



Queen's University  
Belfast

THE SCHOOL  
OF MUSIC &  
SONIC ARTS

# Soundings

## WELCOME!

Welcome to the second edition of the newly-established biannual newsletter from the School of Music and Sonic Arts at Queen's. Following on from the first issue, there is plenty more here about our current activities, which show continued evidence of our expansion, and ongoing commitment to our students.

This newsletter is only able to give a taster of the range of professional training opportunities which we currently provide, which include Ulster Orchestra's Kenneth Montgomery's work with our newly-founded chamber orchestra Camerata, baroque specialist Ian Caddy's workshops with our early opera students, and the innovative improvisatory performances of the QUBensemble. In this last area, we have exciting developments to report in the area of Computer Gaming, Performance, Opera Studies, and Archival Studies. All of these activities enrich student life, and ensure that our graduates find interesting work when they leave us.



Evidence of our students' employability struck Dearbhla Nolan, the student who reviews our Careers Day in this issue; future success can be predicted for 'Dear Diary' correspondent Chris Day, who details the week in which he obtain a funded postgraduate place in Performance. The challenges facing young composers who want to succeed on a professional level is the subject of our feature article, by senior composer Piers Hellawell.

Our student composers were showcased in a lunchtime concert at SARC on 7 February; you will have many opportunities to hear our undergraduate and MA performers (including the Queen's Camerata & Queen's Chamber Choir) in March, April and May. And no spring would be complete without our annual Sonorities Festival of Contemporary Music (20-25 April), which will feature groups as diverse as The Smith Quartet and Ensemble Recherche.

I hope this newsletter tempts you to come and visit us, enjoying the range of activities which are on offer this spring.

Dr Sarah McCleave  
Editor

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## Eminent Conductor Hits the High Notes at Queen's



The Ulster Orchestra's soon-to-be new Principal Conductor, **Kenneth Montgomery**, dropped into Queen's University to put Queen's Camerata through their paces with an open rehearsal in February 2007. At the lunchtime session, held in the School of Music's Harty Room, the chamber orchestra played Haydn's Symphony No. 104 and Mozart's 'Marriage of Figaro' overture.

The event was organised by Camerata's director Colin Stark, a graduate of Queen's and oboist in the Ulster Orchestra. Welcoming the conductor to the University he said: "It is a wonderful opportunity for Camerata to work with such an eminent conductor. Kenneth has put himself at great inconvenience to come to Belfast today in order to work with the orchestra." Speaking after the rehearsal,

Kenneth Montgomery explained why he decided to spend time with the young musicians: "When I was told about the initiative, I was very happy to attend. It is such an important thing for orchestras to play together. Some people feel classic orchestras are old fashioned but I feel they are very important. In some Academic Institutions the old fashioned classical things have been left out, it is like studying English Literature and leaving out Shakespeare, this initiative is fantastic and will do the students wonders and the University.

The Belfast born conductor will continue his role as Principal Guest Conductor with the Ulster Orchestra until taking up the post of Principal Conductor from the beginning of the next season.

## PROfiles

Performer in Training. **Ciaran Scullion**, pianist and composer, is currently enrolled in the newly-revived MA in Performance. He has taken master-classes with William Howard, Roy Howat, John Lill, Rita Medjimorec, Ian Pace, and Pascal Rogé; he will be attending the Birmingham International Piano Academy in July, and the Nice Music Academy in August. Ciaran may be heard in the Harty Room's 'Live at Lunchtime' concert on 3 May.

Budding Opera Director. Master's student **Geoff Higgins** is serving an apprenticeship in opera coaching and lecturing as an assessed part of his specialised degree in Opera Studies. He will be performing harpsichord continuo in the 9 May lunchtime performance of Giovanni Bononcini's *Camilla*.

Student Curator of Public Exhibition. Master's student **Megan Boyd** will create the catalogue for an exhibition in the Queen's Visitor's Centre of materials from the Bunting, Moore, and Percy collections. It will coincide with Queen's hosting the annual Eighteenth-Century Irish Studies conference (15-17 June). Megan is among the first to take the new "Collections Development" module as part of our Archival Studies pathway.

Scholarship Winner Highlights Opportunity. 2007 Bank of Ireland Millennium Scholarship winner, **Tanja Tierney** (BMus, QUB), successfully negotiated the application process and interview last spring. A dedicated student, Tanja is now enjoying the extra hours she can devote to her studies. More information may be found on the "Scholarship Awards" pages of the Queen's website, [www.qub.ac.uk](http://www.qub.ac.uk)

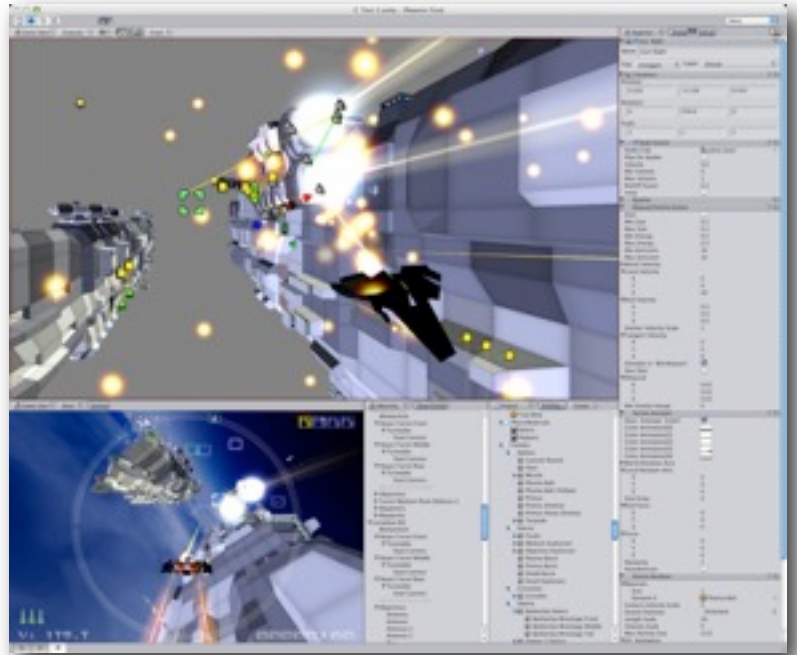
## MUSICAL tRIVIA

Enigma unsolved. Sir Hamilton Harty was a distinguished interpreter of the works of Elgar and received several warm 'thank you' messages from the composer. However, when Harty attempted to guess at the enigma behind Elgar's famous set of variations, the composer put him off, but added "I will leave you the solution in my will!" Unfortunately, he didn't.

# Computer Games in the MA in Sonic Arts

Computer games design is one of the fastest growing industries around. Computer Games within the MA in Sonic Arts covers all the elements involved in making a complete game, including game and sound design, 3D modelling, and -- of course -- computer programming. Programmers use the Unity engine ([www.unity3d.com](http://www.unity3d.com)), an accessible environment that permits easy creation of desktop and web-based games.

Computer games are now played on a range of devices, from handheld devices to state-of-the-art consoles. Music technologists are interested in programming this hardware specifically for music. Each platform has its own characteristic sound, with the lo-fi sound of the Gameboy currently being particularly popular.



Graduates of the MA in Sonic Arts are now employed by companies such as Electronic Arts, or have begun PhDs in computer game audio. This area is ideal for students with high levels of technical and creative talent. The challenge now is for audio programmers and music technologists to invent new ways of creating sound, while also proposing new applications for it.

Dr Graham McAllister (Lecturer, Sonic Arts)

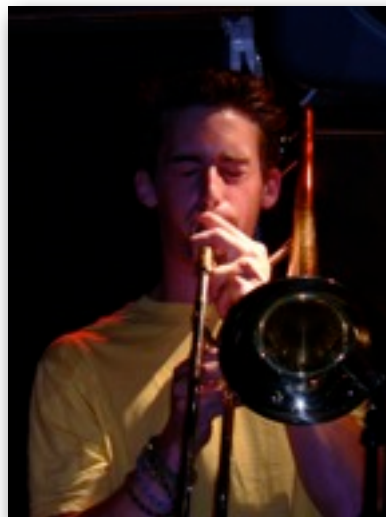
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## STUDENT LIFE

### Dear Diary

**Chris Day**, President of the Music Society and final year undergraduate, recalls his final week of first semester.

Week twelve was one of my busiest weeks to date. As President of the Music Society I must always be well organised in order to deal with the unexpected! A typical Monday begins with lectures in Composition, together with Performance. The day culminates in a rigorous three-hour rehearsal with the University Big Band, with which I play lead trombone. As manager of the Big Band, it is my job to motivate my fellow ensemble members.



Tuesdays normally consist of performance seminar; this week, the skills acquired in this class were put to the test in an audition for postgraduate study at the RNCM. My preparation proved fruitful and I was subsequently offered a place on the MA in Performance course.

There is little relaxation for a Music Society president. Wednesday began with a committee meeting to

prepare for the big band concert that night, and the Christmas extravaganza which I was conducting the following day. Then a quick rehearsal and sound-check before the main event. We played a selection of festive pieces and established favourites to an appreciative audience.

On Thursday, the Music Society's hard work was demonstrated in front of a packed Harty Room. The programme included a diverse range of ensembles and repertoire. Afterwards all involved, including the audience who had participated in some congregational carols, were rewarded with mulled wine and mince pies.

Friday ended the term on a high, as the second audition of the week resulted in an unconditional offer and scholarship to the RSAMD.

# FEATURE

In a special pull-out guide, Piers Hellawell reflects on the challenges facing young composers in the 21st century.



## 1. Would you say that the profile of composition has changed in the past decade?

Certainly. In the first place, institutions like mine encourage students to try the composition pathway; there are transferable skills even for those who don't stay the course. In the old days, no one offered progression in composition activity; it suddenly appeared, grandly, as a final-year 'option'. In today's courses in the UK, it is an equal partner to musicology and performance.

Secondly, the rise of technology facilities has attracted many new students interested in using non-traditional sound sources from the studio to make pieces of their own. Even a studio dunce like me knows that digital technology facilitates the mixing of sounds that used to be a grinding process of tape and scissors.

## 2. How did you find your way into the field of composing?

I needed no leading, since it was what I wanted to do long before I

had any formal musical training. But many others need help in discovering the discipline, and that is crucial. I was lucky to have encouraging teachers – a support that is very necessary now, as the composition discipline denies the easy rewards that young people are encouraged to seek. My parents took classical music very seriously, while at the same time there was pop and jazz at home; all that was (and continues to be ) crucial for me. I have to say, though, that most of my motivation has always come from somewhere inside.

## 3. What advice (or more) would you give to a student who is wishing to pursue composition at university level?

Devour music of the past, in recordings, performances and scores where possible. Composers of the past learned their musical landscape without recordings, so it's got to be easier now! No one can create in a vacuum.

Base your ideas on the reality of what instruments (acoustic or

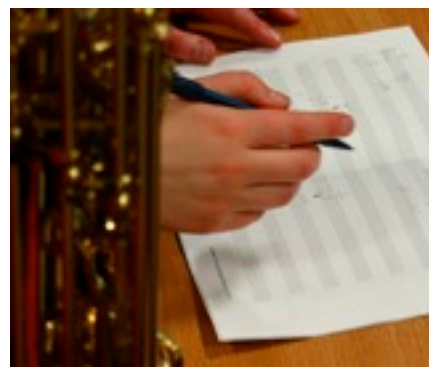
electronic) can do, and gain practical familiarity with their properties.

Study score conventions of how to present your music, since the composer is rightly held responsible by players for everything on the page. It's no good blaming a computer! Never use one until you are absolutely familiar with notation practice to professional standards. Reliance on software is no substitute for real expertise – a big problem nowadays.

Exert yourself to get performances. No one will care as much as you do about your work, so don't expect your opportunities to be dished up by others while you sit and wait.

Stop thinking of listening to music only as entertainment, and start approaching it for what you can learn from great composers. It's possible to learn just as much from a work or composer who does not really light your fire!

Don't be afraid to ask for help. With standards of technical training under dire threat in our exam curriculum, students with vision are increasingly turning to tuition for those traditional skills forced out by the commodifying of education. These have not suddenly become less important, and there are



musicians around who can help you.

#### 4. What do you look for in a potential composition student?

A desire to express and create what was not there before, through the



organizing of sound. Students who merely want to reproduce music that they already know will not be composers, however skilled they may be. Even when young composers get furious with modern music, I know they have a mission and the potential to develop. But a student whose ears and mind are simply closed to artistic issues will never be a creator.

#### 5. How realistic should composition students be when deciding on their future?

They should be realistic – but everyone needs a private dream. Students today are much more hard-nosed and unromantic about their prospects, and that rightly deters all but the few from persisting as ‘composers’; most cannot earn a living from it in the UK, and the trick is to find the richest parallel activity that lets you be a composer. Meanwhile, there’s that dream: some of my contemporaries whom reason could have deterred from composition persisted, while I know of other gifted composers whose practical streak soon brushed away that dream.

#### 6. In your opinion, how much would choosing between a conservatoire and a university affect their future career

#### prospects in this competitive field?

There are strengths to be had on both sides, but they relate more to musical development than career prospects: composers prosper from both backgrounds. Why choose? Our students who become postgrad composers at conservatoire say they have had the best of all worlds, and feel the better equipped by their degree course for the unique opportunities of a conservatoire.

#### 7. What pressures do young ‘classical’ composers face?

Composing your own music continues to attract youngsters despite the blandishments of other, much more superficially rewarding pursuits. This is amazing: composition offers no easy answers, no guarantees and little material rewards. It is appallingly difficult to get works heard in live concert form and still harder to obtain repeated performances of them; meanwhile, there is the



continual drip of disdain for anything mysterious, or inscrutable, from a media obsessed with messages of simplistic attraction. We have lost the power to enjoy things we don’t understand, since popular culture is all about consumption. Who comes out of a Hollywood movie or pop concert arguing what it was about, the way we do after a visit to Tate Modern? The commercial consumer digests a product honed for purchase; its commercial value relies on its being unambiguous. Why not measure depth, as well as breadth, of participation?

Despite these discouragements, students enrol in buoyant numbers for composition. They are not deterred when I tell them it is not as easy as they thought.

*(Images from an Artists-in-Residence workshop for composers in the School of Music & Sonic Arts).*

Piers Hellawell’s work has been commissioned and performed around the world by leading artists; regular collaborators include The Hilliard Ensemble, Psappha, Schubert Ensemble and BBC Scottish SO, for whose new home at City Hall, Glasgow he wrote *Dogs and Wolves*, premiered in 2006. Recent events have included a ‘Portait Concert’ on London’s South Bank and the London premiere of *Cors de chasse*, by the Philharmonia and Håkan Hardenberger. Hellawell’s new brass quintet was premiered in Norway and Ireland by Stockholm Chamber Brass in October 2006.

## Dates for your diary...

20 - 25 April 2007  
Sonorities Festival of Contemporary Music

16 May 2007  
Performance Showcase,  
Great Hall, Queen’s University

# PERFORMANCE MATTERS

## Ground-breaking sounds at Queen's



Under the stewardship of professional percussionist Steven Davis, the QUBensemble has become one of the most exciting ensembles at Queen's.

As a performance specialist, Davis directs the relaxed rehearsals in which the performers double as creative contributors. New compositions are not treated as a completed musical product, but rather as vehicles for the performer's musical ingenuity. As for genre, well the maestro is keen to dismiss the concept, saying "I don't want to get into what type of music it is because I don't believe in any of the shallow pigeon hole systems found in music education".

The ensemble profiles a wide range of students, from undergraduate to PhD, and membership requires only two things: commitment and an open mind. "Everyone and every ability is welcome. The only thing we require is committing to being at rehearsal each week and being open to new musical experiences", explains Davis.

Clearly this group has a unique role to play in pushing the boundaries of modern composition, and its singular vibe is perhaps best summed up by its conductor as, "the energy of punk with the vision of John Cage". Such an intriguing mix of influences should surely arouse the interest of even the most hardened sceptics!

Conor Caldwell, Year 2 BMus.

## Opera Students in Motion

The 1705 London operatic sensation *Camilla* is to be given a new lease on life by students in Sarah McCleave's 'Opera in England' module. Thanks to the School's Innovation Fund, the expertise of Ian Caddy, the principal European director of baroque acting and staging, will be called on to coach several students in the rhetorical art of baroque gesture.

Caddy, an experienced theatrical director who has also worked for film and television, will introduce some final-year singers to this nearly-lost art form through a series of workshops, one of which will be open to the public. Act 2 of this pleasing work – a tale of star-crossed lovers and a princess poised to recapture her throne – will be staged in the Harty Room's 'Live @ Lunchtime' concert on 9 May.

For further details, contact [music@qub.ac.uk](mailto:music@qub.ac.uk)



## *MUSICAL tRIVIA*

Real-life drama at the opera. George Frideric Handel was a large man, and one who knew his own mind. When diminutive -- but notably feisty -- soprano Francesca Cuzzoni refused to cooperate during an opera rehearsal, the frustrated composer allegedly took matters into his own hands, threatening to throw her out the nearest window!

# STAFF NEWS

- **Prof Michael Alcorn**, Composer & Head of School, will be visiting the US in April 2007 for performances of his new string quartet *Leave no Trace*. He is also working on a new piece for the leading new music virtuoso Ian Pace which will be premiered in May 2007. He was the featured composer in March 2007 on the Contemporary Music Centre's website. [www.cmc.ie](http://www.cmc.ie)
- **Prof Piers Hellawell**, composer, is working on a concerto commissioned by Robert Plane, principal clarinet of the BBC National Orchestra of Wales; this is followed by a new piano trio for the Da Vinci Trio for spring of 2008. This year also sees the release of Hellawell's third CD on the Metronome label, featuring major orchestral and chamber works of the last ten years.
- **Dr. Ben Knapp**, Senior Lecturer in Music Technology, has been invited this spring to give a seminar at the Steim Institute in Amsterdam on emotion and music. He has also just been appointed Chief Technology Officer for the newly formed Centre for Technology Research on Independent Living (TRIL). The TRIL centre is a multi-year project composed of a consortium of leading Irish Universities and Intel Corporation.
- **Dr Eric Lyon** is a composer and software developer. Last autumn saw Eric giving presentations in Beijing, New York and New Orleans; he has recently given a lecture on computer sampling at NUI Maynooth. Eric is performing a new solo laptop work at the Gemdays Festival in Huddersfield; his *String Quartet no. 3 with Computer Enhancements* will be premiered by the Smith Quartet in March.
- **Dr Simon Mawhinney**, composer, is to have a world premiere of his *Hunshigo* by Darragh Morgan and Mary Dullea, in Washington D.C.. Garth Knox will play a new work for viola d'amore in Paris, autumn 2007 and Psappa plan to perform *Starbog* on a nationwide tour. Forthcoming compositions are an electronic piece and a collection of micro-compositions for contrabass clarinet.
- **Dr Graham McAllister** is a computer scientist researching in the area of Human-Computer Interaction. This summer, along with his research group, they will be presenting their most recent work in Accessibility at California and Beijing.
- **Dr Fiona Palmer's** latest book, *Vincent Novello (1781-1861): Music for the Masses* has just been published -- for more information see [www.ashgate.com](http://www.ashgate.com)
- **Dr Pedro Rebelo** composer and digital artist, has recently returned from a residency at the Centre for Computer Research in Music and Acoustics at Stanford University in the US. He has completed a new string quartet which will be performed by the Smith Quartet in the Sonorities Festival of Contemporary Music. Pedro has been developing a performance for piano duo with live-electronics which was premiered in Berkeley California with pianist Chris Brown.
- **Prof Jan Smaczny**, will be giving the Presidential address to the Society of Musicology in Ireland at Dublin Institute of Technology this spring. His edited volume on Music in 19th-century Ireland will be launched at this conference.
- **Dr Aidan Thomson** has been invited to participate in a round-table discussion on Elgar's "The Apostles" at Oberlin Conservatory, Ohio, this December.
- **Dr Yo Tomita** is convening an international symposium on Bach's B-minor Mass. This event will take place at Queen's in November 2007; Masaaki Suzuki is to conduct a performance of the Mass.
- **Dr Sarah McCleave** will be giving a presentation at an international dance symposium in Stockholm this spring; this will be followed by a similar event in London in November. Her early opera students may be heard performing an act from Giovanni Bononcini's *Camilla*, in the Harty Room on 9 May.
- **Dr Martin Dowling**, fiddle player and historian, has essays on the history and politics of Irish traditional music appearing in three international journals of Irish studies

## New Appointment

Dr Franziska Schroeder



Research Fellow in Digital Media Performance

Franziska Schroeder is a performer of saxophone and live-electronic music, a theorist and improviser.

She is a founder of the digital media collective *l a u t* ([www.lautnet.net](http://www.lautnet.net)) and in 2006 was awarded her PhD by the School of Arts, Culture and Environment at the University of Edinburgh.

Her research interests include the intersection of philosophy and performance in technology-informed environments, in particular the role of the body in the age of technological change. She has written for many international journals, and has guest-edited for the *Contemporary Music Review*. She recently joined the editorial board for ARIADA (Advanced Research in Aesthetics in the Digital Arts).

In March 2007 Franziska will take up a three year Research Fellowship funded by the AHRC in the School of Music & Sonic Arts.

in 2007: Eire-Ireland, *New Hibernia Review*, and *Radharc*. He will be teaching at Scoil Samraidh Willy Clancy and the South Sligo Summer School of Traditional Music in July.

Dr Martin Dowling, Irish Traditional Music scholar and fiddle player, and Dr Sile O'Modhrain, music technologist.

### MARTIN:



#### What's your favourite sort of teaching or subject area, and why?

It has been a long, winding road for me. My first degree was in economics, while my PhD and early teaching career focussed on social and economic history. I've recently done post-doctoral research with a team of sociologists, and now I'm lecturing in Irish Traditional Music. As a result I cast a wide net. Something clicked in my late twenties with regard to my fiddle playing and my intellectual interests, which eventually focussed on the styles of particular fiddle and flute players in the region around my mother's village of Gurteen, County Sligo. I became aware of the immense difficulties surrounding the use of language to get to the essence of things, and of the importance of social and historical context, and so began an unending exploration. Now, I am fired up about teaching the history of contemporary Irish traditional music and exploring recent work in the field of critical musicology.

#### How do you balance your research/performing with teaching and other duties?

"Integrate" is probably more appropriate than "balance," because my goal is to break down the boundaries. It's not always possible. I regard my fiddle teaching as an extension of my musical practice. I teach with the fiddle in my hands and focus on the fundamentals of my playing while instructing others. Research fellowships over the last three years have allowed me to focus

entirely on Irish traditional music, and the plan is to integrate the development of new courses with writing up that research. I like to play pub sessions in Belfast, where I think we have one of the best scenes in Ireland, but I also like to be out running along the Lagan around dawn. I'm still working on balancing those two!

#### Do you listen to any "non classical" music?

I suppose the better question is, do I listen to any "classical" music? The answer is yes, a bit, but as a traditional musician I mostly hear tunes, not structures or larger ideas. I like my "classical" music early (before Beethoven) and late (from Webern). Glenn Gould and the Kuijkens playing Bach, and Jordi Savall playing Couperin are never far from the CD player. I also "listen" to Ligeti's etudes and Cage's piano music. I've progressed through the entire spectrum of traditional and "world" music, but except for Songhai and Radio Tarifa, both of whom articulate Mediterranean fusions brilliantly, I don't listen to much current commercial trad. My son Joseph, who is studying for his music A-levels, has turned me on to the post-prog metal band *Tool*, with its inventive bassist and drummer. Their last two albums are on in the house all the time, often louder than they should be!

### SILE:

#### What's your favorite sort of teaching or subject area, and why?

I particularly enjoy teaching project-based classes on Digital Musical Instrument design because the instruments students build continually challenge my ideas about what a musical instrument is. For example, a former student, who was a break dancer, built a body suit that could

display the choreography of a dance using tactile displays distributed across the wearer's body. He could 'compose' a tactile dance track to accompany the music, and had to develop a 'language' for tactile music to express formal, structural and expressive gestures. But is this suit a musical instrument?

#### How do you balance your research/performing with teaching and other duties?



This is always a challenge because it is hard to chorelate one's thinking into neat parcels of time and your duties as an academic member of staff often inhibit your ability to pursue a line of enquiry at the point when you are most excited by it. I try to set aside time in the early morning to sit down to read or write, for an hour or so. Sometimes I accomplish nothing, but on other days it is hard to set aside what I am doing and leave for work. In general, though, my most productive research time is outside school semester, when I can set aside whole days to write.

#### Do you listen to any "non classical" music?

Definitely. I have always been interested in electro-acoustic music because of the rich sound world it inhabits. Lately I have also become interested in early Jazz because it represents a time in music making when ground rules were still being defined and people were open to experimenting with new forms, new instruments and new playing techniques.

### Coming up in the next *Soundings* Newsletter

Feature on Irish Traditional Music, World-class Bach events at Queen's, performing in real-time with musicians at the other side of the world & Queen's *Camerata*, review of debut season