

# Biography

## JOHN O'CONNOR, piano

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Through his recitals, concerto appearances and critically acclaimed recordings, the Irish pianist **John O'Connor** has earned a reputation as a masterful interpreter of the Classic and Early Romantic piano repertoires. He has been praised for his formidable technique and through his eloquent phrasing, mastery of keyboard colour and, in particular, his unique sound he has been called a true Poet of the Piano.

He has performed in Europe, North America, Asia, Africa, Australia and New Zealand and has appeared with such orchestras as the London Symphony, Royal Philharmonic, Czech Philharmonic, Vienna Symphony, l'Orchestre National de France, the Scottish and Stuttgart Chamber Orchestras, the Israel Camerata, the NHK, Yomiuri, Kyushu, Kyoto and Sapporo Symphonies in Japan, the KBS Symphony in Korea, the Singapore Symphony, the New Zealand Symphony and the orchestras of Atlanta, Cleveland, San Francisco, Boston, Dallas, Detroit, Indianapolis, Seattle, Montreal, Toronto, Tampa and Washington DC in North America.

He also appears frequently with the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland (and was soloist with them on their inaugural tour of the USA in 2004) and with the Irish Chamber Orchestra.

He has given concerts in many of the world's most famous halls including Carnegie Hall and the Lincoln Center in New York, the Kennedy Center in Washington, the Wigmore Hall and South Bank Centre in London, the Musikverein in Vienna, the Dvorak Hall in Prague and the Bunka Kaikan in Tokyo.

He also enjoys collaborating in Lieder Recitals and performing chamber music with many instrumentalists and ensembles such as the Cleveland, Tokyo, Vanbrugh, Vermeer, Takacs, Vogler, Ying, Audubon and Navarra Quartets.

Mr. O'Connor also continues to make significant contributions to the arts in his native

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country and has championed the works of Ireland's leading 19<sup>th</sup> century composer, John Field. He has become a key figure in the development of young artists through his role as Director of the Royal Irish Academy of Music, and was a co-founder of the Dublin International Piano Competition of which he is Artistic Director and Chairman of the Jury.

John O'Connor first gained widespread attention in the United States in 1986 with the release of the initial volume of the complete recorded Beethoven Sonata cycle which was issued as a box set in 1994. CD Review described Mr. O'Connor's performances of these sonatas as "piano recording of the highest calibre and Beethoven playing at its best" and went on to say "This Beethoven series should become the complete set of choice".

Mr. O'Connor has made more than 20 recordings for the Telarc label including the complete Beethoven Bagatelles, which was cited by the New York Times as the best recording of these works; four volumes of Mozart Piano Concertos with Sir Charles Mackerras and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra; numerous works of Schubert including the late A major Sonata, the complete Impromptus and Moments Musicaux, Waltzes and the Trout Quintet with the Cleveland Quartet; and two volumes of short piano pieces entitled "Piano Classics" and "Autumn Songs". An avid proponent of his fellow countryman John Field, he has recorded most of the composer's major works including the complete Concertos, Sonatas and Nocturnes. His recording of Field's Nocturnes featured on Billboard's classical charts for many weeks. He has also made a recording of his favourite Irish Airs with the Irish Chamber Orchestra entitled "My Ireland".

In 2007 and 2008 he recorded the complete Piano Concertos of Beethoven with the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Andreas Delfs which have received great acclaim.

Mr. O'Connor's early studies began in Dublin where his main piano teacher was

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Dr. J.J.O'Reilly. He was awarded an Austrian Government scholarship that enabled him to study in Vienna with the renowned pedagogue Dieter Weber. He also made a special study of Beethoven with the legendary German pianist Wilhelm Kempff. In 1973 John O'Connor was unanimously awarded First Prize at the International Beethoven Piano Competition in Vienna and in 1975 he won First Prize at the Bösendorfer Competition.

John O'Connor is deeply committed to the development of young pianists in Ireland and in other countries. As well as being Professor of Piano at the Royal Irish Academy of Music, he gives masterclasses and lectures in many of the places he performs as well as in many of the major music institutions including the Juilliard and Manhattan Schools in New York, Harvard, Yale, Temple, Rutgers, Indiana and Seattle Universities, the Ravinia Festival, the Adamant Music School in Vermont, the Hamamatsu Piano Academy in Japan, the National University of the Arts in Korea, the Australian National Academy and the Sydney Conservatorium in Australia, the Paris Conservatoire and the Royal Academy of Music and the Guildhall School of Music in London. He has been a member of the Faculty of the Aspen Music Festival and School since 2006 and is a regular performer at the Festival.

He has been invited on the juries of most of the world's most prestigious International Piano Competitions including those in Leeds, Moscow (Tchaikovsky), Vienna (Beethoven), Warsaw (Chopin), Tel Aviv (Rubinstein), Hamamatsu, Beijing, Shanghai, Munich, Bolzano (Busoni), Cologne, Vevay (Clara Haskil), Cleveland, Salt Lake City (Gina Bachauer), Sydney, Pretoria, London, College Park (William Kapell), Valencia (Jose Iturbi), Hilton Head and Seoul. His students have won many international prizes.

Since 1997 he has taken on the mantle of his revered professor Wilhelm Kempff and gives the annual Beethoven Interpretation Course in Kempff's own villa in Positano, Italy where Kempff gave the course from 1957.

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In August 2010, John O'Connor retired as Director of the Royal Irish Academy of Music after 16 years at the helm during which time he introduced Masters and Doctoral degrees in performance, oversaw a major refurbishment of the building itself, acquired many new instruments for the teaching rooms (including Steinway grand pianos) and persuaded the most prominent Irish musical personalities to join the teaching faculties of the Academy. Many students have had great successes in International Music Competitions and have gone on to forge major performing careers.

John O'Connor will continue to be Professor of Piano at the RIAM but has also taken on a new position as Distinguished Visiting Artist and Professor of Piano at Shenandoah Conservatory of Shenandoah University in Winchester, Virginia. He has also recently been appointed Visiting Professor of Piano at the Showa University of Music in Kawasaki, Japan.

For his services to music John O'Connor has been awarded Honorary Doctorates by the National University of Ireland, by Trinity College Dublin and by Shenandoah University, Virginia and an Honorary Fellowship by the Royal Irish Academy of Music.

He has been decorated with the title "Officier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres" by the French government, awarded the "Ehrenkreuz für Wissenschaft und Kunst" by the Austrian government and has also been decorated by the Italian and Polish governments. Most recently, the Japanese government has awarded him the Order of the Rising Sun and Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon. Mr. O'Connor has also been decorated by the governments of Italy and Poland.

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