



Kate Ellis and Caimin Gilmore performing Sam Perkin's <3 (Image: Shane J. Horan)

## An Alchemy That Makes You Wonder

The second Quiet Lights festival took place in Cork at the weekend. Don O'Mahony attends a selection of concerts including Caimin Gilmore, Löwli, Lemoncello and Rosa Nutty on Saturday, and Junior Brother and Rozi Plain on Sunday.

- [Don O'Mahony](#)

Now in its second year, Cork's Quiet Lights (22–24 Nov.) presents itself as a small winter festival celebrating the new wave of Irish and international folk, traditional and experimental talent. Unsurprisingly, given the explosion in recent years of Irish artists whose work traverses those boundaries, this small festival run by founder Jon Pearson is packed with domestic talent, and this year's line-up built itself around such leading lights of Ireland's contemporary folk scene as [Lankum](#) and [Ye Vagabonds](#). Around that is a constellation of artists such as [Anna Mieke](#), rising star [Maija Sofia](#), and Junior Brother. The presence of music documentarian Myles O'Reilly as the festival's 'featured artist' lends a crystallising effect to proceedings as he has worked with so many of the artists featured.

The second day of the festival saw the world premiere of four pieces for double bass. The night before, double bassist Caimin Gilmore appeared at the festival helming his chamber folk outfit Sun Collective, but here he was more in the modern composition world familiar to him as a member of [Crash Ensemble](#).

Gilmore commissioned four of Ireland's most exciting composers to write four new solo double bass pieces and the results were predictably distinct and diverse. Performed in the arresting surroundings of the Canova Room of the Crawford Art Gallery, a space populated by marble statues and plaster casts, Gilmore opened with local composer Linda Buckley's *Seancheam*, a tribute to her home area of the Old Head of Kinsale. Sonically the piece appeared to point at something overarching and wondrous but as you delved deeper into the diaphanous drones provided by tape and Gilmore's gentle rhythmic playing the piece seemed to contain a creeping sense of unsteadiness, as if the ground could collapse beneath our feet. [Benedict Schleppey-Connolly](#)'s *Blackberry*, for double bass and resonator, is a quieter, mournful piece, sparsely played with longer sustaining notes, suggesting an aftermath of something.

Nick Roth's *Arri* for solo double bass was the most visceral piece. Exploring the Irish Ogham script, intersecting with painter John Noel Smith's concept of Ogham as 'visual rhythm', the piece saw Gilmore wrestle with his instrument, producing sounds that alternated between the low grumble of a giant ocean liner's foghorn to more resonating see-saw notes affected by Gilmore's near constant manipulation of the machine heads or tuners of his double bass. The Ogham concept realised in the moments he'd strike at the instrument with his bow, as if to imprint the dent or a dash of a symbolic grammar. It resonated with the tableaux of petrified marble cast figures, particularly the fearsome 'Laocoön and His Sons,' an agonising depiction of people being attacked by serpents.

The performance closed with <3 by another local composer, Sam Perkin. It saw Gilmore accompanied by Kate Ellis on cello while on tape an ambient soundscape of shimmering notes, gurgling babies and laughing infants played out. In tandem, Ellis and Gilmore built up little passages comprising simple methodical riffs. I scanned the room for a cherub amongst the statues. It was in vain, but <3 on its own sufficed in manifesting such playful figures.