

LIMERICK EARLY MUSIC FESTIVAL 2026 Programme: MASKS & MASQUES



WEDNESDAY 18th MARCH

FESTIVAL LAUNCH

The People's Museum, upstairs in the blue room

Free, spaces limited. [BOOK HERE](#)

5.30pm

WELCOME from LEMF co-directors: Vlad Smishkewych & Yonit Kosovske

5.45pm–6.15pm

MASQUERADE: Exploring the Human Psyche through Gombrowicz, Baroque Music, and Chant

Justyna Czwojdinska: actor

Anna Banko: voice, violin

MASQUERADE is a short, powerful performance that examines the essential role of masks in human existence. Inspired by Witold Gombrowicz's philosophy of the mask—as a necessary but paradoxical element of identity—the piece delves into how we present ourselves to the world, how we shift masks depending on the context, and whether true freedom from them is possible. Combining a rich variety of masks—traditional, modern, grotesque, neutral, and ceremonial—the performance draws on Gombrowicz's sharp insights into form, immaturity, and the perpetual conflict between inner self and outer persona. MASQUERADE investigates the human condition with both seriousness and irony. Physical theatre and ritualistic movement will expose the tension between inner desire and outer form. Sparse fragments of Gombrowicz's texts (adapted from works like *Ferdydurke* and his diaries) will be spoken or chanted, emphasising the absurdity, beauty, and necessity of masks. All of this is interwoven with a tapestry of Baroque music and Gregorian-like chant that accompanies the action, evoking the conflict between sacred aspirations and worldly entanglements. MASQUERADE asks: "Are we ever truly ourselves—or are we only ever what others expect us to be?" MASQUERADE will leave the audience reflecting on their own daily performances, the masks they wear without realising it, and the fundamental ambiguity at the heart of being human. It will be a haunting, beautiful reminder that in every encounter, we are both more and less than ourselves.

6.30pm–7.30pm

MASKS AND MUSIC IN CEREMONIAL CONTEXT: Transformation and Liberation

Billy Mac Fhloinn: presenter, musician

Billy Mag Fhloinn will give a presentation and performance based on his work as director of Pagan Rave. This is an ongoing project which aims to reimagine folk traditions and calendar customs of Ireland. Using as a starting point the ancient costumed figures of Irish and European folk theatre and seasonal festivals, it seeks to operate at the margins of place and mind, and to embody the transformative and liberating aspects of masks and music in a ceremonial context. The event is proposed as an illustrated talk, where elements of the project will be explored through video, image, and text. Examples of masks, costumes, and musical instruments will form part of the presentation. Some of these instruments are accurate copies of historical examples, while others have been invented as part of the project. Space will be given to audience questions and interaction, and the event will finish with a performance on the yaybahar, an acoustic instrument invented by the Turkish musician Gorkem Sen.

7.30pm–8.15pm

RECEPTION

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THURSDAY 19th MARCH

VEILED: Masks, Madness, and Melancholy

<https://www.ul.ie/irish-world-academy/events/lunchtime-concert-veiled-masks-madness-and-melancholy>

1.15pm–2pm, FREE and open to the public

Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, Lunchtime Concert Series

Theatre 2, Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, University of Limerick

Dr Breandán de Gallaí (dance, choreography)

Dr Róisín Ní Ghallóglach (voice)

Dr Yonit Kosovske (piano)

This performance explores symbols of what is seen and unseen, both in nature and in the vulnerability of our personal lives as performing artists. As the northern hemisphere approaches the spring equinox, the Cailleach, the mythological Irish winter goddess and supernatural being of storms, yields to Brigid's youthful spring and rebirth, shedding her guise as life reawakens and balance returns. Likewise, as the new moon emerges from its everchanging cycle of waxing and waning, light meets darkness, and what was obscured is revealed. This lunchtime concert is one of many activities taking place during Early Music Week and the 2026 Limerick Early Music Festival on March 18th-22nd, the theme of which is "Masks & Masques".



FRIDAY 20th MARCH

Concealed and Revealed

Saint Mary's Cathedral 8pm–9.30pm

TICKETS: €25/€20

Peter Barley & Cecilia Madden: directors

Choirs: Ancór & Saint Mary's Cathedral

Guest Vocal Soloists: Sarah-Ellen Murphy (contralto), Emma English (soprano)

LEMF Chamber Orchestra

LEMF 2026 McCullagh-Ó Briain Emerging Artist: Dylan Donegan

Concealed and Revealed delights in images of revelation and spiritual epiphany, of texts and sounds whose meanings are elucidated and uncovered, and of a multitude of ideas and images on the theme of concealment: the night, the moon, and sensual metaphors such as budding flowers and other feminine imagery, both sacred and secular. Featuring music by Johann Sebastian Bach, Henry Purcell, and Maddalena Casulana, this annual choral concert brings together multiple local choirs under the direction of Peter Barley and Cecilia Madden. Cantatas, motets, madrigals, and virtuosic instrumentals are sure to delight the ear and move the heart in this programme of sacred & secular music in the beautiful medieval venue of Saint Mary's Cathedral. The recently established McCullagh-Ó Briain Emerging Artist Award marks its second year, recognising an outstanding instrumentalist playing with historically informed style, and named in memory of Bertha McCullagh-Ó Bríain, educator, and longtime supporter of arts, literature, and culture. The winner of the award will once again be showcased as a soloist during the evening's concert.

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SATURDAY 21st MARCH

Harpsichord Diaries

Fun for ALL the Family, ages 6+

(in partnership with H.I.P.S.T.E.R., Historically Informed Performance Series, Teaching, Education & Research)

Belltable 1pm–2pm

TICKETS: €15 pps, €50 for family of 2 adults & 2 children

Elaine Funaro: harpsichord

Eric Love: actor, narrator

In a special theatrical concert, Elaine Funaro and Eric Love present the live version of their children's book, "The Harpsichord Diaries". This hour-long, family-oriented musical journey features Elaine at the harpsichord playing music from five centuries, in conversation with Eric acting over a dozen characters. The experience is enriched by projections of Andrea Love's animated illustrations from the book. The script for this theatrical concert is adapted from the audio play version of "The Harpsichord Diaries", called "Elena's Dream".



SATURDAY 21st MARCH

Chaconnes, Charades & Chicanery

Belltable 8pm

TICKETS: €25/€20

Mary Collins: historical dance specialist

Steven Player: baroque guitar, historical dance specialist

With guest musicians: Paulo Alonso (viola), Sarah Groser (viola da gamba), Yonit Kosovske (harpsichord)

Chaconne: a stately dance, popular in the 18th century

Charade: an absurd pretence intended to create a pleasant or respectable appearance

Chicanery: the use of deception or subterfuge to achieve one's purpose

This delightful performance of dance, music, and drama offers a peek into the world of Baroque Theatre with its fascination for masquing, disguising and *Commedia dell'Arte* and explores the use of these conventions to satirise and reflect the timeless foibles of human behaviour.

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SUNDAY 22nd MARCH

MASK: The Art of Culture, Expression, and Transformation

(theatrical performance & interactive workshop, 13+)

Belttable 12pm–1.15pm

TICKETS: €20 active participant (maximum 20 persons on stage) / €10 general audience

Simon Thompson: presenter, actor

This performative presentation maps historical and contextual information in relation to the Mask and Masking. Simon Thompson—celebrated clown noir, actor, and researcher—will discuss and demonstrate how the masks relate to ritual, performance, and audience engagement through an exploration of the Commedia dell'arte Mask, Neutral Mask, Character Mask, Ritual Mask, and Larval Mask. Simon will discuss how the application of mask promotes patience and openness, teaching the student that every small gesture or movement suggests meaning, taking the focus away from the face and redistributing it to the whole body. Simon will share his research on how the mask facilitates the very first steps of play by reducing our tendency to overthink, allowing the body, its impulses, sensations, and emotions to lead.



SUNDAY 22nd MARCH

Masks & Gesture

(workshop, ages 13+)

Belttable 2pm–4pm

TICKETS: €20 active participant (maximum 20 persons on stage) / €10 general audience

Mary Collins: historical dance specialist

Steven Player: baroque guitar and historical dance specialist

This workshop explores the techniques and application of Baroque gesture, as well as the power and use of masks. This work has an intrinsic focus upon the relationship between social interaction, its customs and boundaries, and community health and well-being. It is particularly important for young people in the light of current research concerning social isolation and its impact upon mental health resulting from a deficit of physical interaction, the dominance of keypad communication, and the virtual world of the internet and social media.

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SUNDAY 22nd MARCH

Wayfaring Pipers: Virtuoso Everyday Music of the Middle Ages

Belltable 8pm–9.30pm

TICKETS: €25/€20

Ian Harrison; bagpipes, shawm, cornett

Poul Høxbro; pipe & tabor, percussion

Considering the many natural and human disasters that have struck Europe, it is remarkable how much medieval music has survived. Numerous liturgical manuscripts preserve Gregorian chant, hymns, sequences, and complex polyphonic masses, alongside sacred and secular songs sung by both nobles and commoners. Yet this material cannot provide a complete picture of medieval musical life. Most surviving notation records vocal music, and only the social elite—religious and worldly—documented what they performed. What remains is only the visible tip of a vast musical iceberg. Still, medieval images of active musicians show a vibrant everyday musical culture now largely lost. This living sound world is what the *Wayfaring Pipers* programme explores. Drawing on surviving sources and folk traditions that have continued unbroken since medieval times, Ian Harrison and Poul Høxbro reveal a rich exchange between popular melody and liturgical music, blending classical medieval sounds with inherited folk traditions.



For more information, email the LEMF directors at: info@nowandthenmedia.com

Or email the Limetree/Belltable box office at: boxoffice@limetreethetheatre.ie