



***Amhran na hEascainne (Song of the Eel) for Solo Alto or C Flute, with
Optional Drone by Sarah Bassingthwaighte (2020, 4'40", Alry Publications)***

Written by BJ Nicoletti

A Little Background on the Composer, Flutist, Teacher, Music Advocate and Performer



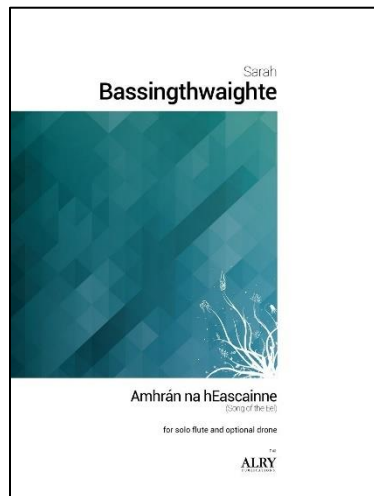
Some GPFS members are likely familiar with fellow flutist Sarah Bassingthwaighte as she lives and works in the Seattle area, in our great Pacific Northwest, and has been active with the Seattle Flute Society. She has a long and strong affiliation with the area. For example, she performed Jacques Ibert's Concerto with the Seattle Symphony at eighteen years of age. Since then, she has performed around the world with many world class performers. She has recorded two CDs of 20th century flute music, many now the more "familiar standards" so to speak and some not so much so: *Flute Meets Machine* (2006) and *Stalks in the Breeze* (2006). Both recordings are high quality, vibrantly capturing the nuanced elements of the pieces such as a range of wind effects, fluid ornamentation, tonal edge and colors, deep dynamic ranges, electronic music complexities, and so on. These can be listened to on Apple Music as well as Spotify streaming services as two options. Her playing is described, understandably, as "full of depth and power," "hypnotic," and as performing contemporary pieces with "polish and virtuosity." Indeed. Have a listen. Here are some important links for you to learn more about Sarah:

- Her Bio Sketch: <https://www.sarahbassingthwaighte.org/bio>
- Her Many Compositions for Flute: <https://www.sarahbassingthwaighte.org/compositions>, most of those listed have clips of audio associated with them.
- For Teachers and Students: She generously shares some of her teaching material here <https://www.sarahbassingthwaighte.org/teaching>

A Recording of Song of the Eel on Her YouTube Channel:

<https://youtu.be/lsku3R4n6Dc>

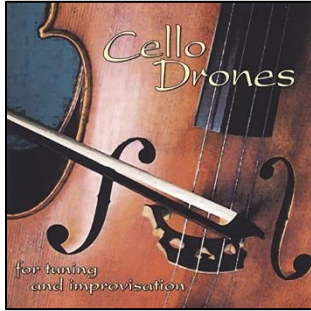
Now for the Piece – Approachable, yet challenging, beautiful, a must play on both alto and C-flute



Overall: First and foremost, watch and listen to her video, about 4'45" in length. It is entrancing both in the visual and sound. Engaging in the video performance as well as playing the piece changes one's mindset. Open the window of your music area and play out toward the sky, over the water, with the breeze.

Stick with it to the end. It has quite the surprise ending!

Irish Song, Sean-nos Style: Foremost, the piece is based on the old Irish song of the same name. Sarah was introduced to this song through a form of unaccompanied Irish vocal music called Sean-nos, which explains a great deal about her approach to her version. "Sean-nós singing (/ˈʃænɒs/ Sean-nos, Irish: [ˈʃan̪ˠ n̪ˠoːsʲ]; Irish for "old style") is unaccompanied traditional Irish vocal music usually performed in the Irish language. Sean-nós singing usually involves very long melodic phrases with highly ornamented and melismatic melodic lines, differing greatly from traditional folk singing elsewhere in Ireland...." (Wikipedia) Not the topic of this article, but if you can find recordings of Sean-nos, listen because doing so is simply interesting style-wise as well as insightful to our own musicality, particularly for the performance of this piece.



Drone: I played both the alto version and C-flute version of this piece with her suggested drone of E as well as E and B. This is a very rewarding approach to such a free style piece. I used the cello drones Martha Long once suggested which can be found on iTunes – *Cello Drones for Tuning and Improvisation* by the Musician’s Practice Partner, 2003.

Style: The style of this piece is perfectly described by Sarah as “very free, improvisatory, and dramatic” -reflective of that Sean-nós style. There is plenty of room in this piece for the performer to make their own strong interpretation, giving movement and color to the piece as the heart and soul moves them. She removed most of the bar lines to help prevent too strong a sense of pulse.

While about 4’45” in length, the piece lays out to two pages long. It is to be played slowly and freely at quarter note equals sixty with significant rubato and higher energy at certain places. The called for dynamic range is to relative extremes, particularly on the quiet end. There is much ornamentation written in, from short effects to longer and more fluid entries into a note. While written in and clearly in the spirit of the musical intent, I highly doubt Sarah would discourage changes to these, particularly adding ornamental effects or varying her suggested ornaments.

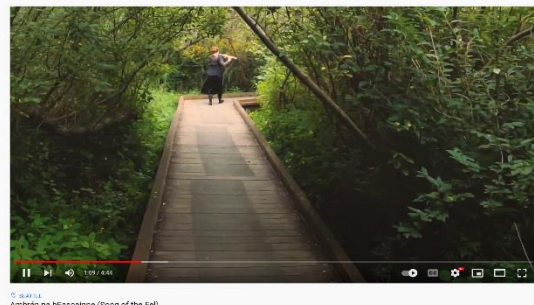
Technical: The C-flute version has a handful of fairly simple modern techniques such as pitch bending and color tones. However, there is room in the piece to add more, including on the alto version. I found myself adding some soft wind tones entering and leaving phrases or single notes, subtle and slow pitch bends, and vibrato using finger movement as in Irish flute playing. All of this said, I also think the piece can be played with the tone and ornamentation approach recommended for an Irish flute, but without the intense rhythmic pulse of that style of music.

Level: The alto and C-flute versions of the piece are suited for maybe the advanced intermediate player, but better suited for the more musically advanced player (beginner-advanced through professional). Technically, there are many dynamic change demands from gradual to more sudden. The composition utilizes the full range of the flute often gradually, but sometimes rather quickly within the phrase. The ornaments are often arpeggiated sequences making them both technically more friendly but musically more challenging to blend in. For me, it was challenging on both the C-flute and alto flute, but particularly unusually challenging for the alto due to all the afore-mentioned

characteristics. That said, it is a “must play on alto” piece, an excellent “stretch piece” for the many of us that don’t play low flutes on a regular basis.

Performance Setting: In regard to performance setting, this piece can probably be performed in any performance setting - formal or informal – but it particularly begs to be played outdoors, shared with a small group of people. It can work in a recital as well as in a sacred setting given it induces meditation and evokes a certain spirituality.

The sheet music can be purchased through several of the sources familiar to us, including a few of the GPFs Commercial Members/Sponsors – Carolyn Nussbaum, Flute World and Flute Center of New York.



SEATTLE
Amhrán na hEascainne (Song of the Eel)

Sponsors & Commercial Members

GPFS acknowledges with gratitude the many years of support from our [Sponsors and Commercial Members](#). It is because of their excellence that the GPFS mission can excel and celebrate our 44th year of extraordinary programming for the greater Portland area, including hosting visiting artists and local events, student study grants and a range of other resources for members and the community of flutists at large.

GPFS 2021-2022 Program Sponsors

The Greater Portland Flute Society thanks our Sponsors for their extraordinary support! Please show your appreciation by giving them your patronage.



Brannen Brothers Flutemakers, Inc.
58 Dragon Court
Woburn, MA 01801-1014
781-935-9522, brannen@brannenflutes.com



Canter Flute Repair
Flute Repair Specialists
Beaverton, OR
Straubinger & Muramatsu Certified
JS Engineering Gold Pads
971-266-4096

GPFS 2021-2022 Program Sponsors

The Greater Portland Flute Society thanks our Sponsors for their extraordinary support! Please show your appreciation by giving them your patronage.



[Carolyn Nussbaum Music Company](#)

625 Digital Drive, Ste 300
Plano, TX 75075
972-985-2662, 877-FLUTE4U (toll free)
info@flute4u.com
[Watch video](#)



[Flute Center of New York](#)

307 7th Ave. #401
New York, NY 10001
212-307-9737, info@flutecenter.com
[Watch video](#)



[FLUTEWORKS Seattle LLC](#)

[Facebook Page](#)
781-526-3677, fluteworks@gmail.com
By appointment only
[Watch video](#)



68 Nonset Path, Acton, MA 01720
978-268-0600
www.wmshaynes.com
[Watch video](#)

GPFS 2021-2022 Program Sponsors

The Greater Portland Flute Society thanks our Sponsors for their extraordinary support! Please show your appreciation by giving them your patronage.



Ted Brown Music
6228 Tacoma Mall Blvd
Tacoma, WA 98409
800-562-8938
253-272-3211
sales@tedbrownmusic.com

GPFS 2021-2022 Commercial Members

The Greater Portland Flute Society also thanks our Commercial Members for their support! Please show your appreciation by giving them your patronage.



Professional Woodwind Repair
Straubinger Certified
Flute & Double Reed Specialist

119 Neabeack Hill Dr, Philomath, OR 97370
Contact: Katie Cooper, 541-760-8865
katie@windsmithmusic.com
By appointment only.



Flute World
29920 Orchard Lake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334
248-855-0410, flutes@fluteworld.com