

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY **PROFESSOR FIONA PALMER**, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, on 12 September 2010, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Music, *honoris causa*, on **KRZYSZTOF PENDERECKI**

A Sheansailéir, a Mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a Dhaoine Uaisle:

Chancellor, Members of the University and Distinguished Guests:

In honouring the formidable achievements of the creative force that is Maestro Krzysztof Penderecki, the National University of Ireland Maynooth is deeply proud. The conferring of an honorary doctorate in Music is reserved for those of considerable distinction in the field. Without question, Penderecki's long and continually evolving career is a shining example of ongoing creative enquiry, development, impact and influence. As composer, his output is substantial; as conductor his vocation has also taken him far afield; as educator, thinker, citizen, and man, his life's work has been distinctive and far-reaching. Born in Poland in 1933, his activities in contemporary music have spanned many decades and influenced and challenged generations of audiences, critics and musicians alike.



The short performance we witnessed this afternoon, under the baton of our honorary graduand, still resonates in our ears. The concert we heard today exposed us to the exploratory string techniques for which Penderecki first gained notice. Written in 1960, and originally entitled '8 minutes 37 seconds', *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima* (as it was subsequently named) was ground breaking. The sheer immediacy of the composer's voice - his utter directness of expression - placed him in stark contrast to his peers. Sixty-five years have passed since 'Little Boy' - the devastating atomic bomb, hit Hiroshima on 6 August 1945 killing up to 80,000 people. Penderecki's tribute to Hiroshima's innocent victims and their families has a sense of increased poignancy, impact and nuance. The elasticity of time, and the experimental graphic notation conceived within this UNESCO-award-winning work, afforded us an insight into the innovatory and exploratory approaches synonymous with Penderecki's music in 1960. For the performers involved today, the opportunity to produce an interpretation of both *Threnody*, and the beautiful 'Benedictus', under the direction of the composer himself, will surely become an unforgettable memory.

On the cusp of the twenty-first century Penderecki published his *Labyrinth of Time-Five Addresses for the End of the Millenium*. This publication drew on lectures he had given in various contexts. 'For me, the possibility of art's regeneration is a certainty': this is the telling title of an article by Penderecki dating from 1995. The concepts suggested by this title mirror the inherent attitude of its author. They reflect the shape of his considerable compositional oeuvre and his activities as conductor and as educator. In many ways, these writings encapsulate the balanced and rounded spirit of a

man whose wider interests encompass literature, nature, history and religion.

Speaking of his approach to large-scale composition in April 1998 Penderecki said:

"I always seek the form first. That is the most important thing. Then I sketch in details, themes, motifs and development. You can see the complete form better this way than if you start at the beginning and write through to the end."

In the same interview he clarified his view on the importance of politics to his work:

"I don't write political music. Political music is immediately obsolete. My *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima* remains important because it is abstract music. The *Requiem* is dedicated to certain people and events, but the music has a broader significance."

Within his compositional output Penderecki has contributed substantially to choral, operatic and instrumental repertoires. Having made his mark in the late 1950s - as an avant-garde composer - his subsequent activity has produced a formidable portfolio of works. Within this portfolio his focus on themes related to the human condition is particularly evident in his choral works - his *Dies Irae* for the Auschwitz dead; and the *St Luke Passion*, a work I vividly remember hearing for the first time aged 16, which was to become, as his biographer Adrian Thomas puts it, his 'magnum opus of the 1960s'. Premiered in Munster Cathedral in 1966, the *St Luke Passion* marked the beginning of a number of liturgical works. The 1970s saw a greater lyricism surface in his writing, and his operatic oeuvre, which began in 1969 with *the Devils of Loudun*, reveals his eclecticism of reference in text and style. The genre of oratorio gained prominence in the mid-1970s - for example, his *Polish Requiem*, *Seven Gates of Jerusalem*, and *Credo* - all of these are written on a large scale.

For nearly four decades, Penderecki's working life has featured a continuing strand in the role of conductor. In this capacity he has worked throughout Europe and the USA and created a fine reputation for his skills on the podium within both his own works and those of Dmitri Shostakovich in particular. He has enjoyed long-standing associations with the Krakow Philharmonic Orchestra and with the Hamburg-based Nord Deutscher Rundfunk Symphony Orchestra. In the 2009-2010 season alone his itinerary included performances with the Nashville Symphony as well as residencies at the Universities of Toronto and Yale culminating in a performance at Carnegie Hall. He currently serves as Artistic Director of the Warsaw Sinfonia. Tracing the progress of Penderecki's career, we are struck by the sheer intensity of his creativity, his success as competitor and award winner, and his awareness of (and response to) the human condition, world events, politics, and religious faith.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is particularly fitting that NUI Maynooth should honour Krzysztof Penderecki's work today. On this, his first visit to Ireland, it is our great privilege to add to the recognition that has been made to his work during his illustrious career. The Music Department enjoys, and cherishes, its ongoing collaboration with Barry Douglas and his *Camerata Ireland*. As guest of honour at the Castletown Concerts 2010, Penderecki is extending his ongoing relationship with Douglas who has worked closely with him over many years.

Penderecki's *curriculum vitae* reveals evidence of outstanding success in garnering external recognition and critical acclaim. And yet his work never sacrifices his core integrity as an individual creative voice with the power to affect and reflect the condition of humankind. He has won prizes and been honoured around the world by institutions and organisations in acknowledgment of his unique and enriching contribution to the musical canon and our cultural experience.

I present to you this extraordinary musician, composer, conductor and educator: a man of creative distinction, Krzysztof Penderecki.

PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS

Praesento vobis hunc meum filium, quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in Musica, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo, totique Academiae.