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Encyclopedia of Music in Ireland: Deirdre Gribbin

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Gribbin, Deirdre, (b Belfast 24TH May 1967). Composer. Gribbin studied with KEVIN VOLANS at QUEEN’S UNIVERSITY BELFAST, with Robert Saxton at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and with Per Nørgård in Copenhagen. In 1999 she was awarded the Chester Schirmer Fulbright Fellowship studying at Princeton University and the following year she received a PhD in composition from Royal Holloway College, University of London. She has received a number of awards including the Huddersfield Festival Composition Prize in 1991 for her piano piece Per Speculum in Aenigmate (1991), the Arts Foundation Award in 1998 for her first opera Her Persephone! (1998) and in 2003 her orchestral work Empire States (2002) was chosen as a winning finalist at the UNESCO International Rostrum of Composers. She has served as director of the Society for the Promotion of New Music, was Fellow Commoner in Creative Arts at Trinity College Cambridge and is a Fellow in Composition at Trinity College of Music, London.

After studies with Nørgård in Denmark, the influence of the Nordic sound on Gribbin’s writing manifested itself with an increasing concern for instrumental colour and orchestral textures. This aspect of her style is revealed most strikingly in a series of large scale works including Empire States for symphony orchestra and the concertos Venus Blazing (2001) for violin and Goliath (2006) for percussion. Her first opera Hey Persephone! sets the story of Demeter and Persephone in modern day Glasgow while aspects of her Northern Irish background surface in Tribe which deals directly with the political and sectarian issues of ‘The Troubles’. Her orchestral work Unity of Being; A peace anthem for Northern Ireland received its US premiere in October 2001 opening the ‘UK with New York Festival’, the first international event in New York post 9/11. Since then much of her work has aimed to push beyond the boundaries of the traditional performance environment. She appeared in character playing percussion in her violin concerto Venus Blazing as an emissary from the planet Venus and works collaboratively with theatre director Lou Stein and Bruce Springsteen’s lighting designer Jeff Ravitz on theatricalising her orchestral music with stage sets, lighting and costumes. Her recent work has included the completion of the string quartet trilogy What the Whaleship Saw (2004), Calum’s Light (2007) and Merrow Sang (2007) while she has also set a number of works by Nobel Prize winning poet Seamus Heaney, most notably Anahorish (2008), a gift to the poet for a lifetime achievement award from QUEEN’S UNIVERSITY BELFAST and a song cycle Island People (2010). She is currently writing a piano concerto The Binding of the Years for the RTÉ NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA’s and pianist Finghin Collins.

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Actual Word Count: 444
Word Count (with Work List etc.): 1053

Adrian Smith

Selected Bibliography
Selected Compositions


Unity of Being, 2001 (Belfast 2001). Orch.

Empire States, 2002 (Dublin 2003). Orch.


Mare Tran, Crossing the Sea, 2003 (Belfast 2004). Mez., str.


And now the shadows are too long, 1993 (London 1994). cl., pf.


Amazing Face, 2000 (Cork 2000). 2 vn, va, vc.


Merrow Sang, 2007 (Galway 2007). 2 vn, va, vc.


**Discography**
Contemporary Music Centre: *Contemporary Music from Ireland Vol.6* (Karol Szymanowski Quartet: CD, CMC CD06, 2006)
[Fidelio Trio:] *Bulb* (CD, NMC D147, 2008)
[National Chamber Choir of Ireland:] *Ad Multos Annos* (CD, NGI 01, 2004)
[Various Artists:] *Rational Option Insanity* (Concorde Ensemble: CD, Black Box BBM1015, 1999)

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Arts Foundation Award
Chester Schirmer Fulbright Fellowship
Collins, Finghin
Guildhall School of Music and Drama
Heaney, Seamus
Huddersfield Festival
Nørgård, Per
Princeton University
Queen’s University Belfast
Ravitz, Jeff
Royal Holloway College, University of London
RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra
Saxton, Roger
Society for the Promotion of New Music
Springsteen, Bruce
Stein, Lou
Trinity College Cambridge
Trinity College of Music, London
UNESCO International Rostrum of Composers.
Volans, Kevin