

PROGRAMME NOTES

by Ellen Cranitch

Imagine going to bed on a Saturday night and waking up on Sunday, a half an hour older than you should be.

Mad, huh? Well, that's what happened a hundred years ago, in a year already fairly packed with remarkableness.

1916. One of the most significant years in all of Irish history. A year of political turmoil, violent uprising, and brutal executions of some of the founding fathers of our state.

And the year the Great Britain stole 25 minutes from us and never gave it back.

In October 1916, with advances in telegraphy, and the need to align clocks throughout the then British Isles, in order to best serve populations doing business, doing war, and taking trains, the government under Prime Minister Asquith, decided to include Ireland in the Daylight Saving Bill, and bring Ireland into the Greenwich Mean Time band. At 2am, on 1st October 1916, the Irish clocks went back by 34 minutes and 39 seconds to join our friends in Great Britain. Since 1880, we in Ireland had been operating on a loosely enough defined system of local times, the Dunsink Observatory being the centre of Dublin Mean Time. Naturally, this met with a bit of opposition. Countess Markievicz expressed her indignation in a letter to a solicitor acquaintance, ('public feeling is outraged by the forcing of English time on us'), and T. M. Healy noted that 'while the Daylight Saving Bill adds to the length of your daylight, it also adds to the length of your darkness.' Fair point.

But, where did the time go? (more tea, Father?)

That's the concept that is inspiring this current collaboration between four highly imaginative

and creative musicians, in *Edges Of Light*, a new commission bringing together four musicians, in whose own work the notion of Time, in its various meanings, is a driving force.

Colin Dunne is known as a dancer, but it's probably more accurate to describe him as a musician who plays the body.

His recent show, *Out Of Time*, is one of the most brilliant solo dance shows of recent years, I was lucky enough to see it three times, and would happily see it another three, or more. In it, Dunne celebrates traditional Irish dance, with movement and monologue, archive film, and most importantly, a complex and thoughtful soundscape, created both of recorded material and currently generated sound. To do this, Dunne and his extremely skilful and sensitive sound engineer, used a selection of electronic delays, loops, and reverbs. The net effect was like an aural trompe l'oeil, as we heard things that are simultaneously happening and have just happened, and occasionally, our ears and eyes were tricked into hearing things that hadn't happened yet. A beautiful and beguiling jest with time, both in its sense of era, and of tempo

So, for Dunne, coming to this project was not about creating a show with a standard narrative built around Dublin Mean Time. "I know it's a very abstract frame that could be open to interpretation, but I was a little nervous that it might still be too strong a statement to build something around. I didn't want to create a 'show about' something...for me it really was about music coming out of four people. Having said that, I'm pretty sure that, had the title not been there, we would have made entirely different kind of music."

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David Power's experiments with time are similarly rich and complex, and yield a new and invigorating approach to uilleann pipe playing.

Currently working on a project with world renowned harpsichordist, Malcolm Proud and Camerata Kilkenny, he is going back in time to explore early and baroque music on the pipes, by Leclair and others, and was audacious enough to attempt, with huge audience approval, a version, with Malcolm, of the Aria from J.S. Bach's Goldberg variations at this year's Kilkenny Arts Festival. This hungry need to explore the possibilities of his instrument, also throws a focus right back inwards, to the simple notion of pure tone. One of David's instruments is the extraordinary Eighteen Moloney set of pipes, dating from the early 19th century, and restored back to playability by David. "I spent ten years bringing this instrument back to a playable state—it's a physically demanding instrument to play, and I have become interested in tone, pure tone, and when I play it, at the point where this pure tone happens, I was experiencing sensations on my skin. This led me to question the relationship between sound and silence, and out of that I began working with sound in a different way." One of his current areas of exploration is with electro-acoustic composer Linda Buckley, where they explore the intersections, and the colours, of sound and silence.

So far, so abstract. But four strong musical imaginations, (or people, if you like) coming together, without ever having met, and having fairly basic knowledge of each other's work, to create something new, must have been a challenge. Tola Custy agrees. "We were all fairly apprehensive coming together in June for a week's development in Co. Louth. But we were all so committed, we just went

for it. We'd work all day, we were disciplined, and by the end of the week we had a show and a running order. We filmed and recorded everything, and we stepped outside of ourselves. I was in awe of how much everyone pushed their own boundaries. I mean, I was using sound effects and techniques I'd never used before." Aha, so not just manipulating time, but a bit of out-of-body experience too, all adding to what is a true conversation of equals. Tola again - "yes, there was no hierarchy, no lead voice emerged, it was four musicians bringing their music and their stories and creating something new. I left on a high."

And the stories are fascinating. 'She Sells Time', is an extract from the show which tells of a woman, who, because she possessed a good timepiece, was able to set it by a reliable local church clock, then run into the City and sell the time to whomever needed to know.

So what's the stepping off point for translating these gems into musically coherent ideas? Did you chat about them first, or make a plan? Colin Dunne again, "well, sometimes for instance Maeve would start up a riff or something, and we'd all start joining in, a lot of the material came from improvisation, and the individual impulse to try certain things, so we'd go back and identify what worked, and find the nuances and re-arrange it. I was anxious that the dance was an integral part of the music, not just come in for a few numbers and disappear again. The sound technology and delays offer me the kind of space to do that, to be spacious, to fulfil a function in the overall, without having to tap my ass off at whatever-per-second."

Ah, Maeve's riffs. A thing of spellbinding sensuality and depth. She manages to create spaciousness and an intimacy all at the same time, with her delicate and uncluttered chord voicings, and Bill Evans-like openness. Her own music, particularly on her album *The Ostinato Project*, has the confidence to float a musical idea, and follow where it leads, in its own time, without the shoehorn of standard structure and form. It's this liquidity which yields the perfect foil to the notion of tunes in *Standard Time*. It can fill in our missing 25 minutes.

Deirdre Moynihan, Music Network's Programme Manager explains, "Given this anniversary year, we had explored ideas that linked with 1916 and found the idea of *Dublin Mean Time* (1880-1916) particularly intriguing. We wanted to offer a core artistic concept to the musicians that we would invite to collaborate while also keeping the idea as open as possible; enabling them to respond to it creatively and to take the music in whatever direction they naturally felt they wanted to take it."

This year marks the 30th birthday of Music Network, and it is fitting that a commission such as this, an adventurous curating of a project celebrating time, space, light, and a hundred years, is throwing new light on traditional formulas.

Though the language and the instruments are from long ago, the technology, the ideas, the conversation is totally contemporary. It is this nod to the past, but shout to the future that is most exciting and, most importantly, we can join in. We don't have to go back to bed to reclaim our lost time, we can own it by allowing Colin, David, Tola and Maeve, hypnotise us, following with our eyes and ears, their swinging watch, their swinging rhythms, and the edges of light become bright shining day. Top of the mornin' to ye.

