

The McCullagh-Ó Briain Emerging Artist Award

2026: Historical global plucked strings

Including: harpsichord, harp, kora, psaltery, bandura, guitar, lute, theorbo, 'ud, saz, sarod, kora, qanun, etc. (Please inquire if you have questions.)

Submission deadline: 30 September 2025 at 5pm

This award was established in 2025 as part of the Limerick Early Music Festival. It supports emerging Irish/Ireland-based artists for whom historically-informed performance practice is an important part of their music-making. It honours the memory of **Bertha McCullagh-Ó Briain**: educator; longtime supporter of the arts, literature, and poetry; and friend of the Limerick Early Music Festival in its earliest days.

The competition is open to musicians ages 18–30 (inclusive) by the time of the 2026 Limerick Early Music Festival, 19–22 March, and who are resident in Ireland or habitually resident in Ireland but may be currently be living abroad. The competition supports students, recent graduates, or early career artists.

Applicants will be adjudicated on the basis of historically informed performance and style, but the use of period and style-appropriate instruments is most highly encouraged and, in some cases, required for certain instruments. (See appendix for more details.)

Solo unaccompanied works on a qualifying instrument are fully eligible for this competition. See application details below for repertory parameters.

Applicants may be of any educational status/level and may perform their recorded audition selection at any pitch.

Applications will be reviewed by a panel of judges comprised of early music performance professionals from within and outside of Ireland, and which take into account the instruments represented by the submissions.

Results will be announced in mid-November 2025, four months ahead of the 2026 festival.

The awardee of the McCullagh-Ó Briain Emerging Artist Award will receive a monetary award of €500 and will be invited to deliver a featured solo performance at the 2026 Limerick Early Music Festival. At the discretion of the festival, and in discussion with the awardee, this performance may take the form of a solo or chamber piece played within the programme of the festival's opening mainstage choral concert (evening of 20 March, Friday, at Saint Mary's Cathedral Limerick), or a solo recital during the festival weekend.

The theme of our 2026 festival is "Masks/Masques". While there is no requirement for applications to connect with this theme, submissions which choose to do so are welcome.

To apply, please submit the following materials by e-mail to info@limerickearlymusic.com with the subject “Emerging Artist Award 2026”:

- A URL (link), YouTube or Vimeo only, to one **video** recording of a solo work of 5–10 minutes maximum. It can be single piece or multiple movements of a complete work, taken from the tradition relevant to the instrument, and with dates of composition appropriate to the style and tradition of early music. (For Western Art Music, this is, generally, medieval to 1800; for global music traditions, this may extend further.) In your email, please supply details of the piece, where relevant (title, composer or lineage, dates, provenance, etc.)
- **CV** up to 3 pages, which includes date of birth
- **Biography** (max 200 words)
- **Essay** (1000 word maximum) exploring the following questions:
 - 1) What do you value most about performing with a connection to historical and/or oral sources and original instruments/reconstructions?
 - 2) What links do you find between historical music and modern performance?
 - 3) How is “Early Music” and/or “Historically Informed Performance” relevant to today?

The application’s written documents should be sent via e-mail attachment (only PDF, DOC, or ODF formats please), but the video may only be uploaded to YouTube or Vimeo. Ensure the video is set to “Public” or “Unlisted” but not “Private”.

Send all inquiries and materials to: info@limerickearlymusic.com by September 30, 2025.

Appendix: Instrument Requirements

For the 2026 award, **historical plucked instruments** will be considered. These include, but are not limited to:

- Harpsichord
- Early Harp (pre-1800s preferred, enquire for specifics)
- Kora
- Psaltery, psalterion (plucked families)
- Bandura (early types preferred—enquire for specifics)
- Historical guitars (Renaissance, Baroque, chitarra battente, etc.)
- Lute, archlute, vihuela
- Theorbo, Tiorban
- 'Ud
- Saz
- Dotar
- Baglama
- Sitar
- Veena
- Sarod
- Qanun
- Gu Zheng
- Gu Qin
- Koto
- Geomungo

If you do not see your instrument listed above, and feel it fits the parameters of this year's competition, please send us an email with your queries.

As a general guideline, we are inviting players who perform upon historical instruments and reconstructions. In the case of global traditional or classical instruments, there is a preference for acoustic instruments, for which electronic pickup/amplification is not integral to the instrument's acoustic construction and tone production. Please contact us if you have any questions.

Kind regards,
Yonit Kosovske and Vlad Smishkewych
Co-directors, Limerick Early Music Festival
info@limerickearlymusic.com