

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

HONORARY CONFERRING

Friday, 18 March 2022

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY **PROFESSOR MICHAEL DOHERTY** on 18 March 2022, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Literature, *honoris causa* on **MARY BERGIN**

Deputy-President, Honoured Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mary Bergin is recognised as Ireland's greatest living tin whistle player and one of its greatest living musicians. The tin whistle, an fheadóg, the most egalitarian and timeless instruments of the Irish traditional music repertoire.

Lonnaithe faoi láthair ar an Spidéal, Co. na Gaillimhe , is as an tSeanchill, Contae Átha Cliath do Mhary ó dhúchas. Tá stíl shainiúil aici, stíl simplí snasta, beacht a léiríonn rímháistreacht theicniúil. Mary's playing style is distinctive for its technical virtuosity, precision, and elegant simplicity. Originally from Shankill in Co Dublin, Mary was born into a musical family and began playing at an early age, winning many awards in Oireachtas and Fleadh Cheoil competitions. Her

mother played classical and traditional fiddle, and her father played the melodeon. Musicians like Paddy Hill, Mrs Crotty and Mrs Harrington were regular visitors to the Bergin home. Despite attempts to teach her the piano and violin, Mary took to the Clarke C whistle, picking up tunes by ear.

Family holidays spent in Miltown Malbay, Co Clare, and the Ring Gaeltacht in Co Waterford were a deep source of musical inspiration. It was in the Déise that she first heard the sean nós singing of Nioclás Tóibín and in Miltown Malbay she played with the legendary Willie Clancy and other traditional musicians. Captivated by the playing of the whistle, fiddles and pipes, she listened carefully to all instruments and the special rhythms of their musical masters. Mary began playing at sessions in Blackrock, Co Dublin, where she met the blind whistler Terry Horan. Venturing further into the city centre brought her to the Pipers' Club in Thomas Street. The growing folk boom in the 1970s and the expansion of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann led to Comhaltas tours of Britain and the US. Since then, she has played all over the world, both as a solo performer and in her earlier days with groups such as the Green Linnet Céilí Band, Ceoltóirí Laighean and De Dannan.

While 'Feadóga Stáin', holds its place as a classic in traditional music, the album's 1992 follow-up, Feadóga Stáin 2 was likewise regarded as exceptional and unequal in its musical mastery.

Mary is a founding member of the group Dordán (the Irish for "a buzzing/humming as of bees") whose distinctive mix of traditional Irish and European baroque music achieved wide acclaim, receiving the National Entertainment Award for traditional music in 1993. Notable recordings of Dordán include: *Irish Traditional and Baroque Music* (1991), *Jigs to the Moon* (1994), *The Night Before...A Celtic Christmas* (1997), and *Celtic Aire* (1999). In 2000, Mary won the prestigious TG4 'Traditional Musician of the Year' Award.

An inspirational teacher of the tin whistle, Mary's 'Irish Tin Whistle Tutorial' series was described by the late Paddy Moloney of the Chieftains as 'pure genius'. In her teaching, the many facets that give traditional music its distinctiveness are explored and interpreted. In her teaching, Mary pays attention to what she refers to as the 'internal rhythm' of the music, the essence of the music, the breathing; almost like a meditation. Avoiding over-emphasis on the technicality, she searches with her students for the feeling, the heart and soul of the music, *croí agus anam an cheoil* but also for the fun and the

enjoyment of the music, the *comhlúadar* - the joyous company that surrounds a traditional music session is never far away.

Mary Bergin's contribution to Irish traditional music is recognised by scholars in the School of English, Drama and Film and School of Irish, Celtic Studies and Folklore. She is regarded as one of Ireland's most esteemed instrumentalists and her direct contribution to Irish traditional music has had an impact on generations of traditional musicians at UCD. Mary continues to tour extensively and teach masterclasses in the tin whistle at universities across Ireland, Europe, and the United States.

Ar deireadh, ar an gclúdach den chéad albam aici, 'Feadóga Stáin', tá pictiúr álainn de chuid Rick Ward, pictiúr de chaislín cloch fireann, suite ar ghéag crainn aitinn, íomhá a léiríonn stíl seinnte Mary go han-mhaith; binn, bríomhar, fuinniúil le foirfeacht san ornadaíocht. On the cover of her first solo album, *Feadóga Stáin*, Rick Ward's beautiful painting of a male stone-chat, perched on a sprig of gorse is an apt representation of her infinitely melodic, perfectly ornamented, vigorous playing; a delightful metaphor for the coming of spring and summer.

Praehonorabilis Pro-Praeses, totaque Universitas,

Praesento vobis hanc meam filiam, quam scio tam moribus quam doctrina
habilem et idoneam esse quae admittatur, honoris causa, ad Gradum
Doctoratus in Litteris; idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo, totique Academiae.