

**OLLSCOIL na hÉIREANN  
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND**

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY:

**MS LINDA O'SHEA FARREN** on 11 October 2017 in the Royal College of Physicians in Ireland, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Music *honoris causa*, jointly on **FINGHIN COLLINS and DEARBHLA COLLINS**

A Sheansailéir, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle,

By any measure, Finghin and Dearbhla Collins rank among Ireland's foremost musicians, contributing across a broad spectrum to Ireland's music heritage on the national and international stage.

Dearbhla and Finghin are the second daughter and second son of Jim and Bríd Collins, but there is nothing 'second' about them.

In a typical pattern for Munster-born UCC graduates, myself included, Jim and Bríd spent time in America before coming back to forge their careers in Dublin - in science, in their cases - and raise their family. They settled in leafy Goatstown, where Dearbhla and Finghin grew up with their sister Mary and brother Donagh.

After primary school in Our Lady's Grove, Dearbhla joined her sister Mary at Loreto on the Green. She went on to study music at Trinity College and in the Hochschule in Vienna, followed by piano performance studies with Boris Petrushansky in Italy.

Finghin attended primary school in Oatlands CBS in Stillorgan, and went on to join Donagh in Gonzaga.

A record 16 years studying at the Royal Irish Academy of Music with John O'Connor, who truly was a giant at Finghin's shoulder, culminated in a BA in Music Performance awarded by DCU. Finghin finished his piano performance studies with Dominique Merlet in the Geneva Conservatoire from 1999 to 2002.

Mary moved to Germany when Finghin was 13, where she teaches piano, and Donagh is Chief Executive of the artists' management firm Askonas Holt in London. Needless to mention, becoming one of the pre-eminent music families of Ireland didn't all transpire by happenstance. You will have gathered by now that no expense was spared on the Collinses' education.

But it's fair to say that the steely hand that rocked the Collins cradle, while balancing her masters degree in chemistry in the other hand, was the brains behind Operation Collins.

While Jim rose through the academic ranks in agricultural science at UCD, Bríd shepherded her talented family through the not always still waters of the music competition world at home and abroad. It is no mean feat that they all came out the other side not only in one piece, but all went on to music careers on the world stage.

As President Trump might say, who thought that 1 + 1 scientists = 4 musicians?

Despite the fact that, with three pianos for four pianists, there were lots of arguments over who would practise on the grand on Sundays, Finghin in

particular benefited from the ‘trickle down effect’ of the three who went before him. Mary started to teach piano to Finghin when she was 13 and he was only 3. This continued until Finghin joined the family queue for John O’Conor at age 6, and Mary continued to support his rapid development until she moved to Germany.

With violins and cellos added into the mix, the many permutations and combinations of duos and trios on multiple instruments available to the four Collins siblings gave them all an in-house chamber group extraordinaire. This no doubt shaped Dearbhla’s choice to concentrate on chamber music, and Finghin’s increasing involvement.

Neither Dearbhla nor Finghin can recall exactly how or when they started to play duets together but, given the scientific family they hail from, I’m going to settle for a process of osmosis over time.

It is no secret that Finghin was precocious, but ever so nicely so. No stage was too daunting for him. He was like a greyhound out of the traps when he got a chance to play in public. He would be seen chirpily awaiting his turn backstage, while pianists twice his age were quietly losing the will to live. He’d pounce onto the piano stool, and pull off the performance of his life. Some things never change. Without these nerves of steel and determination to reach the top, an international career as a concert pianist is certainly a trial. This has proven to be a hurdle too high to scale for many a talented musician, especially on the competition circuit - on foot of which successful careers as concert pianists are increasingly dependent.

Having won the RTÉ Musician of the Future Competition in 1994, and

the Classical Category at the National Entertainment Awards in Ireland in 1998, Finghin achieved major international success at age 22 when he won first prize at the Clara Haskil International Piano Competition in Switzerland in 1999.

His star has risen meteorically since then, playing with innumerable internationally-renowned orchestras, collaborating with a glistening roll of conductors, recording several CDs and gracing the stages of world class concert halls and festivals across all continents.

To even touch upon these performance highs in any meaningful way in Finghin's case would have used up all of my allotted time. But suffice it to say, *'you name it, he's done it.'*

Happily for Finghin, he loves travel. But he also uses his extensive international performing career as a platform to discover, and glean inspiration from, new talent at festivals and concert series around the world in which he is performing, and he ploughs this experience back into his work across the music spectrum in Ireland.

Piers Burton-Page of the International Record Review has written: *'Of Finghin Collins as soloist, little needs to be said that has not been said before: he is exceptionally fluent, exceptionally intelligent, exceptionally sensitive ...'*

Earlier this year, Finghin was granted a singular honour by being presented in recital at the International Concert Series at the National Concert Hall in his native Dublin to mark his 40th birthday - yes, he's only 40.

Also a prize-winning pianist, the Irish Times has described Dearbhla's playing as '*delivering the sound world with the most intense and persuasive concentration.*'

Unlike Finghin, Dearbhla chose to combine her early career as a performer with teaching piano at the Royal Irish Academy of Music, and this choice was to alter her path profoundly. The Academy's vocal faculty was flourishing at this time, and Dearbhla's love of chamber music drew her to vocal coaching.

Her skill at languages quickly copper-fastened her choice to focus her considerable energy and musical talent on vocal coaching and song pianism, and she hasn't looked back since. The career that Dearbhla has since built up as a chamber music partner with leading Irish vocalists - such as Patricia Bardon, Tara Erraught, Celine Byrne, Anthony Kearns, Robin Tritschler and Gavan Ring, to name but a few - has drawn an impressive list of internationally-renowned singers to her door, including Angela Brower, Juliane Banse, Sarah-Jane Brandon, Mark Padmore and Benjamin Appl.

These performances throughout Europe, the US, China and Africa include recitals and masterclasses by Dearbhla with students of world-class teachers like Florian Boesch and Brigitte Fassbaender.

I don't think anyone would dispute that the pinnacle of Dearbhla's success with the many singers whose careers she has nurtured from fragile beginnings is Tara Erraught's stellar career. Having toured the United States in recital with Tara in recent years, nobody was more

delighted about Tara's recent debut in The Met in New York - not even Tara!

It is fitting that Dearbhla met her husband David at a Pavarotti concert in Belfast. David's well known talents lie on the screen, so the marriage of stage and screen in 2001 seems apt. Their son Ben was born in 2003, and Emily followed in 2009.

After Ben was born, Dearbhla took on the role of Artistic Director of the Dublin Hugo Wolf Festival, and this paved the way for her appointment as Executive Artistic Director of the Veronica Dunne International Singing Competition in 2004. This competition gave Dearbhla the perfect platform to showcase her growing talent in transforming the careers of Irish and international singers on the ladder to global success, and she grasped it with both hands.

She has not just secured this platform, she has developed hugely influential juries to whom young singers are introduced through the competition, and she assiduously pursues every opportunity that competition prizewinners can get to become as successful as possible.

Helped in no small measure by Dearbhla's versatility as a musician, artistic flair and dogged determination, the international footprint of this competition has been greatly expanded and, in 2011, it became a member of the Federation of World Competitions.

The Veronica Dunne International Singing Competition is now firmly established as an Irish musical event of international standing that offers a flagship global stage for the encouragement and development of Irish and

international vocal talent.

Finghin made his impact on the world of artistic direction when he co-founded the New Ross Piano Festival in 2006 with a fantastic team of volunteers led by Connie Tantrum. In 2013, he took on the Artistic Director role with Music for Galway, where he is rapidly expanding the programme.

Also in 2013, sharing a deep passion for Lieder and art song, Dearbhla and Finghin established, and co-curate, the Dublin Song Series in partnership with the National Concert Hall and the Hugh Lane Gallery.

And if that wasn't enough, between the two of them, they have been board members of the National Concert Hall, Culture Ireland and the Dublin International Piano Competition.

This rich tapestry of collaboration of sister and brother, both on stage and in artistic direction of music across all instruments and voice, has inspired young Irish musicians to stretch the boundaries of their talent and dare to dream.

When asked what he thinks he'd have done if he hadn't pursued a career in music, Finghin's answer is no surprise: languages. As Dearbhla and Finghin share this love of languages - and even took classes in Russian together at Trinity - one might have thought Dearbhla's reply would mirror Finghin's. But, no, the road not taken in her case was the law.

Ireland may be down one barrister and one linguist, but it is the beneficiary of a cultural tome because Finghin and Dearbhla chose

careers in music, decided to stay in Ireland, and gave back to this country's music and cultural life in spades.

Equally importantly for Ireland, they have consistently 'flown the flag' abroad in a typically generous Collins way.

Finghin and Dearbhla richly deserve the National University of Ireland's highest honour for both their separate and joint contributions to the landscape of music in Ireland.

**PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE**

**UNIVERSITAS: Praesento vobis hanc meum filium filiamque meam, quos scio tam moribus quam doctrina habiles et idoneos esse qui admittantur, *honoris causa*, ad gradum Doctoratus in Musica idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo, totique Academiae.**