

THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY  
**PROFESSOR JAMES BROWNE**, Registrar and Deputy President, National University of Ireland,  
Galway, on 29 June 2007, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Music, *honoris  
causa*, on **JANE O'LEARY**

Á Sheánsailéir, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle,

Born in Hartford, Connecticut, Jane O'Leary is resident in Ireland since 1972 and for many years now is an Irish citizen. A member of Aosdána, Ireland's state-sponsored academy of creative artists, she is a graduate of Vassar College and holds a PhD in composition from Princeton University, where she studied with Milton Babbitt.

Jane O Leary is a composer of international repute, a very fine pianist and interpreter of contemporary music, an innovator and leader in the administration of the Arts in Ireland and somebody who has given freely of her time to promote contemporary music in Ireland, to bring top quality music to Galway and to communicate Irish music to a wider international audience.



This year a new CD of Jane's compositions will be released by Capstone, featuring renowned performers such as the RTE Vanburgh Quartet, ComTempo, Garth Knox, Paul Roe and Concorde.

She has composed over 70 pieces, including orchestral pieces, pieces for ensemble and solo instrument and vocal and choral pieces. Her music has been featured on two occasions at the International Society for Contemporary Music World Music Days and at international festivals and venues throughout Europe and the USA including

- L'Imaginaire Irlandais in France,
- Island: Arts from Ireland at the Kennedy Center, Washington D.C.,
- The Tampere Biennale in Finland,
- All Ireland festival in The Netherlands,
- The Donne in Musica festival in Italy,
- The Great Performers series at the Lincoln Center, New York where the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland performed her orchestral work 'From Sea-Grey Shores'.

In a review of that concert the New York Times wrote: *‘Jane O’Leary’s work “From Sea-Grey Shores” is intended to reflect the landscape and atmosphere of Ireland’s west coast. Yet there was a generic international quality to her musical language, which alternated tension-filled atonal episodes with claming, misty-textured tonal passages. Over all, though, the music was smartly constructed and full of color.’*

The Dutch public radio station VARA featured her music in its composer of the week slot for a week in October 2006, emphasizing her international standing as a composer.

Following a recent first UK performance of her Piano Quintet No 2 by the ConTempo string quartet with Jane herself at the piano a reviewer commented ‘This is very much a contemporary work and the pianist works the strings of her instrument with her hands as well as the keys. But judging by the positive reaction of the essentially conservative audience this is new music that connects with the past as well as the future ..... The excellent pre-concert talk and discussion by [Jane O’Leary](#) also helped build an audience for this new music.’

The challenge of building a new audience for contemporary classical music is one which Jane O’ Leary has taken up over the years. She is a founder member, artistic director and pianist with Concorde, described recently by the Sunday Tribune as “The most vibrant of Irish contemporary groups’. Undaunted by the Arts Council’s initial refusal to give any funding to a new and untried group, Concorde secured a guarantee to cover the expenses of the first two concerts from the American Embassy.

Today Concorde regularly commissions new work from Irish and international composers and frequently works with international guest soloists. In recent years Concorde has performed at music venues and festivals in the USA, and in many European countries. An annual series promoted by Concorde at the Hugh Lane Gallery of Modern Art in Dublin has been running for over 20 years.

Jane O’Leary has served on many national boards, including the Arts Council and the Board of the National Concert Hall. She accepted the Chair of the Board of the Contemporary Music Centre at a time when it had one staff member, no development plan and the very real prospect of going out of existence. Today, and thanks mainly to her leadership, the Contemporary Music Centre has its own purpose built premises in Temple Bar in Dublin, a staff of seven and an international reputation for high quality work.

I have spoken about the contribution that Jane O’Leary has made at a national level to the development of the Arts, in particular contemporary classical music in Ireland, of her capacity as a composer and interpreter of modern music and of her deserved international reputation. I could talk also about her capacity as a teacher; she currently works with composition students in the Dublin Institute of Technology; throughout this Summer she will work with Accessible Contemporary Music in Chicago to compose a piece in four installments, with each installment being recorded at the Chicago Cultural Centre and made available over the web to students and audiences as she writes it.

But away from all of this international and national recognition, it is for “Music for Galway” that Jane O’Leary is best known in this city. In 1981, Jane O’Leary alongside Erika Casey and Angela O’Keefe, established Music for Galway. Over the years this voluntary organization, with Jane as its artistic director, has given Galway almost 500 concerts and has provided Galway audiences with the opportunity to hear at first hand internationally renowned artists of the quality of Yehudi Menuhin, Nigel Kennedy, Robert Taub, and internationally acclaimed orchestras such as the Hallé and the Royal Philharmonic. In the very early years Music for Galway contributed to the musical infrastructure in Galway by convincing its supporters to provide the finances to purchase a Steinway piano. This piano has been at the service of performers in Galway over 25 years; it has been a vital cog in Music for Galway’s musical wheel, and this University is very pleased to host it in a worthy performance venue. Music for Galway has, also, provided the impetus to establish a Galway Music Ensemble in Residence, currently filled by ConTempo. Jane was central to this initiative. In recent months the archives of the first 25 years of Music for Galway were lodged in the University Library.

In honoring Jane’s outstanding contributions to the world of music, I think it is fitting to recognize somebody who has always been the most loyal supporter and enthusiastic admirer of Jane’s work. This, of course, is her husband Pat, who, himself, has a deep appreciation of music and indeed one might describe him as a music encyclopedia.

Jane O’Leary’s contributions to the world of music and the arts in general, are well documented and recorded and clearly set her apart. However, this does not do full justice to Jane’s contribution to music. Jane O’Leary lives and breathes music. Her whole life has been devoted to developing and spreading an appreciation of music through making education and music learning available to all ages and making music performance at the highest professional level accessible to all.

She has always given freely of her time, very often crowding out her personal and family life, serving on innumerable committees and working groups to achieve these objectives. This is epitomized here in Galway through her voluntary efforts in founding and guiding Music for Galway over 25 years and launching Galway’s Ensemble in Residence, ConTempo. She shares an ambition with many in Galway to establish a Galway Music Centre, encompassing all forms of music, and which will permanently realize the dual objective of providing music education and music access for all of Galway’s citizens. It would be a fitting tribute to Jane to realise that vision, but that’s for another day.

Today we celebrate her immense achievements and outstanding contributions to the cause of music, to music making, to music performance and music appreciation in Galway, in Ireland and internationally.

**PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:**

**Praesento vobis hanc meam filiam, quam scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse quae admittatur, *honoris causa*, ad gradum Doctoratus in Musica, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo, totique Academiae.**