

Q: When did you start playing the cello?

A: I played piano since I was 7, but when I was 12 I was sitting in a concert of the Sydney Youth Orchestra and my sisters were both playing in it on violin and clarinet. I realised I wanted to play with others, not just alone at the piano. I whispered this to my mum and she said, just choose an instrument and you can learn it. I sat there excited and enthralled, listening to each instrument. The cello won.

Q: What was your biggest inspiration to begin with?

I had a constant flow of music as a child, and I loved sitting under the grand piano as my mother played. The little ledges and shelves were my secret hiding places and hearing the huge resonance from under the soundboard was always soothing and uplifting. As long as the music was being played there was no trouble... I wanted piano lessons from as early as I remember, but I was told I was too young, so at 4 I had theory lessons with a friend and I loved it. We'd clap rhythms and sing harmonies and put stickers and buttons on the pages.

When I finally started cello at 12, my cello teacher Phillipa Jackson was so energetic and gave me such encouragement. Finally I had a teacher that got me and knew I was brimming with music. (my piano teacher up til then was appalling and although I loved piano, she had no idea how to nurture my talent!)

Q: You live in Ireland now, How has this influenced your cello playing and inspiration?

When I first came to Ireland I had been living in London, and came here to play some gigs in Dingle and Galway and meet a producer for the next CD I was making with my duo "Jan & Ilse". It was an exciting time, traveling about in a campervan to festivals like Miltown Malbay, joining in sessions there and in Galway and Dingle with great trad players like Steve Cooney, Shamus Begley, Sharon Shannon and John Faulkner and playing on Dolores Keane's album *Solid Ground*. I fell in love with the land and the music, and especially the people. When I decided to move here later on, it was to continue the musical journey that had started then. I was living at Inch beach in East Cork, and the coast was beautiful, peaceful and wild. I wrote my Irish air *Inch Strand* during this time. I was also performing solo Irish Airs in the Irish baroque ensemble concerts with Beyond the Pale. In London I jammed with African drummers, electric guitars, and trumpets. In Ireland it's all fiddles, whistles and Bodhráns. I guess this has a big influence on how my cello playing develops!

Q: Tell us about your project; "Irish Airs for Solo Cello" and how did that come about? Where and how did you find the material? What was the idea behind the arrangements etc

To find the Airs I wanted to record for my CD I listened to lots of trad music. I was especially moved by Shamus Ennis playing airs on the Uilleann pipes, and wanted to recreate some of the sounds and expression he could make from the pipes. For the arrangements I tried to find the essence of the air, and to include what it called for. Sometimes very little, sometimes variations, sometimes the sound of pipes, or fiddle, or the voice. I added harmonies where they added colour and shape. I love arranging airs and the journey is usually slow, careful, and emotionally and historically informed. When they have reached completion they sit for a time unplayed so that I can come back to them with a fresh ear. They keep changing, and to write them down is capturing them

at a perfect moment which will be different the next time.

Q: What is celtic cello?

Part of why I wanted to publish my book of Irish Airs was I was searching for Irish music for cello and couldn't find what I was looking for. There are not a huge amount of cellists playing trad cello in Ireland. There is a tradition of fiddle cello duos in Scottish music, and cellos were used in other traditional music, often as a bass, but I will sit in a session and people will tell me when they last played with a cellist (once, years ago) or that they have never played with a cellist, or that they remember me from a session 5 years ago. There should be more of it, and I like being part of the growing Celtic cello scene.

Q: You sometimes play the cello standing up...Is that hard to do? What gave you that idea?

I started to stand up playing cello when I was singing. It made it a lot easier to sing standing up. I experimented with straps and stands, but in the end it is a belt with a strap attached and strapped around the belly of the cello, with the spike out. I have been doing shows as actor/musician on stage standing up and have been able to develop this to play complicated Classical music in this manner. It gives a lovely feeling of freedom, as well as power. I play with a band now and again where I stand up and play whatever I want...it's plugged in, loud and I can go crazy with it.

Q: What is Ozmosis?

A few years ago I joined up with fellow Aussies to create the trio Ozmosis. We play Australian contemporary classical music. We like to promote music from Australian composers and commission new works. A recent concert we featured music of May Howlett for a concert and it was a beautiful event. She came over from Australia for it.

We have a beautiful music film clip of a piece by Katrina Emtage who plays flute in the trio. "Wind on Waves"

Q: What is the Quiet Music Ensemble?

The QME is a Cork-based contemporary music group led by composer and performer John Godfrey, launched in July 2008. We are dedicated to music that invites deep attention and perceptive listening; music that is immersive, reflective, and introspective; music that is an experimentation with, and meditation on sound itself and our relationship with it.

We commission young experimental composers to write works for us. We also play Cage, Alvin Lucier, Applebaum, although many of our performances are improvisation based. In performances I can end up holding a bucket of water under a microphone as easily as tapping my spike with metal from a model railway rail. I enjoy the exploration of extended techniques and the wide use of unusual textures.

Q: You also have played a lot of early and Baroque music, Did you study that formally or how did that come about?

My parents were big fans of baroque music, and my father even built two harpsichords, the first one when I was four and the next a few years later. I helped him build them. There was always baroque music playing on the stereo, or mother playing Bach on the piano, father playing mad harpsichord flourishes at 1am. We regularly went to hear the Macquarie University Renaissance Players perform, and I was enthralled by the rhythms, eerie sounds and dances. I had recorder lessons too, and we had a family recorder ensemble with my uncles family. There were always baroque heads around and we had friends who had a room stuffed with Baroque and Renaissance instruments which we could play. It was like a treasure trove to me. My dad would come back from his travels with German recorders and Gemshorns. My first album I bought as a kid was Anner Bylsma playing Boccherini on a Baroque Cello.

When I came to Ireland I formed Beyond the Pale with Marja Gaynor; baroque violin, Conor O Connell; recorder and James Taylor; harpsichord. We played mostly early Irish music and I was given a beautiful 1700's baroque cello on loan from baroque cellist and gamba player Sarah Cunningham who I had a few lessons with. I was heartbroken when I eventually had to return it! The sound was so ancient and atmospheric.

Q: You also play with folk musicians and rock musicians, how do you find playing in these different genres and styles?

I initially trained as a classical cellist, but soon realised there was fun to be had in playing in a band jamming and improvising. I toured for years with singer/songwriter Jan Allain, playing as a duo and also as a band with drums and bass. I enjoyed finding the role of the cello in each song; where the cello lives and breathes, how it can enhance the voice, how it lifts a song to another realm. The cello can be many things, as it is low enough to take the role of bass, high enough to take the role of fiddle, and versatile enough to emulate a horn, pipes, a flute, percussion, and more.

Q: What are you working on at the moment?

At the moment I am working on new material for my next CD. I have Irish reels and jigs as well as heavy metal inspired cello pieces. The recording will have a Celtic feel, and I always aim to express the intensity that can come through the cello. I am also working on an ambient music CD and music for a couple of filmmakers in Cork.

I am always working on new arrangements for solo cello for my website [playcellomusic.com](http://playcellomusic.com) too.

Q: What is [playcellomusic.com](http://playcellomusic.com)?

[www.playcellomusic.com](http://www.playcellomusic.com) is where I sell the sheet music for pieces I arrange. From searching through the internet and trawling music stores for solo cello repertoire, I noticed there were not enough good arrangements that were playable and also fun. I decided to start publishing my own arrangements on a website so I could share them with other cellists. There is a need for more solo cello repertoire that is a blast to play, sounds great and is enjoyable to practice. I focus on making arrangements that will push and develop a cellist to play more than the classical repertoire, and hope that the music inspires people to play, compose and arrange themselves. The pieces utilize a

wide range of cello possibilities and a lot of double stops (two notes at once) and chords, which makes for a very useful yet fun way to develop technique.

Q: What can audiences expect from your live solo show?

At the moment my solo performance is titled "From Irish Airs to Australia Fair" On the Irish side I play a selection of Irish airs and other traditional Irish tunes, as well as celtic flavoured pieces I have composed myself. I give the ancient tunes a modern and fresh approach. The cello rocks out, goes wild, soothes and caresses. I also include songs I have written, from a rap to a folk style song of love.

I take inspiration from the Irish countryside where I live. The sound of the wind blowing on and on, rain always just around the next cloud, in every intensity and tone, the peace of the sweet but rare sunshine, exquisite and never taken for granted. The sound of the river at the bottom of the field, the sea gentle, or crashing, on pebbles and sand, the dawn chorus in Spring.

I take inspiration from the unexpected sessions that can go til dawn or until fingers can no longer move. I take inspiration from nights around a fire where everyone sings the old Irish songs they learned from their parents or grandparents, and even though there is a slight drizzle there is warmth and laughter.

In Australia my inspiration comes from the insistent heat, the shimmer of mirage, the sudden relief of downpour and thunderstorm on an oppressive afternoon, the drone of a fly in the window pane. The trance of long walks along a sandy white beach, with creaking, croaking, crackling bush on one side and crashing, soothing sea on the other side.

My pieces come from these places, and are informed by the many styles I have played over the years with so many different and wonderful musicians.