



# Violin

## The String Scene in Ireland

by Sally O'Reilly

In January, I returned to the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin to give three days of masterclasses for high school and college students. I was also invited to give pedagogy lectures, a teachers' workshop and a masterclass at the Cork School of Music on the southern coast of Ireland.

The booming Irish economy has invigorated the arts in Ireland, a country that has always had a tradition of great fiddlers, tenors, poets and playwrights. The Irish have such a passion for the English language (*not* their mother tongue!) that Irish prose and poetry are woven into the upholstery on the plane seats of Aer Lingus, the Irish national airline. When the English conquered Ireland centuries ago, I'm sure they didn't realize that the Irish would conquer *their* language in return!

Both Dublin and Cork have received tens of thousands of pounds from the Irish government to build new music facilities. Dublin is preserving the Georgian facade and elegant formal rooms of its original building near Merion Square. Cork plans to level everything and build a totally new facility. The two schools have similar enrollments of more than four hundred students each. Both schools have fine faculties and high admission and retention standards.

The issue of retention was a sticky one in Cork where the school was under the aegis of the city. Adrian Petcu, a Romanian violinist who, with his violinist wife, defected in the early 1980's while on tour in Western Europe, found

refuge and work in Cork. He headed the string department until recently and has produced a new generation of excellent string teachers. He established mandatory levels of achievement which must be attained annually in order to remain in the school. This flew in the face of the original proletarian concept of a city school where any student who could pay the tuition would be taught. "Our teacher resources are limited," he told me, "and I couldn't bear to turn away a food student because a lazy student had the place." By setting standards, Petcu has created a program that is more in line with the preparatory schools at Juilliard and Manhattan. The school also has a baccalaureate program and just instituted its first year of graduate study this year.

I heard violinists, violists, and cellists in Cork as soloists and in chamber music. The level was very high. When I sat in on a rehearsal of an elementary string orchestra, I observed one boy before the rehearsal began. He was in his seat, playing through the Vivaldi *A Minor Concerto*, holding the violin against his upper arm like the hundreds of Irish fiddlers he, no doubt, has seen in his short life. The next day I remarked on his position (which he changed when rehearsal started) to one of the pedagogy classes, cautioning them to distinguish clearly between a fiddler's position and a classical one. I imagine we might have the same challenge in Appalachia.

Dublin is a hotbed of classical musi-

cal activity and the Academy is host to students from many European countries. Their violin faculty includes Eyal Kless from Israel, whose father Yair Kless is professor of violin in Graz. The atmosphere is a cosmopolitan one and there are more extremely advanced students than in Cork.

The Franco-Belgian tradition of violin playing is very much in evidence in both schools. Generally the students are physically relaxed, thoughtful players whose teachers give them a balanced diet of scales, arpeggios, etudes and appropriate repertoire. I was impressed by the openness of both faculties with regard to new materials (I confess that I love people who embrace my books!) and their enthusiastic reception of ideas.

For now, most of the best Irish violinists go to London or Paris to complete their studies. Students everywhere prefer to get away from home when they go to college. But Dublin and Cork have a lot to offer to string students. I will probably refer students who want to study abroad and enjoy the convenience of an English-speaking country to both of these schools in the future because I know they'll be in good hands and in a healthy and encouraging environment.

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