

# ICON OF AN AGE

*A John McCormack Gala Tribute Concert*



*John  
McCormack*  
1884-1945





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## John McCormack 1884-1945

*Before Elvis, before Frank Sinatra and Bing Crosby, there was John Count McCormack. Born in 1884 in Athlone, the heart of Ireland, John would go on to capture the hearts and minds of millions throughout the world. He was the pop idol of his time, selling millions of records to an insatiable public.*

John Francis McCormack was the fourth of eleven children of a Scottish couple, Andrew and Hannah McCormack, workers at the local mill. Hannah, at the time of her marriage, could only sign the certificate with an 'X'. McCormack, however, made the best of the educational opportunities that came his way. From the Marist Brothers in Athlone he won a scholarship to, and further scholarships at, Summerhill College in Co. Sligo, from where his paternal grandfather had emigrated to Scotland.

On leaving school he joined the Palestrina Choir of the Pro-Cathedral in Dublin whose choirmaster, Vincent O'Brien, entered him for the *Feis Ceoil* of 1903. At nineteen McCormack was the youngest competitor but he won the gold medal. Contrary to what is sometimes thought, James Joyce did not compete against McCormack, but entered the Feis the following year to take the bronze medal. His singing ambitions waned soon after, but he avidly followed McCormack's career. McCormack's name appears in *Ulysses* and in *Finnegan's Wake* he appears as the model for the character Shaun the Post.

In 1904 McCormack headed off to St Louis to appear briefly at the Irish Village at the World Fair; and in the same year, at the tender age of twenty, he made his recording debut in London, exploiting the slaphappy days of the infant recording industry by

recording, and indeed repeating much of his repertoire, for several rival recording companies. Sister companies, the Gramophone & Typewriter Co (later HMV) and Zonophone overcame the difficulty of duplication by issuing Zonophone recordings of McCormack under the pseudonym John O'Reilly, a common enough ploy at the time.

McCormack was to continue to make recordings, both in England and in the States, for the next thirty-eight years, producing one of the most extensive discographies of the century – more than eight hundred records in all. To have a 'McCormack Red Seal record was as usual in the average American home, during the second and third decades of the century,' wrote the American critic Max de Schauensee, 'as father's slippers by the fire or the family ice-cream freezer.' The dates are significant, for McCormack's greatest celebrity occurred between the decline of opera as a contemporary art form, marked approximately by the First World War, and the rise of the crooner, Crosby and Sinatra among them, and American popular music in the thirties.

In 1905 McCormack headed for Milan for training with Vincenzo Sabatini, with whom he had less than a year of formal training. On January 13, 1906 at the Teatro Chiabrera, Savona, he made his opera debut in the title role of Mascagni's *L'Amico Fritz*, by

his own estimation acquitting himself well. He had high hopes for what he might achieve in Italy. On a postcard of the Teatro alla Scala he wrote back to his friend, the baritone J.C. Doyle: 'I hope to sing here before I die'. But auditions at La Scala came to nothing, and further minor engagements seemed to offer little encouragement.

He headed again to London and in a few short months he had established himself on the concert circuit in London and the provinces, and made a hit with Samuel Liddle's new song 'A Farewell' at the Queen's Hall. All the while he had his eye on Covent Garden and wrote with remarkable confidence to J.C. Doyle: 'I did the air of *La Bohème* for them, then they told me that it would depend entirely on my success in *Faust* whether they would give me a three year contract for the big summer season playing second to our mutual ideal

Caruso.' He was then all of twenty-two but not far wide of the mark. On October 15, 1907 in the role of Turridu in *Cavalleria Rusticana* McCormack made his Covent Garden debut, at twenty-three the youngest tenor ever to sing a leading role there. A few weeks later he sang Don Ottavio in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and was, said The Times, 'a great success' noting his 'vocal finish.' This was to be the first of eight consecutive years as a *primo tenore* at Covent Garden, during which the tenor held his own against some of the greatest tenors of the time, including the great Caruso.



John with his accompanist Teddy Schneider.



In the role of Turridu in Pietro Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*.

In 1909 McCormack crossed the Atlantic again, this time to sing at Oscar Hammerstein's Manhattan Opera House. New York took the handsome Irishman to its heart and McCormack took New York's to his. 'The broth of a boy' as the *New York Herald* described him on his debut opposite Luisa Tetrazzini, was an immediate hit. The following year, 1910, he was singing with Melba at the mighty Metropolitan Opera House and in 1911, toured Australia as her leading tenor in the Melba-Williamson Opera Company.

McCormack had quickly established himself as a world-class operatic tenor on three continents (he might have sung in Russia and South America too but for contractual obligations). But there were those who felt his true métier lay elsewhere, among them the American impresario Charles L. Wagner who organized a short concert tour for McCormack in the States in 1912. It proved so successful that the experiment was immediately repeated and thereafter opera appearances became sporadic while the tenor established himself, with extraordinary rapidity, on the concert circuit.

By the middle war years McCormack could fill any auditorium in the States, north or south, to capacity and indeed over capacity. Standing room and seats on stage became the norm. McCormack had become a phenomenon of his times. In New York he would sing up to twelve times in a single season – without repeating a single item, except encores. In Boston, he could sing up to four times in a single week and did so for several years running. No singer today would undertake his workload: for years he would cram eighty and more concerts into a six month season; often singing every other day, with relentless travel schedules by rail and car between.

His final operatic appearances were in Monte Carlo in 1923, when, in addition to singing in *Madama Butterfly*, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* and a single performance of Martha, he created the role of Gritzko in the world premiere on March 17 of Mussorsky's *La Foire de Sorochintzi*. 'A helluva day for an Irishman to create the art of a Russian peasant,' he wrote back to Wagner. The critic, André Corneau, thought so too: 'The romance in Act I "Pourquoi mon triste coeur", he sang divinely with a sigh of exquisite melancholy, tinged with tenderness, quivering with a nostalgic Slavonic charm.' Sadly McCormack recorded nothing from *La Foire de Sorochintzi* nor from Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* in which he had appeared in Monte Carlo with enormous success in 1921.

Corneau's words go far to explain why McCormack became so greatly loved, so much of an icon to Irish emigrants with their troubled history: the exquisite melancholy tinged with tenderness, in a voice quintessentially Irish, in song and ballad he expressed the truth that tears lie at the heart of things. If it was a truth especially felt by the Irish abroad, McCormack's appeal was universal and by no means confined to an Irish fan base, far from it. He sang in Japan and China in 1926, and toured South Africa in 1934 with enormous success.

As a point of interest during the four concerts he gave at the Imperial Theatre, Tokyo, he sang arias by Leonardo Vinci's (c.1690-1732) *Artaserse* and Jacopo Peri's (1561-1633) *Euridice*, as well as arias by Handel from *Alceste* and *Giustino*, none of which found its way onto record. His repertoire of seventeenth and eighteenth century music, and indeed nineteenth century art song, was far greater than his discography would suggest. Such was his popularity in singing Irish and Irish-style ballads, wherever he went, that his other achievements are often overlooked. He included, and finished an evening with ballads, but did not confine his concerts to them.

A tour of Middle Europe in 1923 produced a series of triumphs. With the Berlin Philharmonic conducted by Bruno Walter, McCormack sang the aria from Beethoven's *Christus am Ölberge*. 'I had a great ovation at the close of it,' he wrote to his friend Archbishop Curley. He followed this appearance with a solo recital in Berlin made up largely of

Schubert and Wolf and again triumphed. Denis McSweeney, the tenor's manager on the tour, wrote to Lily McCormack: 'We have witnessed great demonstrations at the Hippodrome [New York], Symphony Hall in Boston, Sydney and elsewhere, but I can truthfully say the ovations in both Berlin and Prague were greater.' In Paris in a concert at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées he sang French songs that included works by Fauré; Paladilhe and George Hué, as well as César Franck and Padre Martini. In 1924 he again toured Britain to acclaim.

The previous year he had been made a Freeman of Dublin. He received an honorary doctorate of music from the National University of Ireland in 1927. In 1928 for services to charity, he was raised to the Papal Peerage and in 1932, resplendent in his papal uniform, it was as John Count McCormack that he sang Cesar Franck's 'Panis Angelicus' at the Pontifical High Mass which closed the Eucharistic Congress, to an audience in Phoenix Park estimated at one million.



John on the set of his film, "Song O' My Heart".





McCormack made one feature film: *Song O' My Heart* (1929) directed by Frank Borzage, notable for its unbroken concert sequence. The nineteen-year-old Maureen O'Sullivan made her film debut in *Song O' My Heart*. But the forty-six year old McCormack, still handsome if a trifle overweight, was adamant that he would not play the screen lover, nor did he. In a story line largely made up as the film went along, Maureen O'Sullivan played the role of Eileen, one of the children of the hero's childhood sweetheart Mary O'Brien. The film had charm, but probably on account of its lack of love interest failed to make money. McCormack was paid \$500,000 for six weeks work.

He sang in America until 1937 and made a final tour of Britain and Ireland culminating in farewells at the Theatre Royal Dublin on October 8 and at the Royal Albert Hall on November 27 1938. He came out of retirement to sing for the Red Cross in Britain during the Second World War and continued to make records until 1942 when the development of emphysema made further singing impossible. He retired to the Shelbourne Hotel, Dublin, then to 'Glena' in Booterstown, Co. Dublin. He died there on September 16, 1945. He was sixty-one. In accordance with his wishes he was buried in his Papal uniform, in Dean's Grange Cemetery.

While it was as an opera singer that McCormack first made an international career for himself, he was no actor. When clothed in an opera role he had a sometimes awkward and inhibited deportment on stage, which he never overcame. By contrast on the concert platform by himself, as himself, McCormack was the very soul of warmth and genial charm, who could hold an audience in the palm of his hand as few other singers could. This is how one eyewitness remembered him: 'He just went and leaned up against the piano and, if he'd been in his own parlor at home, he couldn't have been more simple. It seemed as though we were all one big family, and he

was just talking to us, quietly, with his head on one side, and his eyes closed, telling us fairy stories as they came into his mind, making us smile and sigh by turns, weaving spells about us, and sometimes wringing our hearts by the pathos of his tones.'

Much has been made of the importance of McCormack's diction, which was indeed exemplary, but he had a feel for words that went far beyond merely good diction. You can hardly think of a McCormack song without also thinking of the words of it: 'though years have stretched their weary lengths between, I hear you calling me...' He could converse on a musical line, combining effortlessly the rhythms of speech with the implicit rhythms of music, resolving the inherent conflict between the two as if there was no conflict to resolve. His ability to communicate with an audience brought with it a rare sense of intimacy. More than one commentator has remarked on the illusion that the tenor was singing to them personally, no matter how large the auditorium. The same intimacy is apparent on record: McCormack transcends the limitations of sound recording and reaches out to his unseen audience in a heartfelt and personal way.

His discography of some eight hundred discs stand testimony to his remarkable versatility and musicianship. During the years of his prime he possessed a voice of great purity from top to bottom, which was combined with a consummate vocal technique. He was among the least self indulgent of singers, whose arching legato line, exquisite sense of rubato and perfectly judged portamenti and pianissimi were not employed to draw attention to himself, but rather served to point up and to synthesise the words and music. He was one of the most compelling vocalists of the twentieth century.

**Gordon T. Ledbetter**

Author of *The Great Irish Tenor*  
(published by TownHouse)



# Anthony Kearns

*Anthony Kearns was once asked, "What do you do when you aren't singing?"  
He replied without hesitation, "When I'm not singin'... I sing. It's what I do!"*



Anthony Kearns is a true lyric tenor. He has incredible agility and flexibility of voice and the ability to colour notes gracefully and beautifully. Kearns has a deep love of opera and a devotion to the genre, and feels that French and Italian operas best suit his voice.

Whether in the realm of the classics or the traditional music of Ireland, the power and clarity of his voice expresses great truth and rich conviction. Anthony Kearns is truly the consummate performer, with unlimited potential and universal appeal. He clearly shows "promise of his imminent recognition among the next generation of the world's greatest tenors." (Dr. Dennis Crabb, Director of

Music, Peninsula College) "If he can maintain the high musical standards and impassioned singing, he may well become the Tenor of our Times." (Reviewer, Peter Lansdowne)

Anthony's interest in music began at about the age of four when he found his mother's button accordion and began "bashing away at it," eventually sounding out the tunes he heard on a daily basis at home. He perfected the double row black dot, and moved on to the larger instrument, all the while toying with the mouth organ and the spoons, which gave him a keen sense of rhythm. He is a self-taught, fairly accomplished musician.

Kearns began singing at an early age and found that he was blessed with the natural lilt necessary to sing traditional Sean Nós music. As a youth, Kearns sang in various All-Ireland singing festivals (Ceol an Geimhridh, Feis Ceoils, Readoiri, Fleadh Cheoil na hEireann), winning on a regular basis. After entering the F.C.J. Bunclody Secondary School, he joined the orchestra, playing trombone, and eventually became the resident singer, singing at all the Masses and in school shows. He entered any and all available competitions during his school years, winning seemed to come quite easily for the young Kearns.

As an adult, Anthony continued entering and winning singing competitions all over Ireland, including the prestigious Dermot Troy Trophy for

oratorio in 1995 and 1996, the Best Male Singer at the 1995 Waterford International Festival of Light Opera, and he reached the top at the ESB Veronica Dunne International Singing Competition in 1999.

The turning point in Anthony's career was in 1993. While working in sales in Dun Laoghaire, he heard of a contest: "Ireland's Search for a Tenor," in conjunction with The Central Bank's release of a new 10-pound note or a tenner. He sang "Danny Boy" down the phone; hitch hiked to Dublin for the finals, and won the competition singing "The Impossible Dream" and "Danny Boy" as an encore. Kearns was the only untrained singer competing! After winning the competition, Anthony studied for three years with Ireland's renowned voice teacher, Veronica Dunne, at the Leinster School of Music. Veronica had been a judge for the 1993 competition and knew instantly that this young man had The Voice. According to Dunne, "I insisted he get the prize and began training him." While at the Leinster School, Anthony met Patrick Healy, a well known repetiteur.

He worked with Patrick as his voice coach for several years; Mr. Healy is currently his accompanist. Upon leaving the Leinster School of Music, Anthony moved to Cardiff to attend The College of Music in Wales, where he was studying when he received the call from the Irish Tenors. Anthony has toured Germany, Italy, Ireland, and the United States to an enthusiastic response. He and The Irish Tenors have produced eight CDs to date, which have sold millions of copies, and have completed several successful tours of the U.S., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

In his early days, Kearns performed in several productions in Ireland as a chorus member, which lead to roles as: Macduff in Verdi's *Macbeth* and Alfredo in Verdi's *La Traviata*. Anthony has

repeatedly sung lead tenor in *The Irish Ring*, a production encompassing three Irish operas, and brought it to the U.S. in September 2002. That same year, he sang the role of Fenton in an Italian production of Verdi's *Falstaff* performed in Tuscany. Spring 2005 found him singing Rinuccio in Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*, and in April 2006 Kearns sang the lead in *Faust*, both for Opera Ireland.

Kearns has sung at the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin, and performed with the National Symphony Orchestra. He often performs at the National Concert Hall in Dublin and Limerick. Anthony was also guest soloist for the Boston Pops. When touring with The Irish Tenors, Anthony performs in many of the most prestigious venues in America, among them: Carnegie Hall, Radio City Music Hall, Madison Square Garden, Boston's Fleet Pavilion, The Hollywood Bowl, on the grounds of the Capitol on the Fourth of July, and again at the Capitol for the funeral of President Reagan.

For all his devotion to the opera, Anthony Kearns has a deep, abiding love for the music of his beloved homeland. He has perhaps the largest repertoire of Irish music of anyone living, and delights in presenting it to the world. "I take great pride delivering these songs of our people all over the world," says Anthony. From Irish opera to character songs, from haunting songs of emigration to the stirring music of the troubles, Anthony Kearns sings Irish music like no one else. He is the true Irish Tenor, cut from the same piece of linen as John McCormack.

## Elizabeth Woods



Elizabeth studied French, Spanish and International Marketing at Dublin City University before pursuing her singing studies in Italy thanks to a scholarship from the Istituto Italiano di Cultura at the Scuola Musicale di Milano. She obtained a diploma in solo acting from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and took master classes at the Britten-Pears School for Advanced Musical Studies, where she studied with Dame Joan Sutherland, Mo. Richard Bonyng and Dianne Furlano.

As a chorister Elizabeth has sung with Opera Ireland, Scottish Opera and The Royal Opera Covent Garden. With Wexford Festival Opera, she has performed the role of Sophie in the Opera Scenes production of *Werther*. She was awarded the Gerard Arnhold Bursary at the 1998 Wexford Festival where she sang Adele in *die Fledermaus*. She returned to Wexford in 1999 to sing the role of Cesnikova in *Strasny Dwor*.

For Opera Ireland, Elizabeth has performed The First Bridesmaid in *The Marriage Of Figaro*, The High Priestess in *Aida* and The Woman convict in *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*. She sang the role of Adina in *L'Elisir D'Amore* for Opera Theatre Company. Other roles for Opera Theatre Company include Clorinda, La Cenerentola, and Ms Catchall in the recent production of *Vera of Las Vegas* by Daron Hagen and Paul Muldoon. For the Anna Livia International Opera Festival Elizabeth performed the role of Giorgetta in Puccini's *Il Tabarro*. For Garden Opera, she performed the role of Michaela in *Carmen* and for both Lyric Opera and RTE Theatre Nights, Hanna Glawari in *The Merry Widow*.

Elizabeth has appeared in numerous recitals throughout the world: in the Al Bustan Festival in the Lebanon, at the Aldeburgh Festival and at the RDS Concert Hall in Dublin for the Friends of Wexford Festival annual recital. Elizabeth has sung The Messiah, Bruckner's Mass in D Minor and Gounod's St Cecilia Mass with Dun Laoghaire Choral Society and Merab and The Witch of Endor in Handel's Saul with Enchiriadis Treis and the Orchestra of St. Cecilia. Other projects have included "Theatre Nights" for RTE in The National concert Hall and a recording of Joyce songs for Lyric FM with the National Concert Orchestra of Ireland.

This summer Elizabeth was one of 14 singers to attend the opera program at The Westchester Academy, New York, with Ms Renata Scotto. As a result Elizabeth has been offered coaching at the Metropolitan with Mr Ken Noda, assistant to James Levine. Future engagements include the role of Fiordilige for the Garden Opera Company. Elizabeth is currently studying with Evelyn Dowling.

## Giuseppe Deligia



Ever since teaching himself to play 'when the Saints go marching in' on his toy Bontempi keyboard at the age of four Giuseppe has retained a passion for music. At the age of thirteen he was employed directly by Bontempi, to demonstrate their keyboards in the largest musical emporium in Sardinia. Unfortunately, due to family circumstances he was not able to pursue a musical career at that time. Instead he trained as a chef, coming to England in 1991.

Giuseppe worked in several Italian Restaurants around England where he was known as the singing chef, entertaining the customers with Neapolitan classics and Sardinian folk songs. Whilst working in the kitchen his hand was severely crushed in an accident and effectively ended his career as a chef. Singing was his solace and he entered and won a singing competition, which gave him the confidence to join the local musical society taking the lead role in several musicals.

Giuseppe has raised thousands of pounds for charity through his singing. He recorded a charity CD to raise money for the Cumbrian foot and mouth farmers. Even Prince Charles bought a copy. He also organised a concert of Italian music, which raised £6,000 for the young victims of the earthquake in San Giuliano Di Puglia, Italy in December 2002.

Giuseppe's wife entered him into a TV music competition, 'Operatunity' on Channel 4, for the chance to receive training at the English National Opera in 2003. Of the 3,000 applicants who auditioned Giuseppe reached the semi finals. He saw his very first opera and took part in a number of workshops at the London Coliseum. Fired on by this experience he was determined to become an opera singer and sing at the most prestigious venues in the world. To achieve his dream he had to track down a teacher to train him, which led him to Dr Robert Alderson in Manchester who encouraged him to audition for the DIT Conservatory of Music. He was immediately picked for the role of Don Alfonso for Mozart *Così Fan Tutte*, and with this he was taken to America to represent the DIT at the University of Connecticut. Since he started at the DIT in September he has successfully auditioned to sing with the chorus for Opera Ireland productions of *Traviata*, *Faust* and *Cenerentola*.

He will be taking part in Gaetano Donizetti's *Don Gregorio* for the Wexford Festival Opera. He also won various competitions within the DIT including the "Messiah Trophy" for Oratorio or Sacred Solo Singing presented by Dr Veronica Dunne. He recently took the decision to end his studies at the DIT and is now undergoing vocal training with Ireland's foremost vocal coach, Dr Veronica Dunne.

# Icon of an Age

*Gala Tribute Concert, 23rd September 2006*

*Starring*  
Anthony Kearns (Tenor)

*Featuring*  
Elizabeth Woods (Soprano), Giuseppe Deligia (Baritone), Patrick Healy (Pianist)  
Gordon Ledbetter (Compere) Robert Houlihan (Conductor)  
The Irish Film Orchestra

## Concert Programme

- “Intermezzo” *Cavalleria Rusticana (Mascagni)* – Orchestra
- “Salut, Demeure Chaste et Pure” *Faust (Gounod)* – Anthony Kearns, Tenor
- “Una Furtiva Lagrima” *L’elisir D’amore (Donizetti)* – Anthony Kearns, Tenor
- “Parigi O Cara” *La Traviatta (Verdi)*  
– Anthony Kearns, Tenor & Elizabeth Woods, Soprano
- “Ebben, N’andro Lontana” *La Wally (Alfredo Catalani)* – Elizabeth Woods, Soprano
- “Au Fond Du Temple Saint” *Les Pecheur De Perles (Bizet)*  
– Anthony Kearns, Tenor & Giuseppe Deligia, Baritone
- “Avant De Quitter Ces Lieux” *Faust (Gounod)* – Giuseppe Deligia, Baritone
- “Panis Angelicus” *(Cesar Franck)* – Anthony Kearns, Tenor & Elizabeth Woods, Soprano
- “Ave Maria” *(Bach, Gounod)* – Anthony Kearns, Tenor

## Interval



- “Fairy Story by the Fire” – John McCormack in “Song O’ My Heart”
- “To the Children” *(Rachmaninov)* – Anthony Kearns, Tenor & Patrick Healy, Piano
- “Where’re You Walk” *Semele (George Frideric Handel)* – Anthony Kearns, Tenor & Patrick Healy, Piano
- “Angels Guard Thee” *Jocelyn (Benjamin Godard)* – Elizabeth Woods, Soprano
- “Plaisir D’amour” *(Giovanni Martini)* – Giuseppe Deligia, Baritone
- “Kitty My Love Will You Marry Me” – John McCormack in “Song O’ My Heart”
- “Macushla” *(Rowe & MacMorrough)* – Anthony Kearns, Tenor
- “She Moved Thro’ The Fair” (Trad.) – Elizabeth Woods, Soprano
- “The Minstrel Boy” *(Thomas Moore)* – Giuseppe Deligia, Baritone
- “I Hear You Calling Me” *(Harford & Marshall)* – Anthony Kearns, Tenor
- “Ireland, Mother Ireland” *(P.J. O’Reilly)* – Anthony Kearns, Tenor

Footage from “Song O’ My Heart” courtesy of TwentiethCentury Fox. All rights reserved.



## Patrick Healy



Patrick Healy is a well-known repetiteur and accompanist who has coached countless music students, and toured the world as an accompanist to great artists over the past fifty years. He has been involved in music his entire life, beginning at three years of age when he began studying piano. During these early years, he particularly enjoyed playing the waltzes of the Strauss family. While attending the Jesuit school, Belvedere, Healy developed a life-long love of the work of Gilbert and Sullivan. He attended the Royal Irish Academy of Music and University College in Dublin. He also studied in Rome.

Patrick spent twelve years with the English National Opera in London as a repetiteur and accompanist. He has appeared often on the BBC and has often served, as a radio host on RTE. Patrick is also known for his recordings and performances in the realm of Irish Folk Music.

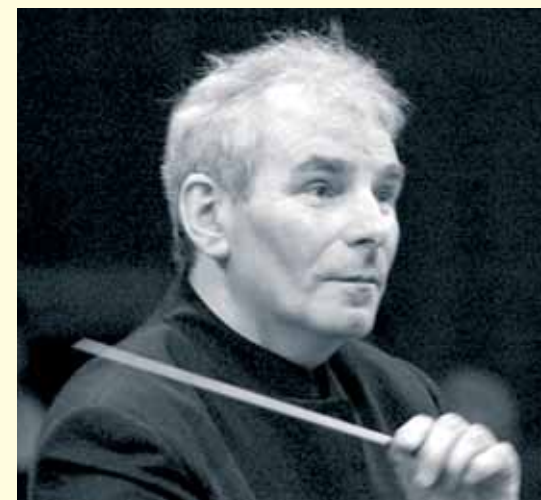
Patrick Healy is considered an authority on Gilbert and Sullivan and produces and performs in annual Gilbert and Sullivan productions at the National Concert Hall in Dublin. These concerts are very popular and anticipated with great enthusiasm! Patrick's well-developed charm and wit is evident in these light-hearted, hilarious evenings. Anthony Kearns has performed in these productions with Patrick from time to time.

Patrick's association with Anthony Kearns began while the young tenor was studying at the Leinster School of Music with Dr. Veronica Dunne, where Healy served as Anthony's voice coach. Their friendship flourished, as well as a mutual respect and appreciation of each other's talents. Currently, Mr. Healy serves as Anthony's accompanist on all his solo tours, and has done so for over ten years. Patrick is responsible for finding the lovely older pieces, which Anthony includes in his repertoire.

In Kearns Solo Concerts, Anthony refers to Patrick as "the comedy relief for the evening." His witty repartee throws audiences into gales of laughter and thunderous applause during the tenor's intervals! He has been compared to Jack Benny in his droll, dry, delightful delivery. He charms his audience and is remembered as quite the gentleman.

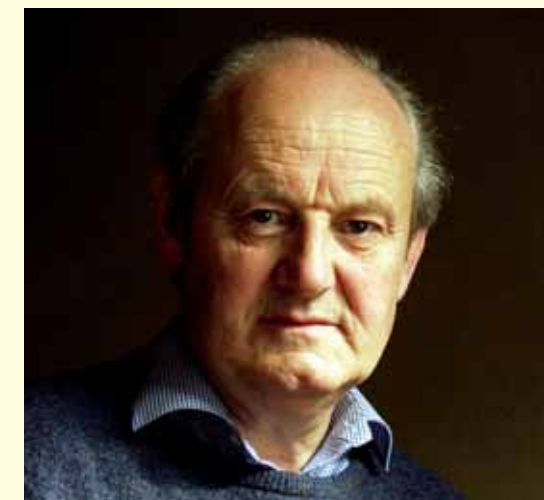
During the summer of 2002, Healy wrote a beautiful song for Kearns, which is quickly becoming Anthony's signature song: "Hills of Home." It combines a beautifully crafted lyric and a haunting melody into a sweetly sentimental song of Irish emigration and is perfectly suited to Anthony's voice.

## Robert Houlihan      Gordon Ledbetter



Robert Houlihan was born in Killarney. At sixteen he began his music studies in the Army School of Music, Dublin, before further study at the Municipal College of Music and under George Hurst at the Canford Summer School. In 1980 he won 2nd prize at the International Competition for Young Conductors in Besançon. He was awarded scholarships from the French Government and the Arts Council of Ireland to study contemporary music in Europe and conducting with Leon Barzin in Paris. He won further awards in 1983 in the Hungarian Television International Competition, followed by many engagements in Hungary, Romania and Czechoslovakia. From 1990 to 1993 he was principal conductor of the State Philharmonic of Tirgu Mures, Romania and from 1992 to 1997 principal conductor of the Savaria Symphony Orchestra in Hungary.

In addition to his conducting appearances with orchestras in eastern and central Europe, as well as London and Amsterdam, he teaches in Ireland, France, Holland, Portugal, Hungary and every August he assists George Hurst at Canford Summer Music School, England.



Gordon T. Ledbetter has long had a passion for opera and the early history of sound recording, with a special interest in John McCormack. He is the author of two books on the Irish tenor, with his latest "The Great Irish Tenor" soon to be released in paperback by TownHouse Press.

For Zampano Productions, he has written and presented a documentary on the life of McCormack that makes up part of the DVD box set, "John McCormack, Icon Of An Age – The Anthology". The set includes his introduction to the hitherto unknown letters of McCormack to baritone, J.C. Doyle, published for the first time. Included are four CDs encompassing some of McCormack's best recorded repertoire with a commentary by Gordon, along with four unpublished recordings and five by his children.

Gordon has broadcast extensively on Radio Éireann, Lyric FM and the BBC and he lectures frequently in the United States. He wrote and presented a documentary for BBC Radio 4 on black contralto, Marian Anderson, which won a Sony best classical music programme of the year award.

## The John McCormack Statue

*John McCormack was a very proud Irishman and had a deep affection for his capital city, Dublin. In 1924, he was made a Freeman of Dublin, the first to be awarded the honour after independence. On receiving the award he remarked, 'A free Ireland, a free Dublin, has made me a Freeman'. It was one of his proudest honours in a life blessed by many. So it gives us great pleasure to announce plans for the erection of a statue to the tenor in his beloved Dublin. One of Ireland's finest sculptors, Elizabeth O'Kane has been awarded the commission. The statue will be based on this striking photograph and will be unveiled in the autumn of 2007.*

*Patrons of the Statue and Documentary,  
"The People's Tenor":*

Anglo Irish, Allianz, Bloxham, Bwg, C&C,  
Cosgrave Developments, Ellier Developments  
French Estates, Green Isle, IIU, One 51,  
Maplewood Homes, NCB, Richmond Marketing  
Louis Copeland, Brendan Gilmore  
& Martin Foods Equipment.

We have also commissioned a portrait of John McCormack which will be auctioned along with a leather bound commemorative book containing the signatures of the representative players from both teams that have appeared at the 36th Ryder Cup at the K Club, as part of the fundraising efforts for the statue.



## Elizabeth O'Kane



Elizabeth is mainly self-taught. She works regularly with groups of eminent artists in Dublin. Last summer she studied Figurative Sculpture at the Florence Academy of Art in Italy and previously studied sculpture at the Slade Summer School in London. She has a first class honours Diploma from UCD in the History of European Painting and finds this a constant source of inspiration.

She has lectured in portrait sculpture to the Friends of the National Gallery of Ireland and at the Institute of Art, Design and Technology in Dun Laoghaire, Dublin.

She exhibits regularly in the Royal Hibernian Academy and Royal Ulster Academy Annual Exhibitions and with a number of galleries in Dublin and around Ireland. She works to commission for corporate and private collections and sells her sculptures in limited editions within Ireland, the UK, Europe, America and New Zealand. Recent commissions include portrait busts for the new BreastCheck Unit at St. Vincent's Hospital and for Belfast City Hall. She was also commissioned to make a sculpture for New York-New York Hotel Casino, Las Vegas!

She welcomes clients to her studio in the old IDA Tower on Pearse Street. Her work can be viewed on her website at [www.elizabethokane.com](http://www.elizabethokane.com)

Elizabeth is a sculptor and painter, originally from Ballymena, Co. Antrim, now based in Dublin. Originally a translator of French and Spanish, she changed careers eight years ago to devote herself to a future in art, initially working as an interior designer and then full time as a sculptor and painter after winning the Oireachtas/CAST Sculpture Prize at the Annual Oireachtas Exhibition in Dublin in 2000.

Her sculpture work is figurative. It follows the realist tradition and is representational in content. She works in clay and wax, and casts her work in bronze. Elizabeth is especially drawn to the art of portraiture, capturing the sitter's personality and expression. She is keenly interested in anatomy, depicting both the human figure and animals in different poses and in movement. Her sculptures are elegant and tactile with an overriding calmness throughout.



## Words from the Promoter



*Peter & Martin Dwan at The Royal Albert Hall, London 2005.*

As with most people attending the concert tonight a parent first introduced me to John McCormack's recordings. In my case it was my father, who also happens to have a tenor voice. Dad would often sing the songs and play the records but as a young child I showed little interest in the music.

As a child I spent many a summer at my grandparent's farm in County Laois, and whilst travelling down we would always pass through Monasterevin. On one occasion as we crossed the bridge in the heart of the town, we caught a glimpse of a massive house fronting on to the River Barrow. I was mesmerised. I'd never seen anything like it before and on asking who lived there, Dad replied, "Sure that was John McCormack's house". John McCormack had finally got my attention. I was

mightily impressed and needless to say I wanted to know more about the man who lived in the big house. Sadly, my interest waned with remarkable speed, for his crackling recordings had little appeal to a young lad. So it would take me over two decades to rediscover John McCormack, and the second time round I really came to appreciate the talent of the man and the enormity of his musical achievements.

It all started in late 2004 when I found an old gramophone player in my parent's attic and low and behold, what was in it but some old 78's by the man himself. One of the records was "The Old House". Although I had heard the song sung many a time over the years it took on an incredible poignancy in the hands of McCormack. I was to learn later that

Frederick O'Connor wrote the song specifically for John's farewell tour. Knowing this, it dawned on me how truly heartfelt the words were and their significance to the singer in the twilight of his career. I was hooked.

With my renewed interest in John, I proceeded to devour whatever available books there were. One of these books was, "The Great Irish Tenor" by Gordon Ledbetter. It was a great read complimented further by wonderful photographs. I soon tracked Gordon down and over a coffee we discussed the possibility of making a documentary. We discussed all facets of John's career but with Gordon it was also with a befuddled look. He couldn't understand "why a young man like yourself would be interested in old 78's?" But I was and I've even bought a few on Ebay, but that's another story.

Concluding our meeting we were in agreement on one thing and that was the remarkable neglect of McCormack's memory in Ireland. To put things into context, John was a great friend of James Joyce and in fact persuaded Joyce to enter the Feis Ceoil in 1904, the year after John had won his gold medal for tenor. The story goes that Joyce would have won the gold but for his refusal to do the sight-reading test. With this disappointment Joyce focused his energies, as we all know, in the field of literature. Today James Joyce is heralded as one of the greatest writers of the 20th century, with an annual celebration of his life and most famous work. And rightly so! But if one is to consider the impact of the artist on the public consciousness, McCormack is in a league of his own.

So we set out to make a documentary on The Great Irish Tenor. Sadly our attempts to secure funding for the project were futile. No one was interested. McCormack was indeed a footnote in history. But fate had dealt us a cherubic faced saviour, my Dad. The Cardinal, as he's known to his closest friends, or

Peter to the rest, has as I alluded to earlier in the piece been for many years a huge admirer of John's. Being a tenor himself, he aspired to follow John, not to be him I might add, but to pursue a recording career and possibly grace some of the world stages. Unfortunately, with a large family to provide for Dad's commitments lay elsewhere. But the documentary gave him the opportunity to honour his idol and with much gusto he set about making his contribution and a most appreciated and significant one at that.

When newly discovered McCormack letters emerged on the market, Dad didn't hesitate. "Those letters have got to be in the documentary", he remarked and he was as good as his word. He bought them. I now knew that this wasn't some interesting diversion for him. He was fully committed and determined that our documentary was going to be the definitive chronicle of his hero. Whether we have achieved this is for others to decide. But Dad and his Irish enthusiasm (a phrase also used to describe McCormack) would often get the better of him. One could say we had our creative differences, father knows best and all that, but filmmaking is a collaborative process and in the end I believe we have produced a work that is mindful of that. For that reason I think we have something that we can all be very proud of.

The McCormack letters are remarkable in their content. They were written to J.C. Doyle, a well known figure in Dublin musical circles, some years McCormack's senior and something of a mentor to the young tenor. What makes these letters particularly special is that although many great singers have put pen to paper and registered their thoughts on fellow singers, most of these accounts were made later in life with the passage of time and in many cases self censor. Not so in the case of McCormack. Some of these correspondences are remarkable for their honesty and immediate

reflections. They were written within hours of seeing performances and have the unguarded abandon that is so associated with youth, with comments about many of the most celebrated singers of the time, Caruso, Melba, Tetrazzini and Battistini among them. They also provide a first-hand account of the tenor's rise from obscurity to international fame. This letter dated 13th October 1905 is noted for McCormack's comments on Melba, the greatest soprano of the day, whom he would perform with in later years. Although a professional respect but a personal loathing would note their relationship for one another, McCormack had talent and even Melba had to acknowledge that. In fact she invited John to Australia as her leading tenor and by all accounts he outshone her. One wonders if Melba would have taken the young Irishman to Australia had she come across this particular letter:

Blue that characteris d Mel. Cielo d Natica  
he got!! Jots aside it was heavenly. I  
heard Tenatello on Friday night in London  
in Ballo in Maschera, he is a lovely  
singer but the voice appears heavy, none  
of the brilliancy of Caruso, whilst Melba on  
Saturday was the greatest disappointment I  
ever got. She sang the Bohème & when  
she came to the gulf I thought I  
would be put out, I laughed so much.  
Dramatic is then he is glorious, I

In the months that followed our documentary took us to New York and London, to the great opera houses, The Metropolitan and Covent Garden and also to John McCormack's home from home, The Royal Albert Hall. Filming in these legendary venues really drove home the magnitude of John's achievements and it made us think about how we could mark his life and musical legacy. A concert was mooted and before we knew it we were on the road to mounting this special event.

2006 marks the 25th anniversary of the National Concert Hall and it also happens to mark the centenary of John McCormack's operatic debut in Savona, Italy, so it is fitting that we are here tonight to celebrate two great Irish institutions. John even performed here in this very building, thus adding to the sense of occasion.



Royal Opera House, Covent Garden in the early 1900's.

We all are acutely aware of how difficult it is to pursue a career in the arts. Opportunities are limited, as is funding, so on this special night it is wonderful to be able to announce a new bursary in honour of John McCormack. The Feis Ceoil, Europe's longest running music competition and the platform on which John McCormack launched his career will administer the bursary. IAWS GROUP Plc, one of Ireland's leading companies has made the magnificent gesture to fund the award over the next ten years to a value in excess of €100,000. A wonderful tribute to the great tenor I'm sure you'll all agree. Finally, we have also with the assistance of the John McCormack Society of Ireland commissioned one of Ireland's finest sculptors, Elizabeth O'Kane to produce a statue of the singer, which will be unveiled later in 2007. All profits from this event will be donated to this fund.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank our sponsors, The Sunday Independent, IAWS GROUP Plc and Élan Corporation for their support in making this concert a reality. Special thanks must also be extended to John Kearns, for his invaluable assistance in producing this show, to Paul O'Mahony for the striking set design and to Francie Hughes for being such a patient music librarian. To the marketing/design team at IAWS, Lara Smith, Rachel Magan and Eoin Tierney, I thank them for their boundless enthusiasm and wonderful advertising copy.

Tonight we are blessed by the presence of some of Ireland's finest musical talent, Anthony Kearns, Elizabeth Woods, Patrick Healy, Robert Houlihan and members of The Irish Film Orchestra. Of course I also have to acknowledge our Italian guest,



Giuseppe Deligia. Following in the footsteps of his fellow baritone and countryman Mario Sammarco, it is wonderful to have a link to the land of song, as John McCormack described Italy. I thank all for their passion, faith and support for this concert. To my friends on the documentary, Gordon Ledbetter (writer & presenter), Eric Courtney (director of photography), Hugh Fox (sound recordist) and Kevin Cooney (editing supervisor) who struggled on manfully with the task in hand when any sane person would have walked. I also have to extend my gratitude to our many other sponsors, for their steadfast support for our documentary and the proposed statue to John McCormack. To Paul Brock, the John McCormack Society of Ireland and the family of John McCormack I thank them for their support. I thank also our other contributors from far and wide, Robert White, Brian Zeger and George Jellinek in

New York and John Steane and Dr. Michael Henstock in Britain. It is also important that I acknowledge the wonderful support offered by Judith Woodworth and her team here at the National Concert Hall. They have been nothing short of fantastic and it is easy to see why the concert hall is such a successful and treasured venue.

Finally, my heartfelt thanks and appreciation goes out to my family and to my Dad, The Cardinal. Without his encouragement and support this night would never have come to fruition. Thankfully it has and it is the culmination of a collective dream to celebrate the life of a great Irishman, John Count McCormack.

**Martin Dwan**  
Zampano Productions



Above: Gordon Ledbetter, John Steane, Dr. Michael Henstock & Peter Dwan, London 2005. Facing page: John Count McCormack in his Papal regalia.



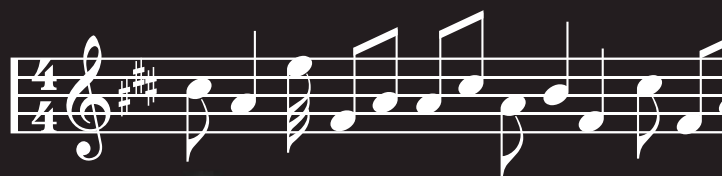


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Vocal Bursary 2007



The IAWS GROUP plc is pleased to announce the launch of a new annual Vocal Bursary worth €10,000 to honour the legendary Count John McCormack and to support Ireland's emerging young vocal talent.

This prize will be awarded to the winner of the new competition which will take place in 2007. Details of the competition will be announced at a special tribute concert to be held at the National Concert Hall on the 24th of September 2006.



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