Sonoro Quartet

Sylvia O'Brien, Tracks 2–4

One of Ireland's leading sopranos, Dr Sylvia O'Brien has established herself as a performer of renown in opera, oratorio, chamber, and contemporary music. O'Brien is currently Professor of Voice at the Royal Irish Academy of Music. O'Brien's specialist vocal skills have established her as a leading interpreter of contemporary music, having performed numerous prestigious international premieres, as well as works by many composers who have written specifically for her voice.

She has collaborated with many composers most notably the Irish composers Seóirse Bodley, Raymond Deane, Gerald Barry, Brian Irvine, Siobhán Cleary, and Seán Doherty. Notable performances include George Crumb's *Apparitions* (Evlana Ensemble, 2023), Kaija Saariaho's *Changing Light* (Evlana Ensemble, 2018), Gerard Barry's *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* (RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra, conductor Gerhard Markson, 2005), Claude Vivier's *Lonely Child* (National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland, conductor Nicolas Cleobury, 2014), Morton Feldman's *Neither* (National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland, conductor Stefan Asbury; Helsinki Philhamonic, conductor Dmitry Slobodeniuk), Seán Doherty's *The Song of Iron* (Evlana Ensemble, 2024), Michel van der Aa's *Here [in circles]* (Crash Ensemble, 2013), Siobhán Cleary's *Ondine and her kind* (Evlana Ensemble, 2015), and Raymond Deane's *Siberia* (Wolfgang Ensemble, 2017).



Sylvia O'Brien

Mark Redmond, Tracks 5–8

Mark Redmond, currently a PhD candidate at TU Dublin, received an Honours Masters in Music Performance and a First-Class Honours Degree from the DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama, where he was awarded the Leo Rowsome Gold Medal for Performance.

Having gained a reputation as a performer on the uilleann pipes in a 'traditional' context, Redmond engages in a wide range of diverse genres. He performs and records regularly with the National Symphony and RTÉ Concert Orchestras, and has premiered works for uilleann pipes and orchestra by Shaun Davey, Neil Martin, Brian Byrne and Vincent Kennedy. Additional recording history includes featuring on Na Píobairí Uilleann's album *The Rolling Wave*.

With organist David Bremner, he recorded, *L'Air Du Temps/The Spirit of the Times*, which combines traditional repertoire with music of the French organ school. He features on albums by Christy Moore (*Flying Into Mystery*), and Daoirí Farrell (*A Lifetime of Happiness* and *The Wedding Above in Glencree*). On the international circuit, Redmond has toured with Riverdance, Celtic Woman, Celtic Legends, and has performed or recorded with a host of diverse artists including Macklemore & Ryan Lewis, Westlife, Glen Hansard, Imelda May, Sharon Shannon, Dónal Lunny, and Declan O'Rourke.

Other Performers

Lauren O'Neill, Harp, Tracks 6–8

Molly Tobin, Concertina, Tracks 6–8

Robert Harvey, Flute, Tracks 6–8

Seán Doherty, Fiddle, Track 8

James Bingham, Spoken Voice, Track 3



Mark Redmond

Recorded at All Hallows Chapel, Dublin City University and Campus on 5th and 6th May 2023.

Executive Producer: Seán Doherty

Producer: Richard Duckworth

Recording Engineer: Richard Duckworth

Mastering: Peter Montgomery

Programme Notes: Seán Doherty

Lament for the Poets, commissioned by West Cork Music for the 21st West Cork Chamber Music Festival in 2016

The Devil's Dream, commissioned by the Vanbrugh Quartet, with the support of the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon

No Go, commissioned by Ensemble Xenia for the EstOvest Festival 2016

Drochshaol, commissioned by University College Cork for the National Famine Commemoration 2018

Paddy's Rambles through the Gravel Walks, supported by Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon, Traditional Arts Project Award

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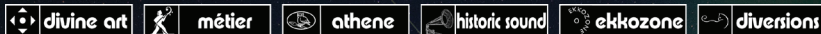
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