

The Ceol Na Mara Experience

Letterfrack may seem an unlikely place for classical music, being right in the heart of Connemara, but this is the place where 'Ceol na Mara' has its roots. Situated beside the Connemara National Park and nestled beneath the peaks of the Twelve Bens with the beaches of Renvyle and Lettergesh just down the road, the scenery of this magnificent location couldn't but inspire your music.

Children and adults of all ages and standards travelled from around Ireland to take part in the week-long summer school. Each day we participated in varied classes and workshops from chamber music, music appreciation, master classes and orchestra to traditional Irish music and sean n6s singing. I went in July for the second year in a row with my parents and younger brother, who took part in the junior part of the course.

At the start of the week small groups of students of similar standard were brought together for each activity. The combinations of students changed several times throughout the day, ensuring that students and teachers alike got to really know each other. This created a great sense of friendship and camaraderie which was evident in the music.

Chamber music started us off each morning where we played in trios and quartets. The tutors guided us with regard to technique, style of music and helped us fuse as one entity which definitely showed when we played in the final concerts. Master classes were also given each day by tutors such as Geraldine O'Grady, which gave us all the chance to develop our individual performance skills.

We also had the chance to try out different instruments such as viola or cello. This was a great opportunity for me personally to widen my musical experiences and at the end of the week I performed as part of a quartet on viola for the first time!

In the orchestra we played a great variety of pieces such as one of the Bach Brandenburg Concertos, Vivaldi's Concerto in B minor for four violins and orchestra and even Palladio by Jenkins. The pieces were challenging and definitely tested our sight-reading skills. It definitely contributed to the overall enjoyment when we mastered them.

A number of students play traditional Irish music as well as classical so we were delighted with the time spent each day in the trad class with Odhran O Casaide. It is a completely different way to learn as every tune was taught by ear. The people who had never played traditional before found it fascinating that the music has such freedom to do whatever you choose, and really enjoyed the classes. There was also a Seán n6s singing class where we



Emma Downes (Limerick), Rhona Lynch (Offaly), Sadhbh Murphy (Dublin), Luicia Mc Partlin (Tipperary)

learned about old Irish singing styles. Even to sit back and listen was a real treat. (This, as well as the music appreciation class, is one that parents were welcome to participate in and they thoroughly enjoyed it!)

Even though we had very busy days there was plenty to do when classes finished. Many families climbed the Diamond mountain, took fishing trips and visited nearby Clifden and Killary Harbour. One evening we went to the Teach Ceoil in Tully to a Comhaltas Seisi6n where we were treated to a performance of music, song and dance. For the second half the audience was invited to participate and those of us from Ceol na Mara who play trad joined in on stage. The following night we returned to the Teach Ceoil where we took part in a Seán n6s dancing class. (You would need to have been there to really appreciate the fun we had!) Another night an impromptu session took place in the local pub 'Veldons'. We really enjoyed it and the tourists and locals alike were in their element listening to us.

On the last day the work that was done all week was showcased over two concerts. The first a lunchtime concert in the hall in Letterfrack and featured the Junior, Intermediate and Senior orchestras. We re-convened later in the day at the Teach Ceoil where we played chamber music in quartets, traditional Irish music and concluded with some of us from the Senior group, playing Vivaldi's concerto for 4 violins.

We said our goodbyes at a reception in a hostelry at Tully Cross. We all hope to keep in touch during the year and can't wait to meet up again next year for another 'Ceol na Mara' experience!

Lucia Mc Partlin (age 16)