

● MEATH CHRONICLE

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inspire

Dunboyne film score
composer Ciaran
Hope on making it in
Hollywood

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the audacity of Hope

US-based Meath native Ciarán Hope has spent the last few years making a reputation for himself as a Hollywood film composer, having originally landed in LA as a Fulbright Scholar. The Dunboyne man has worked on movies such as 'The Insider' and on several episodes of 'Buffy The Vampire Slayer' and, on a recent visit home, spoke to *John Donohoe* about how his career path led him to score movies and why he is thrilled to have won a contest to write a signature tune for Navan's Solstice Arts Centre

Ciarán Hope grew up with music all around him. He was always subconsciously listening to notes and musical compositions and, by the age of three or four, had developed a musical ear, even though he didn't know it then.

His mother, Kitty Dalligan, is a music teacher, and as a carefree youngster, Ciarán sat listening to her giving lessons as he waited for her in the Conservatory of Music in Dublin, unintentionally taking it all in.

"My mother wasn't planning to turn us all into musicians," he says. "It was just always there, on the sidelines. We were involved in lots of other activities in Dunboyne - football, swimming, other sports and school activities."

It was the same during his teens, Ciarán says, but then, he finally started to play clarinet, and discovered he could play, and play it well, to such an extent that he enjoyed it.

It wasn't his first career choice, but when he did eventually turn his hand to composing music, he began experiencing considerable recognition and success. "I'm not going to be the next Beethoven or anything," he says. "I write music for a living - it's more commercial than classical."

Ciarán was recently home in Dunboyne from his Los Angeles base for a few weeks, and amongst other things on his trip home, met with the management of the Solstice Arts Centre in Navan, where he had won the international competition to compose the signature tune for the centre. Most of his work in LA involves producing scores for

films, through his company, Pangea Music.

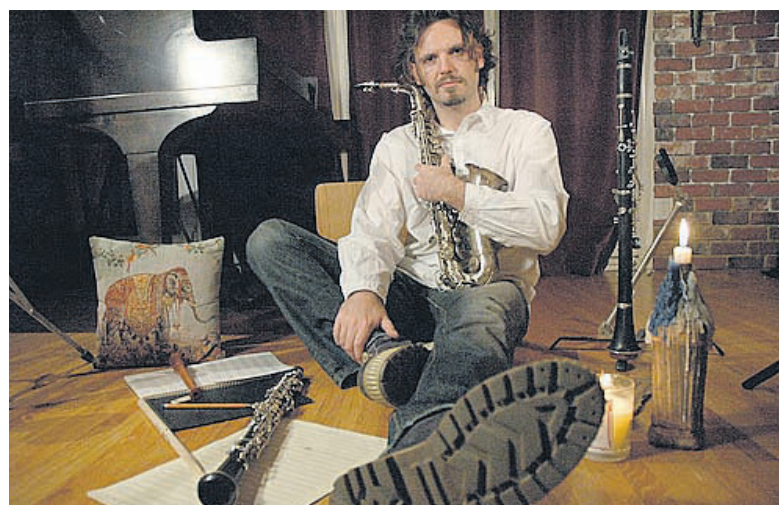
"While I originally wanted to study music, I decided to do engineering in college," he says. "At the time, when Ireland was just beginning to boom, it seemed like a better career choice."

While studying engineering, Ciarán also kept on his interest in music on a part-time basis. "I began to study composition and clarinet at the same time as I was studying engineering. During the summers, I started going to Prague to study under Professor Ladislav Kubik."

Professor Kubik was professor of composition at the Florida State University where he developed a vibrant composition studio, as proven by numerous awards of his students in various national and international competitions. Prior to joining the FSU faculty, he taught at both the Prague Conservatory and Charles University of Prague, and the University of South Florida in Tampa.

Since 1994, he has been president of the Czech-American Summer Music Institute and artistic director and lecturer of the yearly CASMI International Summer Programme in Composition in Prague. "He knew his craft very well and took me out of my box," Ciarán says. "I was only a runt of a composer not knowing what I was doing, but he made me realise that there are no rules and at the age of 20 or 21, all my preconceptions were broken wide open."

By the time Ciarán had finished his engineering degree, he was contemplating going back to do a degree in music. "At this stage,



I had no particular career path in mind, but I felt I needed to go and study music and do what I needed to do."

He met with Dr Eibhlís Farrell, the head of the DIT Conservatory of Music, and began studying post-grad music with her. He continued in Trinity College, and in 1998, received a masters degrees in audio acoustics and electro-acoustic composition.

After winning the IMRO prize at the Irish National Composer of the Future contest and the Contemporary Music Cup at Europe's oldest classical music contest as well as

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being a finalist at the International Clarinet Association's Composition Contest and the International Song for Peace Contest, Ciaran was awarded the first ever Fulbright Scholarship in film scoring, which led to a reunion with his old Prague professor, Ladislav Kubik, at Florida State University.

Like every other business, jobs come from what you do and who you know.

"It's not like auditioning an actor for a movie role," Ciaran says. "If the moviemakers take on a composer for a movie, and then suddenly find when they hear the material, it's not what they want, they don't have the time to turn around and get somebody else. They have to be sure of who they're getting."

In the States, he began building up a network of contacts and connections, and began working on short small-money student films, and low to medium budget movies with independent companies. "I tried to work on a better project than before as each year went by - and making a few extra dollars!"

When working on a film, Ciaran will initially view the images and discuss with the director and team what they have in mind for the musical accompaniment, such as at what parts of the film it's needed or what type of music is suitable.

"It's not always what I might want at first. Then I start writing a piece to the structure given, and put the image and music together on computer and watch them both together. If the team is happy, then you bring in live players into the studio and record them. Or if it's a bigger budget, an orchestra is used. It all has to be done in a few weeks.

"With most of the scores I'm doing at the moment, I also contribute a song or two. The last score I had to write was an Italian mafia Godfather-style one with a mixture of Italian aria, and a polka!"

A big break for Ciaran came in 1999, with the Golden Globe award-winning 'The Insider', starring Russell Crowe, Al Pacino and Christopher Plummer. The composer needed assistance, and Ciaran helped in the orchestration. His job was to add the strings - someone else would add brass.

He has worked on a couple of episodes of 'Buffy The Vampire Slayer' and even got to play a small part in one scene, playing guitar, which he enjoyed greatly. Award-winning romantic comedy 'Screw Cupid' was one of Ciaran's most recent projects, and he worked on 'It's A Guy Thing', released in 2003.

Over the past year, he has been working on an internal project with Disney, while a major film project is in the offing involving Peter O'Toole.

During his recent visit home, Ciaran was involved with a Temple Bar-based company, ImaginationGYM, on a music-based education project. ImaginationGYM is based around a series of audio adventures that are designed to stimulate a listener's imagination and intelligences and to integrate the left and right hemispheres of the brain which encourages whole brain learning.

"I am their audio director and take care of the music and audio mixes including sound effects and dialogue," he explains. He also gave an open master class on film music at the Dundalk Institute of Technology.

As the being winning composer in the Solstice Arts Centre's 'Solstice Music Com-



mission' competition, his composition, entitled 'Solstice', will be the new signature tune for the centre. It is intended that this piece be played in the arts centre before performances, at launches, exhibition openings and other publicity events.

The commission invited composers worldwide to submit proposals of pieces of music three to four minutes long. It will be premiered in Navan later this year.

"It has been a lot of fun to write the commission and, hopefully, I've created a piece of magic that stands the tests of time," Ciaran adds.

In preparation for writing the piece, he carried out a lot of reading on an array of topics including Tara, Newgrange and the Battle of the Boyne, and combined it with his local knowledge. He wanted to connect the commissioned work to the heart of County Meath. His inspiration for the piece inevitably arrives with the shifting times of daylight and nightfall, and with the juxtaposition of the seasons.

"When it dawned on me that the name of the arts centre right in front of me summed up what I seemed to love most about my relationship with Meath, I realised then that the work just had to be called 'Solstice'. I decided to use the title as one of the more significant aspects of the form of the music. The piece would evolve from a simple genesis and, along the way, evoke change and possibility as it irrevocably marched towards its climax, reminiscent of the sun's rise on those fateful days of solstice, with which our county and ancestors are so irrefutably intertwined."



Ciaran Hope was photographed in Dunboynne by Barry Cronin