

THUS SHE SHALL GO TO THE STARS

A concert for the West Cork History Festival inspired by the life and work
of
Agnes and Ellen Clerke of Skibbereen, West Cork



Jessie Kennedy & The Celestial Quartet

with special guest Constance Kingston

The Celestial Quartet are:

Tess Leak

Diana Llewellyn

Francesca Flowers

Susan McManamon

We are delighted to welcome you to Rosebank this evening.

The huge joy of curating the annual West Cork History Festival Concert is the collaborations that evolve with the artists that join us.

This year it has been a privilege for me to spend time making music with The Celestial Quartet featuring the writing, melodies, thoughts, cello, vocals and autoharp of Tess Leak and cellist Diana Llewellyn who has composed a stunning cello trio "Agnes Clerke."

Francesca Flowers has brought her wonderful cello playing, vocals and beautiful energy, and Susan McManamon on piano and vocals who has also done some great arrangements for some of our pieces.

It has been an exciting collaboration with Festival co-founder historian Victoria Kingston, delving into the world of astronomy.

Jessie Kennedy

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Arts Council Ireland Agility Award 2022 for making this project possible

Victoria and Simon Kingston for their continued support and collaboration

Finola Finlay for so generously sharing her research with us

Historian Gerald O'Brien for his sharing his knowledge on the history of the Clerke

Family's life in Skibbereen in the 1840s

Armagh Observatory & Planetarium (& our thanks to them for the amazing pictures too)

NOTES ON THE MUSIC

There are many elements that we have included in our musical response to Agnes and Ellen Clerke. The decade of their birth being in the 1840s in Skibbereen, at the peak of the Famine. Their childhood immersed in home study with their protective mother and father. Their study and love of music of the era, in particular the story of Agnes and her mother listening enthralled outside the home of Liszt in Rome, whereupon the man himself invited them to join the party, and Agnes played piano for the guests. Ellen's poetry and study of linguistics. And of course, Agnes' astounding academic achievements in the field of astrophysics and cosmogony. She is recognised by having a crater on the Moon named after her, one of very few women to have this honour.

Jessie Kennedy

Hill of Infinity-

Silvermast - Night's Soliloquy

Mare Serenitatis (Dark Sea of Lava)-

Dear Old Skibbereen-

"My great love in songwriting is the process of getting to know people, their passions, loves, woes and inspirations, what fuels them. There is always the intense and humbling ritual of asking these great historical minds to grace us with their muse, and grant permission to sit with their hearts, minds and souls, to graciously let us know what parts of their stories they wish to be shared with the world.

Agnes wrote on her studies on astronomy as a child:

"I had an immense love for the subject, and love begets knowledge.""

Tess Leak

"The Chemistry of Stars is a song based on some of the words of Agnes Clerke. 'The cardinal truth emerging from these inquiries is that of the extreme isolation of the solar system. A skiff in the midst of a vast unfurrowed ocean is not more utterly alone.' A skiff is a type of small boat that would have been used on the Ilen River near her home in Skibbereen.

The song *Who Calls Me Dark* was written by Tess Leak and Jessie Kennedy and takes words from the poem 'Night's Soliloquy' by poet Ellen Clerke, Agnes' sister.

'Who calls me dark? For do I not display
Wonders that man's eye would never see?' "

Diana Llewellyn

"How to start any task is always the most difficult and it is said preparation is key so I began with this wonderful lady's name. If you spell it out in the musical alphabet it is A G E C E E . I realised that if you fill in the missing notes it forms the descending natural minor. I needed a bit more than that so found that her second name was Mary. So now I had a rhythm... Agnes Mary Clerke. A lovely set of notes which I stuck to almost entirely with just the addition of a sneaky G sharp here and there! My tribute to a remarkable scholar."

Susan McManamon

Prelude in C Major BWV 846 by Bach, from the Well-Tempered Clavier (1722)

"There's something very special about the clarity of this piece. While seemingly repetitive simplistic arpeggios are established in an almost meditative texture, there is also a grand and beautiful melody which soars above the bass, tinkling like angels or stars in the sky. I imagine that Agnes Clerke floated away herself and very much got lost in this piece when she played it for friends, as we do today."

Moonlight Sonata, Piano Sonata No 14, Opus 27 No 2 by Beethoven (1801)

"This much-loved piano masterpiece was named Moonlight Sonata after Beethoven died. His slow, dark arpeggios reflect for me the hypnotic, mysterious nature of nightfall, of a deep, stormy, reflective darkness existing side by side with a brighter, dreamy, reflective calm."

Tabhair Dom Do Lamh, traditional Irish harp tune, ca. 1603

A traditional piece that would have been popular in the 1850s when Agnes and Ellen Clerke were studying and playing music. The sisters played harp, piano, and sang and played Irish airs on guitar.

Historical note by Festival co-founder Victoria Kingston

Jessie and I have been incredibly inspired in learning about Agnes Clerke (1842-1907), one of West Cork's most remarkable women. Born into a middle-class family in Skibbereen, Agnes grew up during the worst years of the Famine. She was home-schooled along with her sister Ellen and their brother Aubrey. Agnes travelled to Italy and settled in London, where she and her siblings lived together, studying & writing.

Agnes' interest in astronomy developed at an early age, encouraged by her father. Her real skill was in interpreting astronomy, and science more broadly, to non-specialists. She did this through articles and two particular books *A Popular History of Astronomy* (1885) and *The System of the Stars* (1890). This skill at interpreting academic subjects to a broader audience is something to which the West Cork History Festival has always aspired!

The Concert

The music will be interspersed with quotes from the writings and poetry of Agnes and her sister Ellen.

Part One

1. Prelude in C Major BWV 846 (Bach)
2. Young Agnes - Theme from Berceuse (Gabriel Fauré, 1845-1924)
3. Dear Old Skibbereen (traditional)
4. Agnes Clerke Cello Trio (Diana Llewellyn)
5. The Chemistry of Stars (Tess Leak)
6. Trio in C opus 87 Minuetto and Trio (Ludwig van Beethoven, 1770-1827)
7. The Hill of Infinity (Jessie Kennedy)

Short Interval

Part Two

1. Bourree 1 & 2 from the third Suite for Unaccompanied Cello in G Major (Johann Sebastian Bach, 1685-1750)
2. Tabhair Dom do Lámh (Traditional, circa 1603)
3. Mare Serenitatis - The Dark Sea of Lava (Jessie Kennedy)
4. Moonlight Sonata (Bach)
5. Who Calls Me Dark (Tess Leak & Jessie Kennedy)
6. Sonata V for Violoncelli and Continuo (Benedetto Marcello, 1686-1739)
7. Silvermast - Night's Soliloquy (Jessie Kennedy)
8. Ag Criost an Síol (Traditional, circa 1810)