

Chase the end-of-summer blues away

With festival fever still in the air, there's still much to look forward to nationwide – and the new season is just around the corner

KILKENNY was my last port of call on this summer's festival map. St Canice's Cathedral and Kilkenny Castle played host to artists that any dedicated music festival would be lucky to engage, which immediately sets Kilkenny apart from the more generic or commercial arts festival.

Classical-music programmer Susan Proud and clarinetist/guest programmer Carol McGonnell, are to be lauded for this achievement but that's not all for which McGonnell is due praise. Of the concerts I had opportunity to attend, her performance of Steve Reich's *New York Counterpoint* on 19 August was the highlight of the festival. Her pre-recorded tracks and live sound explored timbres from the sweetest recorder tone to percussive stabs, bringing a great variety of sound quality to the music, performances of which don't always enjoy the thorough interpretation which McGonnell bestowed upon it on this occasion.

Between their three performances, the Argento Chamber Ensemble, of which McGonnell is a member, brought some terrific contemporary repertoire to the festival, all of which was most capably and convincingly performed. The billing of Erwin Stein's chamber version of Mahler's

4th symphony on 19 August was yet another brave programming move and the ensemble faced their less avant-garde task with grace and sensitivity. Of particular note was lead violinist Miranda Cuckson, whose playing smacked of all the right elements of chamber and orchestral musician, dotted with moments of outstanding soloistic ability.

Baroque music, I have to admit, I can take or leave, but it wasn't unpleasant to listen to the European Baroque orchestra on 18 August in St Canice's Cathedral. Of course, many die-hard baroque fans will be making their way south soon for the fourth East Cork Early Music festival. Begin-

ning on 6 September, the five-day festival spreads its wings across seven venues in east Cork and the city for eight concerts.

The last of the series will attract much attention, when the a capella vocal trio, White Raven, present their usually diverse programme, ranging from 12th- to 15th-century music from Ireland, England, France and Spain to our own traditional sean nós songs. Irish soprano Kathleen Dineen directs the trio. Another concert that looks set to charm is that which opens the festival proceedings. The Newcastle-based, highly reputable Avison Ensemble will appear under the direction of violinist Pavlo Beznosiuk and

in the company of guests James Bowman (countertenor) and Sarah Cunningham (viola da gamba) in St Fin Barre's Cathedral. Among a Vivaldi concerto, cantatas from Buxtehude and Bach, it is the latter's sixth Brandenburg concerto which is bound to cause the greatest stir. Malcolm Proud's harpsichord performance of Bach's *The Art of Fugue* on 10 September at noon is certainly a safe bet, as is Monica Huggett and her Irish Baroque Chamber soloists on the previous evening in Cloyne Cathedral. See www.eastcorkearlymusic.ie for details.

The people at Music Network have been busy all summer bringing concerts to every corner of the country. Carol McGonnell will tour with Hugh Tinney in the coming weeks, which I certainly won't be missing. Another concert that will capture the imagination is the Prey trio on 2 September in Bray's Mermaid Arts Centre. Comprising various types of clarinets, flutes and oboes, the Irish trio is noted for their relaxed and imaginative presentations.

Finally, the Sunday Times International Orchestral Series opens at the NCH tonight. Is that the new season I smell?

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Miranda Cuckson: outstanding soloistic ability