

Dorone: Ok, so now I think the beginning with me to get just you agreeing to be interviewed.

Ben: Oh yeah, im happy. My name is Benjamin Dwyer and Im agreeing to be interviewed.

Noa: Is it OK for us to use it in the project's archive?

B: Yeah, subject to me seeing what's printed that's fair enough.

N: We will publish the audio and transcript and you will of course get the transcript to approve it, basically we are not cutting short except for tea or coffee break.

B: I would like to see the context of where my words are being put, So you know if I can see what the end result is I can and Im happy to do that.

D: OK, so how old are you?

B: 54 years old.

D: How about your education?

B: Briefly I'm an autodidact. I got the worst education. You know from 1972 until 1985 I was educated by the Christian Brothers. It was a horrible environment; that schooling was the only block to my education. The day I left school, I started reading Simone de Beauvoir, I started self educating; and I also started playing classical guitar at that stage. As it happens, my overall education has been directed through my developing education within classical music; developing as a guitarist and later as a composer. I took the first performance degree in Ireland in 1987—the Graduate Diploma, which gave me a degree in music performance from Trinity College. I went on to London to do the master's degree in performance at the Royal Academy of Music. I then came back to Dublin and spent a few years just performing. I then got very interested in composition and did a PhD in composition in Queen's University in Belfast. Strangely enough, my relationship with educational institutions has not been good. My four years in Dublin with DIT were appalling. I basically self-educated. The master's degree in London was fantastic. I have to say, however, that I didn't have a good three, four years in Queen's, for reasons that we don't have to get into now. I never went to any of my graduations, as I didn't care much for the pomp and ceremony. But now, ironically, every year I have to put the gown on for my students' graduations! I am, on a certain level, denouncing the educational establishment because of the poor education I received; although I remember, and remember fondly, certain individual teachers who shone through. I'm now Professor of Music in Middlesex University, and my experience, that is, my bad experience in education in Ireland completely feeds into my ethos as a teacher. Whether it's undergraduate or PhD teaching, all my work is based on offering the sort of education I didn't get myself.

D: Were you born in Dublin? Is your family from here?

B: Yes, my father is from Dublin, as was my mother. My father's father was from Baltinglass in Wicklow, my mother's father was from Crossmaglen in Armagh, which was a stronghold of Irish republicanism.

D: ... And how come they moved here?

B: I don't know the full story but people were gravitating towards cities at the beginning of the 20th century. My grandfather moved from Baltinglass to New Street in Dublin, opposite Patrick's Cathedral. We still have the photographs from the 1900s: 'Dwyer & Sons'. They were wheelwrights and sign writers. My father never worked for anybody. I never worked for anybody; my first job was in Middlesex University as a professor. I never had an official job before that except for freelance composing and so forth, so I think we have this thing in the blood where we walk our own paths, as it were. The definition of a Dubliner is a country man son, that's what my father used to say. So my grandmother on my mother's side was from Dungarvan in Waterford; and my father's mother's people were Dubliners. So Dublin-Waterford-Wicklow-Crossmaglen. We are Irish; I mean, it's not surprising that our grandfathers and grandmothers are from different parts of the island.

N: So your father was self employed?

B: They were, they are, all self-employed: painters and slaters/roofers. But at night they communed with poets. My father was a very close friend of Brendan Behan and Patrick Kavanagh, and with many people who were part of the 'golden age' of poetry in Dublin in the 1950s in McDaid's Bar. A lot of great poetry emerged out of that period. I must have inherited an interest in the arts from my father. He never got involved directly with the arts himself but he preferred the company of artists

N: Did he take you to this bar?

B: He did: I was introduced to Luke Kelly there when I was very young. He also took me to Grogan's when I was about nine. Grogan's is now the 'arty' bar; it inherited that from McDaid's. But most of those days are over. The years from 1947 to 1969 were a golden period; and it all happened in one bar in Dublin where all the poets mingled. Even intellectuals from Trinity College went, and they all became fairly alcoholic and dysfunctional, and they hated each other (haha) but it was a very interesting period in 20th-century Irish literature. That Bohemian scene is gone now.

N: Why has it gone? Why did it disappear?

B: Well, there's a whole story there. McDaid's was sold and the manager, Paddy O'Brien, who was the heart and soul of the pub, got a job in Grogan's; and then all the clientele moved to Grogan's. But we're not talking about Grogan's now are we?? (Haha)

N: What I'm asking is, was there a change in the social-political atmosphere?

B: I see what you're getting at now. I think, you know, that after the war, in the 1950s, Ireland was very poor, and we had a number of governments under de Valera. And one of his notions of Irish republicanism was that Ireland should stand by itself, you know? That was never the case really because we were depending on Britain for a lot of work and trade. There wasn't much money going around, and it wasn't until Sean Lemass became Taoiseach (head of the government in Irish) that things changed; actually, he opened Ireland out to the world. I mean, we are talking about the '60s; change was happening everywhere, and so we too opened up, somewhat. Since the foundation of the Free State [1922] and the Republic, which was formed in 1947/48, the political and socio-cultural thinking was very closed. The Catholic Church was dominant; almost every book was banned. So in the '60s it started opening up slightly; and I guess that's when drink became a central thing to get people through their lives. You know, Patrick Kavanagh didn't have much money, he didn't have much community; nor did Brendan Behan. Kavanagh was not really recognised until he died (and Behan died very young). When Patrick Kavanagh died in '67, all the politicians suddenly turned up to his funeral; and it was

then that Charlie Haughey [later Taoiseach] said, 'we'll have to do something for artists in Ireland', which is why they created Aosdána some years later.

Antony Cronin, the poet, was writing speeches for Charlie Haughey, which probably played its part in the setting up of Aosdána, this organisation that provides a stipend for artists who have made a significant contribution to the arts in Ireland. So your question is quite perceptive because after Kavanagh died the artists' world became more professionalised and recognised. Before, it was ignored; and they were in bars drinking and hating each other; just trying to survive. Also, at this stage, there was hardly any classical music, you know, there wasn't a composition course in Ireland until the '90s. So lots of us were left behind, and people had to make their way. People have to make their way anyway in the arts. Is this going off on a tangent?

N: I think it's very important in terms of the background to what we will ask next. Because in this period, the end of the '60s, there's a very big change worldwide.

B: Well, this is also the beginning of the Troubles in the North, of course. Because what was happening in the North was terrible. The North was formed in 1922, and we're talking about the '60s, so we are already almost 50 years into, essentially, an apartheid system. For example, as a Catholic, if you didn't own your house, you couldn't vote. Many Catholics couldn't get full-time work or well-paid work, and so they didn't have the means to buy a house. There was a lot of gerrymandering going on, which was built into the political system. One of the great things that John Hume did (I don't know if you know John Hume, but he jointly won the Nobel Peace Prize). His early activism was in creating credit unions for Catholics, so they could slowly get cheap loans to buy houses. So once they were able to buy a house, they could have a vote. So this was happening before the Troubles broke out. Hume was trying to get Catholics into positions in which they could have equality, in an equal society. And keep in mind that while politicians in Britain were coming down hard on the apartheid system in South Africa this was happening on their own doorstep!... Within their own sovereign state, you know, right on their door step.

N: But this was not something, that as far as I know, this kinda system of connecting property to the voting rights, not existing in England either... I mean in the UK, it was especially only for...

B: No, no of course. There were many things in the North that were different because certain laws of government were different for different regions of the UK. One example is British law dealing with homosexuality. After the Wolfenden Report the Sexual Offences Act was passed in 1967 for England and Wales, but it did not come into effect in Scotland until 1980, and later still in the North of Ireland until 1982; because of the (basically) Presbyterian ethos that was dominating the governments there that had full control for over forty years. These things still happen. They are happening today, by the way, with the abortion laws. [In light of the Good Friday Agreement, and more parity in the government there, things are improving].

N: And how did the beginning of the Troubles... How did it effect this group of poets?

B: In Dublin? I don't think it did, in the sense that we were watching it from a distance. I mean, the Free State side won the Civil War, so you had a Cumann na nGaedheal (later Fine Gael) government. And there was a tendency in certain quarters to see the North as no longer Ireland's concern. Ireland was scarred by civil-war politics. We've had, since then, two right-wing parties. We've never had a strong history of left-wing politics; not since Jim Larkin and the unions. We never had that history. Take Spain, for example; there was always a left and a

right wing. The Labour Party in England had always been strong, but people here haven't had that in any real sense. And even in the 1980s and '90s when the Labour Party here went into government with Fianna Fáil and other coalitions, it was desecrated; coalitions destroyed its political agency. Two major parties came out of the Civil War. They espoused an opposing politics of the Free State on one side and an all-Ireland Republicanism on the other; and this has dominated politics in Ireland ever since. And both sides, it must be said, allowed the Catholic Church to dominate Irish cultural life for years; it was a disaster.

N: What do you mean by both sides?

B: What I mean is, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. People always say it was de Valera and Bishop Charles McQuaid (who, was the most powerful cleric in the country) who created this conservative Ireland. But even after 1946, when we declared a Republic—a Republic no less!—we were still run by the Church. I don't know what this idea of a Republic was, it certainly wasn't the French ideal, which had influenced Irish freedom thinking for many many years. Remember that the 1798 rebellion took place only 9 years after the 1789 Revolution in France. When we eventually had a Republic, it was basically a theocracy.

You know, I am the sixth child in my family (actually, before me there were twins that didn't make it). Because of this, after I was born, the doctor told my mother that she should not have any more children because her life would in danger with another pregnancy. So, as she was a good Catholic, she went to see a priest. She went to confession; and the priest assaulted her; he physically threw her out of the church. She was looking some permission to use some form of contraception. This was in 1966 (after I was born in '65); and for her troubles when was assaulted by the priest. So it's only in the last ten to fifteen years we have seen changes; and these changes have come only after we have been through an outrageous exposé of disastrous, unspeakable sexual abuse by the Church, and the institutional cover-ups on all levels. At last, I feel that we have broken the shackles of the Church. It still amazes me (when I drive down the street) to see people walking into a church today. Recently, I visited my old school. I drove into the old yard (the school is closed down now). I was there for 45 minutes feeling very upset at the memories of the abuses that took place; of my experiences there. It was a Christian Brothers School. I didn't get the worst abuse (mostly just violent attacks), it was fucking horrible, and worse for others. It wasn't a very nice childhood, it wasn't a very nice country we grew up in, I have to say. So look, it's all very complex. You ask me these questions about Irish life, but it's very difficult to give a clear picture of things, it may be relevant, it may not.

N: No it's fine, it gives us a good background.

D: What is your living standard in perspective today, has it gone up or down, relating to your parents and grandparents?

B: I'm the first to have a degree in my family; I'm the first to have a master's degree; I'm the first to have a PhD; I'm the first to be a professor. Now my living standards are not fantastic despite what you might think, because living in London is very expensive; and I use a lot of my salary to subsidise my artistic work. It got to the stage, after the collapse of the Celtic Tiger, when I had to figure out how to maintain my artistic life. This was also the time I got married. I realised that, for the first time, I had somebody to look after; someone other than myself (she was doing a PhD). I didn't get married until I was in my mid 40s. I had been freelance up to that moment, doing quite well composing, curating and performing. There was a lot of money,

lots of commissions. I ran a festival in Dublin (even from Spain, when I moved there); I was very active. But when everything collapsed (around the time I got married), I realised I couldn't continue like this. So I took the academic route. I was already 'academic' in my head anyway, in the sense that I was already writing about music, I was interested in the place of music in Ireland, and so on. Then I moved to London. London is super expensive. When I got my professorship I thought that I could buy new guitar. I have my professorship seven years now and I still haven't bought a new guitar. I haven't had that luxury, but I do put money into my own artistic work: I pay for some recordings, for some people to play my music. In truth, if I was waiting for Arts Council support, many pieces would not have been recorded. I've always taken a pro-active position. If I have to put my money on the table, then I have to put my money on the table. So, you know, I don't take three holidays a year. I don't know if that answers the question. Certainly, from an education point of view, my father left school at fourteen and I'm a Professor of Music, that's a huge social and educational mobility leap.

D: What is the main difficulty you encounter today?

B: It's too wide of a question for me to answer.

N: It's more about, not so much personally in the sense of relationships, but in general social conditions for instance; is there a special relationship of being an Irish man in London...

B: You've just hit the nail in the head... In the UK I do feel in exile, I've got to say. And I've become radicalised somewhat since I moved there. I've been pointed at, spat at, I had intellectuals dropping Freudian slips about the 'stupid Irish', it comes up. I'm sensitive to it because I've written a book on it [*Different Voices: Irish Music and Music in Ireland*]. I researched the history of Ireland and Britain through music. Although London is an amazing city culturally (I go to the Tate regularly, to the Royal Festival Hall, etc.) I nearly always go alone. I often don't see people socially. There's little or no community there and certainly my experience of the way things are there is that it is just so fiscally focused, that it's losing its character, it's losing whatever people used to love about London in the '60s. I lived for many years in Camden. I have some friends, but I would say few of them are British; I don't know why. I had the same experience in Barcelona. The Catalans are looking towards Paris and not Madrid. I understand their nationalism, I really do, but they don't seem to be interested in engaging with people unless they speak Catalan. I left Ireland to find something new, to learn another language. I was looking to expand my intellectual outlook; perhaps to fall in love! I made some great friends, certainly in Barcelona. But I find London the same. It's mostly just money, money money, and I'm seeing many people around me suffering.

N: But do you think Londoners, the Brits that live in London, have community? Or is it that the whole society is like this?

B: Well, you have to ask Londoners that. I don't know. I think it's all very once removed there. When I come back to Dublin, maybe it's because I'm a Dubliner and I feel comfortable here, but people speak to each other at the bus stop. If you talk to somebody at the bus stop in London they think you're looking for something. Maybe it's because we're talking about bar culture earlier, but bar culture in London is strange: nobody speaks to anybody in a bar. If you talk to somebody they think you're weird. But in Ireland we speak to people we don't know in bars. Maybe it is the size of the city [London] that keeps people to themselves. But I think I'm intuiting something bigger than this because it's a place where you can feel real anxiety; and there are certainly changes taking place since the Brexit thing. Recently, in my local

bar in Primrose, an English guy heard my accent and started pointing at me, shouting: ‘you’re Irish!’. Things like this happen. But there’s a long history of the narrative of the Irish man being the stupid leprechaun in Britain, it’s very hard to break through that. One thing I do find in the UK is that, when I meet people, the first comment is about me being Irish. Before I’m Benjamin Dwyer, before I’m a guitarist, before I’m a professor, before I’m a composer, I’m Irish; and Irish in the English mindset means inferior. I’m not saying this is always a conscious thing, but it’s there, the air, as it were. I may be a professor, but I’m an Irish professor. I’m sorry to say that, but it’s true. And I am sensitive to that because I know my history and I see the same tropes being acted out again and again, you know, so I do struggle with it at times. But that’s where I am. I enjoy my job, it’s a great job and I love Middlesex University, I love the ethos. I know great people in England, but maybe I’m just too sensitive because I know my history. I’ve asked Irish friends living in the UK if they worry about speaking out loud with their accents and they say no. But I’m sensitive to it. I mean, even when people say, ‘I love the Irish accent’, I say to myself, ‘oh dear!’ It’s just because I’m Irish first and we know that for much of the English mindset Irish means stupid, colonised, blarney, drink, alcohol. It’s very hard to break through that, to get to Ben Dwyer.

D: Which group of people would you most count on? Family? Neighbours? Peers?

B: Family.

D: How much time do you spend with them?

B: Now, more than ever. I have lots of brothers and sisters. My father is getting quite old, so I’m hanging out with him a bit. But when you go through a crisis—I’m sure it’s the same for everybody—it’s your family that is there for you. Of course, there are friends, some great friends, but I think in the end, your world becomes very small with people that matter. It’s astonishing to think that your world, probably, is a dozen people. It’s a bit sad but there you go.

D: Do you represent and are you represented in your home country and where you’re living now?

B: You read the book! [*Different Voices*] I represent my country, yes, absolutely. I was invited to visit Buckingham Palace to meet the Queen. My very DNA is against any notion of Royalty. But the Queen’s invitation to Michael D. Higgins to make a state visit to the UK was the first since the foundation of the Irish State. Can you imagine that; since 1922? This was about six years ago; it was astonishing. This was in the wake of the Good Friday Agreement so we are getting close to the issue, and while I would normally not bother going, I went because I was representing the sovereign state of Ireland, I absolutely went. Those of us who were considered to have made a ‘contribution to British life’ were invited a week before Michael D Higgins’ official visit. Once in, I mingled. The woman to my left was from Donegal; she was a Director in the Department of Education and the guy to my right was an SAS officer who served in the North for twenty-five years (and for sure shot people through the face!). So we chatted that night, the three of us. It was quite bizarre. We were invited into another room to meet the Queen personally. We shook the Queen’s hand. I have a photo of it. I didn’t bend or kneel down. She is not my Queen. However, I was very proud to be there as a representative of Michael D Higgins and my country. I also wanted to observe what British power looked like from the inside. This was the closest I got to the power base that destroyed my country over several hundred years. But it was also a historic moment when the two countries, as

sovereign states, were meeting as equal partners (even though there is unfinished business in terms of a united Ireland).

Also, I know that when I perform, I represent Ireland on different levels, either officially or unofficially. Does Ireland represent me? Well, I'm a member of Aosdána, so yes, I have to say I get recognition. (But then I have to focus into the music economy and I think music is not financed as much as it should be and we are overshadowed by literature, overshadowed by traditional Irish music, and we're overshadowed by Irish pop music; but that's more of a local issue). So, overall, I give a yes to that question on both sides but with some caveats. You know about them, they are all in the book.

D: I said to Noa, she should read the book.

B: It's a postcolonial history of Irish music, and it has these twelve interviews including Dorone's. But I've written there pretty much what I think regarding the development of music in Ireland. I also write about our relationship with England and (later) Britain, so it might help contextualise some of my comments here.

D: Are there groups with which you are engaged and in what way?

B: Do you mean political groups?

N: or NGO's.

B: No, I'm not a member of any political group although my politics has changed in the last ten years. I know only artistic groups. It's almost been deliberate in a way. I mean, I don't want to sound indulgent but I put a lot of time into being a musician and I'm a bit selfish in that regard. Perhaps I should have married sooner, I regret not having a kid but that's my life...fine. I know the reason why; it's been always, 'put the music first'. The only church I belong to is the church of art, and the older I get the more important that is, in actual fact. Over the last fifteen years my music has absorbed a political consciousness. I don't go out in the street to protest, though I admire people who do. I really don't tweet that much; everytime I tweet something I get into trouble or feel bad about it (and then I waste so much time trying to explain myself to people I don't know). For me, to write music from the social position that I started out from, you know, in Crumlin, a working-class area, is already an activism. I have written works that try to deal with life, although not all my work is as political as yours, Dorone. I'm a committed feminist, although I don't look like one! And I look at the world through a postcolonial lens.

N: How does a feminist look?

B: I don't know! Hah. I was once told by a feminist that a man can never be a feminist, which I think is very sad. My *Umbilical* piece is deeply influenced by feminist theory, as is my *Scenes from Crow*. The Beckett works [*what is the word, six residua (after Beckett)*, and *five disjecta (after Beckett)*], which I just performed last week are not political, they are about my understanding of the relationship between with language, music and silence.

I will soon be completing, however, a work called *SacrumProfanum*, which I've been working on for over ten years. This is my most explicitly feminist composition. It's based on the ancient stone carvings called Sheela-na-gigs, which are figures of females that expose enlarged vulvas, and which are found all over Ireland and in parts of Britain. I situate the Sheela as witness to the damage and destruction done to Ireland by colonialism, the Church, and late Capitalism, with a particular emphasis on the hurt perpetrated to women within these historic and contemporary contexts.

I realise now that my compositions are completely tied into philosophy, a way of seeing life through music, a way of understanding life through music. I'm not interested in making

‘beautiful vases’, as it were. There are a lot of composers who make beautiful vases and I totally respect that; and they polish their art and make beautiful pieces. I make ugly pieces. Actually, now I’m thinking of your interview, Dorone [in my book] when you say ‘Art is for reflecting what the world actually is, not trying to pretend it’s something else.’ So that’s what I’m doing. Now sometimes it’s beautiful because there’s beauty in ugliness; if the ugliness is a truth. My music is a philosophical way of seeing the world, and if that means taking on the subject of colonialism or feminism, which *SacrumProfanum* does, I do it very strongly. *SacrumProfanum* is as explicit as the carvings it is resonating with. [I’ll explain that later. I’m happy to send you some scores as well, and I have some published essays explaining my position on this]. I have developed a theory I call an ‘aesthetics of damage’. I have had problems with the way the Irish self-racialize (I’m talking about productions such as *Riverdance* and *Celtic Woman*). These are commercialised versions of ‘Celticism’, which is already a dubious nomenclature, I think. We were Gaelic, we were a Gaelic society, we had a Gaelic aristocracy, a Gaelic poetry, a Gaelic music. The notion of being Celtic is quite dubious, as the Celts spread all over Europe. It’s more of an imagined thing; and quite possibly another historical obfuscation that airbrushes over ‘actual’ Gaelic history and destruction. *SacrumProfanum* is a difficult project for me, as I am engaging with Gaelic music and materials for the first time as a composer. The problem for me is that if you’re going to engage with Irish music you have to engage with the genocide that took place. You know, by the time Queen Elizabeth died in 1601, 90% of Irish land was in English hands. By the time of the Flight of the Earls, which is a little later, the entire infrastructure of Gaelic life in Ireland had been destroyed by the English. That meant all the aristocratic structures over the island had collapsed. This ultimately meant that all the music was gone, all the harpists and poets were forced to become traveling troubadours. Everything was gone, and English language and rule had established itself. And there was this distinction between those within the pale where English was spoken, and the rest, ‘beyond the pale’, which was deemed uncivilised, you know. The country was fucking destroyed. So when we have these Celtic revivals like *Riverdance* and everyone is dancing and everything is beautiful—this is problematic for me. Nobody is talking about what actually happened. Nobody is talking about the destruction to an entire civilization, an entire language, an entire music.

And so I situate the Sheela-na-Gig as the witness to all this destruction because she’s there since before the English invasion and she is there still. So she’s the witness, and what she sees is appalling; so if I’m going to write music and engage with Irish materials, I have to make that engagement through an aesthetics of damage. They are the only aesthetics that are appropriate to deal with the actual history. My feeling about pieces such as *Riverdance* and *Celtic Woman*—all this glamour—is that they are actually airbrushing over land-grab, starvation, famine, genocide. This is where my music becomes really ethically induced, if you like. Living in England has perhaps helped me understand this even more.

In *SacrumProfanum*, I have one piece for flute and bowed-guitar; and I’m back-to-back with the flautist who faces the audience because I’m not be seen by them, because I’m a landscape, and she is the sheela-na-gig. She is the embodiment of Ireland’s difficult story, and she is spurting out all the hatred and anger. This is for flute, often considered tame and sweet, but she is full of explosive anger, and it’s the furthest thing from beauty, and I’m glad I wrote it. It’s a piece called *Hag*, and it’s my greatest feminist manifesto because it’s the woman looking back at the male glance, and looking back at the English colonialists, and looking back at the Catholic Church, and saying ‘fuck you all’. Sometimes music has to say that.

N: Have you heard about the discourse of whiteness and how it is connected to the Irish? It was developed a few years...

B: You mean among black women? the make-up thing?

N: No, no, the origin of this racial division and the production of Whiteness as a race.

B: No, no.

N: And it's very connected to Irish redemption contract but after we're finished I'll tell you all about it.

B: Right, right. Well, the interesting thing about certain colonial narratives about the Irish, is that, because we weren't black, the British colonialists had to try and make a connection to 'blackness', to 'other' us, as they did the blacks; and they called us 'white chimpanzees'. It was easy for them to make racial distinctions about people whose skin was a different colour. They couldn't figure out what they were going to do with the Irish because we looked just like them. So they called us 'white chimpanzees'; we are talking about the 1800–1850s!, in magazines like *Punch* in Britain. It hasn't gone away. In the 1970s in the UK, you could see the signs everywhere (you probably know it): 'no dogs, no blacks, no Irish'. This is recent history and it still lingers in the Brexit mentality, I'm afraid.

N: Can you tell us, if you would like to tell us, what was your political change? You said you changed....

B: Well, when I was growing up we knew nothing about the North. Maybe, when I was studying music in my early days I saw the bombings, I don't think I cared enough. I was so obsessed with music it just didn't register. Quite often, when people get older they become more conservative; the opposite has happened to me, both musically and politically; because I don't believe in the establishment, I don't believe in it – why should I anyway? I think it's a personal, philosophical thing, actually; a view of life. It's not because I suddenly became political. Radicalised is a very strong word, perhaps...I'm not at the picket line. But my thinking has become more anti-establishment. I don't really believe in what *The Irish Times* it's going to tell me about life in Ireland. I grew up abused under the 'protection' of both Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil. I grew up in their schooling system; I grew up under the thumb of the Church; I grew up with the physical abuse. And then, later, during the Celtic Tiger, both these political parties were nurturing a late-Capitalist vision for Ireland, which failed so many people.

N: You mean in 2008?

B: I went to Spain for various reasons but one of them was that I didn't like the Ireland I was beginning to see. Young kids driving Mercedes cars who got a job in tech and they were behaving like asses whose only concern was money. I didn't like what I was seeing; a new money-obsessed Ireland. This attitude went right to the top. What was that famous quote by Bertie Ahearn,¹ about those who warned about the financial excess, : "all these naysayers, they should go commit suicide". What a horrific thing to say. And afterwards, when everything crashed, there were lots of people committing suicide. I mean, this was the sort of ignorance I was witnessing. So I don't care for Fine Gael or Fianna Fáil. They've had one hundred years of government between them. Now, I also grew up in a period when everyone was appalled by the bombings and the terrible atrocities that took place in the North of Ireland on both sides. Politicians were insisting that Sinn Féin would have to decide between the bomb or the ballot box. This was fair enough because certain things that happened were unforgivable, on both sides; though a lot of it on the side of the IRA.

1 Irish prime minister (1997-2008) Bartholomew Patrick "Bertie" Ahearn

The political context is important to note at this point. With the support of Clinton great strides were made towards ending the Troubles. Remember, in order for the Good Friday Agreement to come into law, the Irish voted to change that part of the Irish Constitution that claimed the Six Counties of Northern Ireland to be rightly part of Ireland. You know we voted to let that go? And then the British stated that they had no strategic claim on the Six Counties. So they were brave too; we pulled back, they pulled back. Then Gerry Adams and Ian Paisley had to figure it out. And Clinton and senator George Mitchell were very important in nurturing a new political environment. Clinton gave Gerry Adams a visa to America, which was politically a brave decision. And in fairness to Paisley, who was the most rampant 'never never never' figure in Northern Irish politics, he understood the historical moment and made the big leap.

That's how I was able to go to Queen's University (Belfast) and do my PhD there in a more or less peaceful environment. Of course, there has been peripheral violence and criminality. But there's been twenty-five years of peace. The thing that really annoys me about Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil is that for years they were saying to Sinn Féin that they needed to choose between the ballot box or the bomb. It's been the ballot box for twenty-five years now, and the only thing they talk about is the bomb; and I don't believe this type of politicking anymore.

I'm 54, I grew up in this State, I grew up with the abuse, I grew up with the religious bullshit and I don't buy it anymore. I'm sorry, I acknowledge the heartbreak that people affected by the Troubles feel, and I know that their loss is great. But we have to move on.

Another thing about Sinn Féin is that they are a left-wing party, the only one, it seems (though recently a fragmented block of left-wing politicians has emerged). Labour has failed by all accounts. I'm all for the Greens; you need to sort out the climate issues; but the Greens are like Fine Gael on bicycles. All they want to do is tax people; and they're happy to sit in with right-wing parties to push their agenda. They don't have much vision, in my view, because you cannot push a green agenda from the right of politics, in my view; that's incompatible. There needs to be a bigger Green vision than just being in power. The incentive needs to be much, much greater. I'm not afraid of Sinn Féin. I have no real party affiliation but I do want a united Ireland (though not by any means). I think the division of our country has been a disaster. I think wherever the British went, wherever they pulled out of, they caused disaster. From India they created Pakistan; Israel, Palestine, (I know this goes back to the First World War) but Syria and Iraq?—the British and French carved it up among themselves. You know all the troubles that we have currently, are still postcolonial issues. And Ireland is one of the longest colonized countries. We should have never been divided up. There should have been a more imaginative way to deal with the 'Irish Question'. But the British have always been belligerent and mean-spirited when it came to pulling out from their colonies. Millions died in India in the partition of the country. Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims were living together for centuries! And when the British pulled out, they created this terrible rift. And look at the problems now with Kashmir, and two countries with nuclear bombs staking their rights over the region? And now the old problem with Northern Ireland is raising its ugly head again in light of Brexit because English nationalists never gave a shit about Ireland, north or south. Most don't even know where it is, believe me. I once had a very educated colleague say to me, 'Benjamin, tell me about Southern Ireland'. I replied, 'what do you mean? I don't know of any map that has a country called Southern Ireland on it'. So look, I think maybe to answer to your question regarding this Sinn Féin thing is mainly that I am a product of the Fine Gael-Fianna Fáil Ireland, and I want change, I want a real left party playing its part in Irish society. (58:10) Ideologically, I'm not absolutely against the right,

by the way. It's that I want mature politics. We've never had that in Ireland. We've had one hundred years of civil-war politics, that's not mature. And we live in a late-Capitalist age where the political and socio-cultural systems are failing. Inequality in the world today is greater than in the time of the Sun King [Louise XIV]. Take us back to Versailles?—no problem. We are in that era; and I think it's going to collapse eventually. I think there's something happening at the moment in this surge to the right we see in Europe. I feel for the first time in my life that I'm watching history. History just happened before; but in the last six or seven years I feel I'm watching it. It has been fairly slow, but radical. As regards the UK, I don't know what's going to happen, I think a *Coup d'état* took place there with this Brexit thing. It seems to me to be such an act of self-harm; and the only people who will benefit from it are a small number of elites. I guarantee this: anybody north of Watford (in other words, the north of England) will suffer badly. They all voted for Brexit because they are so angry with being left behind. But that was the result of Thatcher's divisive politics of the '80s. These poor people are angry and blaming Europe when they should be blaming that Tory who divided England in two. Now, I know that things had to change; the unions had too much power, I understand that. But when she collapsed everything, all the industries of the north of England, she didn't replace them with anything. You know why? Because she didn't give a damn. So there are three generations now (and I have been up there)... Three generations without job prospects. This is a little like the situation in Northern Ireland. If you keep people in oppressive situations like that for long; where your father had no job, you've no job and your son isn't going to have a job, there's going to be havoc. And when this Brexit thing collapses, as it will, there's going to be havoc.

N: That's why Johnson is recruiting 20,000 new police men.

B: So they are putting back what they took away 5 years ago.

N: Yes, but the reason is not crime, the reason is they are afraid of...

B: Of course. And they have even bigger issues because it could very well be that Scotland will leave. I mean, in the first referendum, Scotland was promised that the only way that they could stay in Europe was to stay in the UK. Within two years of this promise, they are being dragged out of Europe screaming and kicking; and all those young Scottish people will be disenfranchised. They won't be able to work in Europe, they won't be able to retire there; all their losses; it's tremendous. Now if Scotland leaves, what does that make of the Six Counties?

N: If Scotland leaves, there's not a UK... Wales will leave because there's no point for it to stay and Northern Ireland...

B: I don't know if Wales will leave. Are they strong enough to leave?

N: Well, it depends what will happen, if Scotland leaves, then the whole concept falls and then we'll see what will happen in Northern Ireland. Will it become something of its own, or will it become a part of Ireland, or it will become an autonomy within Ireland? There's million options.

B: I know. The thing in Ireland is that in 1918 Sinn Féin had a landslide, so this was the same, almost the same in the South for sure. By 1922 there was a war, of course, which was awful. I mean it was turmoil. And I think there would be trouble if there was a move towards a united Ireland. But this issue will probably never go away; the plantation there was so strong.

N: But I don't think it will happen in the same way. I think it will happen in a more gradual way because Brexit will not fall apart in one day. There will be a few years in which you know...I mean, once Johnson put the border in the Irish Sea, he let Ireland go. And I think they (the Six Counties) will stay part of their economic relation will grow and grow and....

B: Economics is important because, you know, I think applications for the Irish passport in the North have gone up something like 40%. These applications are being made by unionists-protestants-presbyterians. Now that could have a serious impact on a vote on a united Ireland. It will always have to be democratic; so if they say no, they say no; if they say yes, then they say yes.

D: So what does the word peace mean to you?

B: Community. It's probably as simple as that. I mean, if we don't live together, understand each other, we are not going to have the peace. It's almost like, I don't know, as the world gets bigger it is very hard to have community, so it's very hard to develop empathy you know. I lived for two years in St. Albans (which is north of London) in an apartment complex. I never got to know one of my neighbours. We live in these compartmentalized structures. This is not just in St Albans. In London, where I lived for three years, it was the same. In total, I've been living seven years in apartments and I never got to know my neighbours, ever. That's partly the problem. People live compartmentalized lives; and so they don't develop sufficient levels of empathy, you know; it could be something as simple as that. We are lacking community, and when we lack community we don't empathize with the 'other'. This is what Levinas talks about; if we don't empathize with the 'other' that's the basis of fracture.

D: You are in a place where there's no war. Do you think there's peace here?

B: I do, though I'm wondering if that is a trick question: the absence of war is peace? What the question is asking is: 'is the absence of war, peace?' I'm not too sure. Again, I go back to the community and I don't know if I'm being biased but people speak to each other where there's community. My answer is the same as the last answer. There's relative peace here, of course, but I can be beaten up going home. I mean, the question is difficult because it depends on the context. I think it's got to do with the 'other'. Empathizing with the 'other'. If you have empathy then you have peace. It's almost too simple; it sounds naïve. If you have empathy you have peace.

D: What is the sound of war? What is the sound of peace?

B: From a composer's perspective, I go back to what I said before: some of the peaceful music can be airbrushing over unsavoury truths; some of the rough war music can be enlightening. So it can be contradictory. I'm going to concentrate on your word 'sound'. I'm a composer, so for me it's music; we know the sound of peace. The sound of real peace is complete silence. I don't like music that airbrushes, not just over Irish history but over anything significant to us. It could be music that airbrushes over people's individuality. That's one of the reasons I like this place, there's no [piped] music. What we hear in the background is people talking. But when you go to most bars or restaurants you have muzak, which is replacing conversation. That's the sound of war. And then, of course, there's great music, political or non-political, whether it's abstract or narrative, and it enlivens the consciousness, and that's the sound of peace.

N: Why do you think the real sound of peace is silence?

B: Well, I've been meditating since I was thirteen; I've been practicing Transcendental Meditation. With TM you get a mantra. This mantra has a vibrational quality that takes you down to the threshold of your consciousness, and then you dip into the self. You transcend

your body, time, space: where we all live. I don't want to sound arrogant but because I've been transcending for a long, long time through meditation, I know what peace sounds like. But there is no 'me' there; there's just the self. And that has actually impacted my music as well, for instance, my Beckett pieces. I'll send you the CD. They are about Beckett's relationship with silence; I wrote in the CD programme notes 'eleven reflections on Beckett, music and silence'. Beckett was trying to transcend language, but language can't transcend itself because it can't operate beyond the non-linguistic realm. That's why his 'failing' was built into his language: 'fail again, fail better'. He failed again and again, but he kept writing. So this became a very important issue for me as a musician, as a composer. Music gets close to silence. The ultimate sound of peace is silence. But as a composer I have to say that I think that the music that airbrushes over reality and stops us from being ourselves is a kind of quiet war music. It could be muzak or...

N: ... a space filler...

B: A space filler. Yeah. I mean the television... Our consciousness is being constantly diverted away from ourselves. This is answering the earlier questions about peace. It seems ridiculous to say that muzak or ad music are agents of war but they are because they are taking us away from ourselves; and if we're away from ourselves we have no empathy, and if we have no empathy we have no sense of the 'other'. I strongly believe that the sound, the noise we have to put up with day to day can have a detrimental effect on our psychology. We rarely get to hear sound that is creative and life-affirming. The shit that goes into my ear from morning to night is horrifying, actually. This chatting sound in the room here is a beautiful sound. But this is rare. You get a taxi home, you go to a restaurant... tu-tu-tu (banging noise)... It's non-stop. That's the sound of war. Now I'm developing a theory here: any sound or music or muzak that stops you from being attached to yourself, to your 'self' is war music. The sound of peace is silence.

D: Is peace a relation with one-self? Or between people or states?

B: You're probably beginning to see a pattern to my thinking here, it's the empathy question again; it's the silence question again, because it comes back to basics. You know, states are products of our thinking, of our imagination. We construct these things. We create dualism in our thinking, which means that we see the world as either 'this' or 'that'. That thinking has been embedded in our consciousness for centuries. The poet Ted Hughes had a theory that in previous epochs (maybe over 2000 years ago) there were less patriarchal societies, more balanced communal structures (his Crow poems emerge out of this understanding of earlier societies). My Sheela-na-gig project taps into this idea. There has been a steady trajectory towards rationalism over the last 3000 years and all the magic of the Talmud, the Vedas, the ancient Gaelic texts, was disappearing slowly. Christianity kicked in with a male god. While Catholicism held on to the Virgin Mary as a significant icon, the Reformation kicked in and reduced the presence of women in the church. It also got rid of a lot of the mystery in religion. It removed all the stained glass from the churches, and painted the colourful walls white, and got rid of the priest... We know why...

N: Because they become Capitalist.

B: Because the priest was the vehicle through which the mystery was delivered. He was taken out of the equation and replaced with the 'word'. The word was rationale, a rational new understanding of the Godhead, which, in the absence of women became more patriarchal

during the Reformation. This took hold in most of northern Europe; and it eventually became the basis for Capitalism. This focus on the rational begets the new world, and the Industrial Revolution of the 1700s and beyond. It's emerges out of a Protestant-rational worldview, which eventually leads to the disasters of the modern fiscal structures of late-Capitalism. Rational thinking, in my view, is the basis of so much disaster in Western thinking, patriarchy and society... What was your question again?

D: Is peace a relation with one self?

B: Yeah, that's it. It's lost and we keep going in the wrong direction. Deep, structural relationships between male and female, relationships based on empathy are largely undermined. We're currently experiencing a Cartesian reality that has completely gone mad. I think there needs to be a radical revolution. But it won't be one of armed revolt; it's going to be one of consciousness. Otherwise, I don't see any hope. So the answer is to go back to the self. Not enough people are doing it, but that's where music, art, visual arts, poetry come in; these are the windows into selfness. We experience the self momentarily through art. We all have these moments of an experience, that 'something' which takes us back, reminds us where the self is. But it's not enough, sadly.

D: In the current political situation, what do you consider as the main split and polarization in regards to power?

B: Polarisation? You mean in Ireland? Can you ask that again?

D: In the current political situation, what do you consider as the main split and polarization in regards to power? And does that have a threatening or motivating effect on peace?

B: To get into detail, I think we might be coming to the end of the civil-war political hierarchy that's been in place in Ireland. It mightn't change over night, but the Sinn Féin thing has rocked the boat. I've seen all the stats, and it's important to note that not all who voted for Sinn Féin were young, which is what many political commentators claim. People are just tired; they want to move on. You've seen the changes in Irish cultural society in the last twenty years, Dorone (you were at the cutting edge of it). The great developments in terms of rights and the female body. The churches are pretty much gone; I don't see the church ever having a substantial role to play in Ireland again. We are depending now on bright, informed, intellectuals to run the country for us. I think we're at the beginning of a paradigm shift. It has taken one hundred years for us to make this change. And it's interesting that we're in the decade of commemorations of the 1914 war, the 1916 Rebellion, the 1920–21 War of Independence, and the formation of the Free State in 1922. We're in that decade of celebration and memorial, and so I think this could be cathartic. It's not about Sinn Féin necessarily, but we're done with civil-war politics. We need something new. I have to say there is no vision coming from the guys who have been in power in my lifetime apart from Charles Haughey. I'm fully aware that he's a very divisive figure; but actually he was quite visionary, relatively. I think history will eventually rethink his current standing. He had some notion of vision, particularly for the arts in Ireland. Anyway, so whether it's Sinn Féin as a focus of change or not, it doesn't matter to me. I feel there's a shift taking place, and actually I think it will be good. We need to get rid of the old politics. Change is coming. For sure, something is happening, and I think in twenty years' time we're not going to recognise the Ireland that we now know.. I'm going to see the transition; I think it will happen within my lifetime. But your question was power and the...?

N: Was it the main split in the Irish society?

B: I think that the split in Irish society is that we no longer care about civil-war politics. It is not serving us. You got two centre-right parties running the show. I mean, they created the Celtic Tiger and the subsequent economic collapse; and now we're heading towards another one. There are cranes all over the city; they are building hotels, and we have thousands of people without homes; and thousands of homeless children! We can't have this. People do care. So Varadkar and Coveney have been quite good in terms of Brexit. They were quite adamant, holding their ground. They have twenty-six countries in Europe, of course, supporting them but they were articulate and strong in their positions. What I liked about them, about the pair of them, is that they didn't come across as the typical Irish politician I grew up with, the 'ah, yea'-Bertie back-patting type; they come across as young, savvy, articulate politicians. But they are completely tied up with property and money interests; so while they are performing reasonably well in relation to the Brexit issue, they are overseeing homelessness like you've never seen in this country before; a disastrous housing crisis, and it's not good enough. I'm not flying anyone's flag here for another other party, but I don't believe in this sort of politics anymore. I think this commemoration period of ten years is actually going to put the whole civil-war business to bed. On the other hand, Brexit may open up the united Ireland issue, which will start something new...I don't have the answer, these questions are too big to answer.

N: Do you think Ireland is starting to look inwards? Like until now it was looking to Britain? Differentiating itself from...and we are asking questions about the housing about the health, does it look inwards?

B: No, no. I think it's the opposite. If you have two civil-war parties running the show for one hundred years, and they've been voted against, I don't think it's because we were looking inwards. We've had a taste of freedom. I mean, we are the diaspora. We know better now. We see the world globally. It was the old Irish political thinking that kept us inwards, that kept us as the supply garden for England. I say, let them have their Brexit. We are natural Europeans, we have been for a long time. So, no, I think it's the opposite. I think what's happening is that now we no longer believe in the whole legacy of the Irish parties. I don't think that people who voted for Sinn Féin were voting for a united Ireland, they were voting for houses. They believe in Mary Lou, she comes across as honest, as straight-talking. And none of these new Sinn Féin leaders (Gerry Adams is gone now) has Semtex on their fingers. They come across as a genuine left-wing party concerned with improving the lives of ordinary people. And the behaviour of *The Irish Times*, the *Sunday Independent*, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil in castigating them is out of step with the people right now. As I said earlier, Sinn Féin left the bombs behind twenty-five years ago. And now all the establishment parties are talking about is the bomb. We need to move on. We need to be brave enough to move on.

Keep in mind that some British politicians and those in the British media have behaved appallingly towards us during this Brexit thing. The English press—I don't know if you were aware of this—were calling us stupid, they were calling Varadkar stupid because we were not putting up with their bullshit. So I think this change in political weather is maturing. We dropped the Church. Women have more equality now than they've ever had; it's not over but it's better than it's been. In my lifetime here, I've seen big changes. It's moving in the right direction. I know there are problems with Europe, but the great success of Europe in my view has been the seventy-five years of peace it has maintained. On the continent of Europe 70 million people died between the First and Second World Wars. George Steiner calls it the Thirty Years' War...horrific. When you think of what Germany did to itself. But we've had

relative peace since 1946 until now. That's an amazing achievement, no matter what you say about Europe or the European experiment; that, in itself, is an amazing achievement. We shouldn't forget that. Since Ireland joined the EU, we've progressed tremendously; and our dependence on our long relationship with that island beside us (which was an abusive relationship) is now beginning to loosen. That's how I see it. I know there are problems and complexities relating to our membership of the EU, but if we loosen our relationship with Britain and improve our relationship with Europe, I think we will develop more healthy as a country.

This is not some dark nationalism. There are two different types of nationalism. I want to talk about this for a moment? There is American nationalism—'Make America Great Again', and there is British nationalism (Rule Britannia), and English nationalism, but that's different to Catalan nationalism. Because there's the nationalism of a country that has for centuries taken over the world. And there's the nationalism of a country that for centuries has not been able to speak, quite literally, its own language. So there are two different types of nationalism. Sometimes I read in *The Irish Times* correlations between Sinn Féin-Irish nationalism and the nationalism of the Nazis in Germany. These are two very different types of nationalism: the nationalism of abusive countries that have the power, and the nationalism of those countries that just want to be themselves. They are different. No one is talking about these distinctions. So when people connect Irish nationalism to the nationalism of Nazi Germany, that's a grave misjudgment. My *Sacrum Profanum* takes on these themes. They are profound and they matter to me. I have a colleague, Siobhan Armstrong, who plays the medieval Irish harp. We've largely lost that tradition, or rather, it was destroyed under English (later British) colonialism. She is, almost single-handedly, recapturing what was lost. Though, as I say, we didn't lose it; it was taken away from us; it was robbed from us. I can speak fluent Spanish but I can't speak fluent Irish. It was robbed from us. These are the problems. No one robbed the German language from the Germans—you know what I mean?—no one robbed the English language from the English. But here's a country with a completely different set up to the Anglo-Saxon island of Britain; we were Gaelic and now we've no Gaelic language. 1% of our population speaks it fluently. Our language, our poetry, our music was placed in grave danger. They tried to take it away. So don't tell me that Irish nationalism is the same as German nationalism or British nationalism; it's not, it just isn't. I mean, we need to preserve languages no matter where they are from; we're losing something in the region of one hundred languages a year; these are not just dialects, they are languages, they are people's languages. So for me that's it. It's not flag waving but I do want to make that distinction between different types of nationalism. A nationalism where you're just trying to be who you were without interfering with any other country. The problem of the English-Brexit business is the problem of a thousand-year history of being in other people's countries and taking everything, not just taking produce, but taking their cultures, you know. That's the dangerous nationalism.

D: Do you practice peace in your own surroundings? Do you see yourself socially responsible for bringing or maintaining peace and in what way?

B: Education. Yeah everyday. And the older I get the more important that is for me. I told you earlier that I was quite selfish being a composer and a performer. Perhaps you have to be. I was keeping my distance from students, from relationships, actually. But now teaching has become the big joy of my life. Middlesex University has a broad demographic: Muslim students, black students, Indian students; actually, very few white British. And many students

are from disenfranchised areas. So it's a pleasure for me to try to make a difference to their lives. It goes back to my own experience growing up, you know. Teaching music is fantastic because it's a great language in the sense that it is a universal language; and I know that sounds like a cliché but it's true. If people can play something sensitively that means they have empathy, because you're helping them to expose parts of their hearts and minds. Nobody can explain this, you know, but music opens up the heart; and so when you're teaching music you're teaching peace. I know that's a very philosophical response but it's true. I think it all boils down to humanity. What they didn't tell me about my job when I took it was that I was going to have to be a psychiatrist, a carer; but if you can give people a hope in themselves... That's the answer.

D: Are there or were there institutions that are responsible for bringing or maintaining peace? The state (nation, capitalist, welfare state, socialist...)?

B: The Welfare State, of course. I mean I don't know how people survive in America. I lived in Spain for five years. A very good Australian friend of mine lived there. She was married to another friend, and after they split up she was left without a pension or anything else. She went back to Australia, which was just as well because she unfortunately she had a stroke and she's now being looked after in Australia. She would be in a terrible situation if she was still in Spain. Just the question one more time?

D: Are there or were there institutions that are responsible for creating or maintaining peace?

B: Of course, the Welfare State is a beautiful idea. The NHS is the best thing that came out of the Second World War for the UK. It is being undermined now by the Tories. People sometimes forget how important the NHS is. It's society of course. As I said, we are in this trajectory where Britain, since the Second World War, has been mostly run by Tories, not by Labour, not by the left. And that's not changing. And in crises, poor people vote Tories for some reason. Now I know Corbin didn't inspire, but still. And the Tories are just going to rip things apart. The Welfare State, it's probably going to be replaced by something else—a for-profit system. It won't be good, you know. We've had a Welfare State all my life here but Mary Harney started undermining that and it's a different animal now. So there are millions of people without health insurance in America. It's crazy. If you cut your finger you can die, because you can't afford to go to the doctor.

D: Is peace a result of one's personal or generational historical experience of war, deprivation, justice or social conflicts?

B: I can only answer in the same vein. I think everything stems from the tree; if there is no nurture going into the tree, the leaves are not going to be good. It's holistic, I know it's simplistic. That's all I can say about it. I live my life through music, a kind of philosophical music that makes sense to me, I want to make sense of the world through music; that's philosophy; it all comes back to the self. I suppose that it's a cross between philosophy and (I hate this word but...) a spiritual understanding of the world. I know you're coming from a political perspective, you're trying to solve political problems and I can't begin to..

N: But what made you go and research Irish history, I mean you're not a cart making music for my own deeper..or really transcendental thing on it's own but something deeper is making you go and research deeper...

B: I don't believe any real composer doesn't involve themselves in politics at some level. I have a good friend, the composer I mentioned earlier who composes what I call 'beautiful vases'. While there is no overt politics involved in the compositional processes of these pieces, there is politics lurking in the background because it involves a politics of the privileged. I'm privileged, but to be able to make art for art's sake, while all this stuff is going around is somewhat problematic for me. I don't think there's a conflict between art being transcendental and art being political and awareness-raising. But there are people who say that the minute you use art for political means, there is a diminishment in the art. But then you have to reassess the Eroica Symphony, which was dedicated to Napoleon. When Beethoven composed it he thought that Napoleon was freeing Europe of the shackles of tyranny (of course, he withdrew the dedication later). And his Ninth Symphony has become the anthem for human freedom; it's the unofficial anthem for Europe; that's political. What about Penderecki's *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima*? They are great works of art in themselves. I don't see any diminishment here because they have a political element. Great black poets have written about freedom, great poetry: I'm thinking of people like Maya Angelou. So you see I have a little problem with composers and artists who are writing in little bubble and composing beautiful vases while claiming to be non-political because actually they are already making political statements; a politics of privilege. Now, my Beckett piece, *what is the word*, is not political, it's more philosophically directed, but my next piece, *Sacrum Profanum*, as I mentioned earlier, is very political. It's not that art always has to be political. I forgot the question, but I'm bringing it back, actually I think I'm answering your question that at this stage I'm...

N: The question is if your position is of making art from a transcendental place, how does it get political?

B: Well, I mean the transcendental is there, but actually I'm here with you guys. I'm here because I believe in politics. I have to live in the world. You know it's a privilege for me to be able to write the Beckett piece. It took me three years; that's a privilege. But as I say, when I teach in my university in London and I meet these kids with all sorts of problems, do I say I don't give a shit? You know? One can't get away from politics. If I walk home tonight, I'll see twelve homeless people. I mean, I have a choice: I can ignore that and say it doesn't matter. If you are a composer, and it doesn't matter—fine. But if you're a composer and it matters, then it connects to your composing. It doesn't mean that every piece has to be about politics. I wouldn't recommend that actually; but it means that sometimes you just have to write certain pieces that address the real world in which you live.

D: Do people volunteer to go to war or is it a personal choice?

B: I doubt it. I mean in the Second World War there was a clear enemy in fascism so, as well as the draft, many volunteered. I think about the Spanish Civil War, which tore that country apart. People didn't volunteer for that—it was something that happened to them. But if you take the Iraq War and the Afghanistan War, we're getting into different territory. The army go to small towns in the States and they recruit totally disenfranchised kids who don't even have a passport; and they think they are volunteering to go to war? I mean, these questions are really difficult because you can take them on any level. I often say to my brothers (I'm the youngest of four brothers, my eldest brother was born in 1956; he's 64), if we were born in Belfast or Derry, instead of being born in Dublin, would we be all alive today? I don't know, it's a very difficult question. If I were Catholic growing up in Belfast and I saw no future for my family,

no future myself, no future for my son, would I have been able to avoid getting involved in the Troubles? I don't know. I often say to my brothers we are very lucky to not have been born there, to not have had that karma. It's a very difficult question. It's a question with huge ethical weight.

D: Who is profiting from war? How does that affect the post war politics?

B: Now that's an amusing one. I don't know how to answer that. Coca Cola, for instance. You know the answer to that?

D: Did anyone in your family fight in a war? Did they ever tell you about the war?

B: No. And I think I just answered that with the last answer there, but there for the grace of God go I. I think we would have. I think one of my brothers would have been the first to pick up a gun. I wouldn't, I'm a pacifist. I mean I really am. But if I was married to you, and someone was going to harm you, I'd kill the bastard. You know?

D: Do you think peace has advanced the society we live in?

B: It's a strange question, of course it would have. I mean, I don't understand the question. We need to live in peace. I don't understand the question.

D: Is peace related to the distribution or redistribution of wealth, ownership of property?

B: Of course it is. We are so far from the Marxist ideal; we're so far into late Capitalism that there's no way equality can be created now without some major shift. This is the end result of late Capitalism; and America is the result of late Capitalism; millions of people without health insurance. 'You can't work? Fuck you, get another job. You cut your wrist? Fuck you. I'm making money, fuck you'. That's the mentality: 'By the way, we'll sell you a gun so you can go kill yourself.' It's a completely de-sacralised environment and that's the modern world that we are aspiring to at the moment.

D: Can a state be run by a working-class person?

B: These are really loaded questions. You see you're talking about equality. But I think you really need visionary leadership, you know?

N: Yes, but is it necessarily connected to expertise or because you know you had...?

D: What is solidarity for you? Is it practice in your surroundings? Is it a factor in the production of peace?

B: I think, you know, I have a small community here and in the UK; and it's mostly built around music; family as well. My friend Nick Roth became an Irish citizen two days ago!

D: Congratulations!

B: I'm delighted for him! Because he's been here for twenty years. He's from London and he has created so much beautiful community here. He has brought out thirty CDs by Irish and Irish-based composers; he's a composer, a jazz player, an improviser, a record producer, the whole lot. I've played with him. His interview in my book is entitled, 'There's no such thing as genre'. For me he's one of the greats, I just love him. I would like to see him as a Taoiseach!... honestly. He's got vision, he works hard, he laughs. I feel like he's the only person who has ever listened to my music, really listened. He also writes. We are both struggling at the

moment, trying to write books on music and philosophy; we've been working on this for two years. We meet in restaurants; we share our ideas, that's what community is. He's someone I feel a part of a community with. I know that sounds a bit naff but I do. When I started writing my book, *Different Voices*, it was really an attempt to figure out who my community was in Ireland. I was trying to find my place. In many ways, I wrote the book for myself; to ask 'where do I fit in? Is there a community? I think there is but it's a small one.

D: How does wage labour bring you together with or separate you from other workers?

B: Oh yeah, that's a big one. I have a full salary, I get it every month. Now, I have very talented colleagues who do not have full time jobs. And music institutions are now adopting the gigs-economy model, and it's disgraceful. What can I say? I pay for my own projects, pretty much. Ok, look, maybe I don't deserve any arts council support. I do what I do, but I don't like to see music institutions do the gig-economy thing. I have a colleague; she should have a full time position, she's a stunning musician and an amazing teacher, and they won't give her a contract for more than eight hours a week so that she can never get close to having a contract, and so they don't have to give her a pension. This is where we are going. This is the logical result of a Cartesian experiment gone wrong. And musicians put thousands of hours into their work, you know. If I was a doctor, I'd be a consultant by now. I'd have a Mercedes (not that I want a Mercedes). But these things are valued differently. So that's a bit sad, and I don't know what more I can say about it.

D: Has socialism / the EU or the prospect of joining the EU brought peace to your area and are you thankful for the EU?

B: Well, you can't really put socialism in the same sentence as the EU. I said earlier that I think Europe is a very great experiment, but it's working under the same rules of late Capitalism. I think the great thing about Europe is the peace it has maintained, its vision is essentially good, but I think they're messing up on migration issues; and it's very much on the cutting edge of late-Capitalist thinking and it needs to reshape. So when you say socialist in Europe, the question seems a little bit flawed in my understanding.

N: The question actually has a slash because it was actually in opposition and also because of the different countries in the project had different regimes so Yugoslavia was socialism, Romania was socialism, Ireland was something else...

B: Well then I'm glad you clarified that. Well, I think you know my position about Europe. I don't think there will be some sort of Marxist revolution. That bus has left the station. There will have to be some kind of interconnectedness. For example, I noticed that the company in England, JCB, are now on a 4-day week because they're missing a single engine part from China, which they can't get because of Covid. You see this is why the Brexit thing is so stupid, whether we like it or not we have a global interconnection (that has its problems; I'm not holding a flag high for this), but that's where we are.

N: They think like Trump 'make America great again'. I mean, this question of this satisfaction on globalism the answer to that is not going to Americanism or protectionism..

B: No no, it's happening in Poland, it's happening in Hungary, Poland is being myopic, it's so extreme.

N: it's happening in France, in Italy, everywhere.

B: Yeah.

D: how does European peace relate to internal immigration?

B: Yeah, that's a really complex question. Europe has been, on the whole, a great achievement, so far. But the West for years has been bombing the Middle East and parts of Asia, and doing so without thinking about the long-term consequences, so it's lacking vision. You know. I mean, Angela Merkel was a visionary welcoming refugees and migrants into Germany. But, generally, the problem is that the West's policy towards that part of the world is to destroy it. If you destroy a country, you are going to have refugees and mass immigration.

I think Europe has been a great thing for Ireland. But its also run by financiers, this is the problem. It's a climate problem, it's a health problem, It's a problem with starvation all over the world, you know, and Europe is weak in the face of American aggression and its horrible foreign policies. They support awful countries like Saudi Arabia. They implicitly support the bombing of all these countries, and then suddenly they're surprised that Libya has collapsed. Syria is a disaster. What's happening in Syria is heartbreaking; and they don't ask where are these people going to go. There are millions of Syrian refugees in Turkey. But you have to stop bombing if you want to stop the flow of displaced refugees. I think these questions are really heavy. I'm exhausted trying to answer them because I don't really feel qualified to answer them.

D: How does peace relate to relations with countries in other continents and immigration from there?

B: That's the same question. They are really difficult questions

D: How does peace relate to climate change?

B: It's the same thing; I think the questions are all related. All the problems relating to late-Capitalist thinking are coming home to roost now. It seems to me like I'm watching history for the last five or six years. It's not just Brexit or the Sinn Féin thing or MAGA, 'Make America Great Again' or the rise of the right in Hungary. Its all part of the same thing. And meanwhile Australia just burned up! It literally burned; you could see it from a satellite. It's happening everywhere. England is flooded. In Brazil the rain forests are burning up (there's an evil man in charge there for sure). I think we are close to some sort of a tectonic shift politically, and I think it's going to be in consciousness, which is the same thing as getting back to the self. If we can shift the consciousness, things may change.

But what we've been seeing for years is the politics of aggression and possession. Countries used to invade other countries to take the produce. They don't have to do that anymore; they just have to invade the bank accounts, or control the food supply or the seeds.

N: Yes, of course they are genetically modified. They cannot reproduce.

B: This for me is the latest form of colonialism today. In Iraq, the practice of sharing seeds was important because a varied seed use always replenished the land. After the American invasion and the creation of a new 'Constitution' they now only have four seeds to work with, and all these seeds are provided by Monsanto, so they are now depended upon an American corporation to feed its people. Few people know this story! There's a de facto Iraqi government there, but it's really run by American corporates. So this is the problem. I mean, all these questions are really relevant, but they're unanswerable in the face of the world that we live in.

N: Well, we have one more question and then we can talk freely.

D: Would you consider peacebuilding a political endeavour? and who is the political subject that can carry it ?

B: That goes back to visionary leadership. I don't think we're ever going to have peace if we don't have a shift in consciousness. I think I go back to the same question.

N: But do you see a group of people let's say, it doesn't have to be that, like in Marxism you have the working class or it doesn't have to be the working class, maybe there's another...

B: No, I don't actually think they exist. I mean why can't people live in peace? It seems that we've always had wars, it's our destiny, and it shouldn't be because we're the brightest of the living beings on the planet; we are pretty bright. We can put people on the moon but we can't stop wars. We're full of contradictions, it's like when Notre Dame was burned down; within twenty-four hours there were billions pledged, and there are people starving in all sorts of places, you know what I mean? We're full of contradictions. A shift in consciousness is the answer. I believe in this; you need to have a visionary consciousness. But we don't, we are not accessing ourselves, and that goes back to our Cartesian destiny. I think one of the reasons we're suffering all these problems is that we're living in the wrong paradigm. Descartes has a lot to answer for. What did he say? 'I think therefore I am'. Well, no, actually. And quantum physics has really figured this out. Actually, we're nowhere. We're resonating with the leaves; I'm not being dreamy here but the minute you say, 'I think therefore I am', you're not thinking about anything else. That was the cognitive wrong turn from the 1600s; and we've been on that journey ever since.

I think of Harold Bloom, the great American educationalist and writer. He argues that during the dark ages the lights just went out in Europe. All that knowledge from ancient Greece, all the religious and philosophical tracts, all the literature was held (often by Irish monks) in little monasteries on islands off the coast of Scotland or Ireland or somewhere down in the Mediterranean. And when it came to the the period of the emergence of the Renaissance, and Europe opened up again, that knowledge was ready to be released and harnessed again. It was because these little pockets of knowledge were preserved by small groups of people that we had the Enlightenment. And that's where I think we are now. I think there are small groups of people who are preserving the best of human consciousness. As Borges says:

A man who cultivates his garden, as Voltaire wishes.

He who is grateful for the existence of music.

He who takes pleasure in tracing etymology.

Two workmen playing, in a café in the South, a silent game of chess.

The potter, contemplating a colour and a form.

The typographer who sets this page well, though it may not please him.

A woman and a man, who read the last tercets of a certain canto.

He who strokes a sleeping animal.

He who justifies, or wishes to, a wrong done him.

He who is grateful for the existence of Stevenson.

He who prefers others to be right.

These people, unaware, are saving the world.

Has the Mass ended?

N + D: Yes! Thank you very, very much!