

For Immediate Release

New composition from Neil Martin to be performed in Washington and Philadelphia

A major new work from award-winning Irish composer and cellist Neil Martin will debut when the Belfast choir Cappella Caeciliana performs in April at the National Cathedral in Washington, DC, and at Villanova University and St. Malachy's Church in Philadelphia. This tour is part of **Imagine Ireland**, a year-long celebration of Irish arts in the USA supported by the Irish Government agency, Culture Ireland.

The performances will mark the debut of **Exsultet**, a new version of the Easter vigil prayer. Traditionally sung in Latin, Martin's setting uniquely also uses Irish, and the music is, of course, newly composed. A renowned composer, arranger, cellist and uilleann piper, Neil Martin is a founding member of the critically acclaimed West Ocean String Quartet.

Cappella Caeciliana, under Musical Director, Donal McCrisken, will, as part of their concert program, perform **Exsultet** at 7:30 p.m., April 27, in St Thomas' Church, Villanova University, and at 7 p.m., April 28, at St. Malachy's Church in Philadelphia. Then, at 5.30 p.m. on April 29, **Exsultet** will be performed as part of Evensong in Washington's National Cathedral.

Founded on the feast of St Cecilia in 1995, Cappella Caeciliana specializes in singing great choral repertoire in its liturgical context. Performances have included Vivaldi's *Gloria* and Pergolesi's *Magnificat* as well as an increasingly broad a cappella repertoire ranging from plainchant to contemporary composers such as John Tavener. The choir has performed in Germany, Switzerland and at a Papal Audience in Rome.

Martin's new version of the Easter vigil prayer common to all Christian traditions was commissioned by Cappella Caeciliana and funded by the Northern Ireland Arts Council.

Martin, who lives in Belfast, is known for his work with West Ocean String Quartet, for his collaborations with leading Celtic musicians of the day, (including Christy Moore, The Dubliners, The Chieftains, Altan and Mary Black) and for his many other compositions that have won acclaim on both sides of the Atlantic and around the world. His *Agnus Dei* for a cappella choir was premiered in October 2010 in St Paul's Church, at Ground Zero in New York City.

He has contributed to more than 100 albums and his music has taken him throughout Europe and North America, including performances in Carnegie Hall, The Kennedy Center DC, and the Royal Albert Hall.

In 1999, along with Seamus McGuire, he formed the West Ocean String Quartet. Their music crosses the boundaries of classical and traditional Irish music, and Martin composes and arranges most of their music. The quartet's debut CD, *Unwrapping Dreams*, was released to considerable critical acclaim in July 2004.

The quartet's second CD, *The Guiding Moon*, was released in October 2006 and featured the playing of guest artist Matt Malloy, flutist of the world-famous The Chieftains. West Ocean String Quartet's latest recording, *Ae Fond Kiss*, was released in December 2009.

Comments on Neil Martin and West Ocean String Quartet:

"...the playing is precise and pristine, the melodies are beautiful, and the arrangements are supple and imaginative ... The West Ocean String Quartet succeeds in this bridging of Irish traditional and classical music through sheer artistry as well as a sensitivity to and familiarity with the demands of each genre"

Earle Hitchner - Wall Street Journal/ Irish Echo

"...the West Ocean String Quartet is already fording rivers that don't even appear on most musicians' maps."

Siobhan Long - Irish Times

"Martin's writing was imaginative in its arrangements and the ensemble was delicate, expert and sensitive in its playing."

Belfast Telegraph

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