Irish Independent

The musical instrument fund that launched a generation of artists

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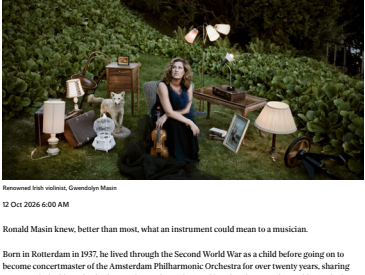

Renowned Irish violinist, Gwendolyn Masin

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Ronald Masin knew, better than most, what an instrument could mean to a musician.

Born in Rotterdam in 1937, he lived through the Second World War as a child before going on to become concertmaster of the Amsterdam Philharmonic Orchestra for over twenty years, sharing stages with the likes of Yehudi Menuhin and David Oistrakh. When he moved to Dublin in the late 1980s to teach at what is now TU Dublin Conservatoire, he began to notice that his most talented students often had far more ability than their instruments could support.

In 1995, Masin did something about it. He founded the Music Instrument Fund of Ireland (MIFI), a charity built on a simple idea: that a young string player with real promise should not be stopped short by the cost of an instrument capable of matching their ability. MIFI loans fine instruments from across Europe to Ireland's most promising young musicians for three years and can be extended for another three years on re-audition.

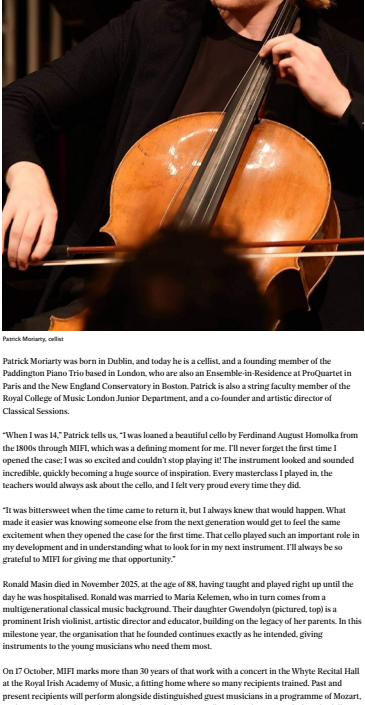
Thirty years on, the numbers speak for themselves: a collection of 16 instruments, 112 young musicians who have played on them, and a remarkable 84pc of recipients who have gone on to careers as professional musicians. Today, previous MIFI beneficiaries perform with orchestras, trios and quartets and teach at conservatoires, building the kind of multi-faceted careers that a fine instrument, at the right moment, can make possible.

Neasa Ní Bhriain was born in Dublin, and is now a violist, a professor of viola at Hochschule für Musik Dresden, and a founding member of ensemble reflector. Neasa tells us that:

"Aged 16, I was given a Postacchini violin from the Music Instrument Fund of Ireland. It was on this instrument that I gained entrance to the HMT Rostock in 2008 and played for my (last) violin teacher, Prof. Petru Munteanu. I remember when I had to give it back, Prof. Munteanu asked if he could play it during my final lesson using it. He recognised it had been something precious that had made our work more enjoyable.

"This instrument had soul and beauty and was the last violin I truly loved. After giving it back, I slowly realised that I was looking for much deeper resonances and went on to search for the sound that would carry me through until today - the viola"

"Thank you, MIFI! Letting young musicians find their sound on such wonderful instruments lets them know they're being taken seriously - and that is beautiful."



Patrick Moriarty, cellist

Patrick Moriarty was born in Dublin, and today he is a cellist, and a founding member of the Paddington Piano Trio based in London, who are also an Ensemble-in-Residence at ProQuartet in Paris and the New England Conservatory in Boston. Patrick is also a string faculty member of the Royal College of Music London Junior Department, and a co-founder and artistic director of Classical Sessions.

"When I was 14," Patrick tells us, "I was loaned a beautiful cello by Ferdinand August Homolka from the 1800s through MIFI, which was a defining moment for me. I'll never forget the first time I opened the case; I was so excited and couldn't stop playing it! The instrument looked and sounded incredible, quickly becoming a huge source of inspiration. Every masterclass I played in, the teachers would always ask about the cello, and I felt very proud every time they did.

"It was bittersweet when the time came to return it, but I always knew that would happen. What made it easier was knowing someone else from the next generation would get to feel the same excitement when they opened the case for the first time. That cello played such an important role in my development and in understanding what to look for in my next instrument. I'll always be so grateful to MIFI for giving me that opportunity."

Ronald Masin died in November 2025, at the age of 88, having taught and played right up until the day he was hospitalised. Ronald was married to Maria Kelemen, who in turn comes from a multigenerational classical music background. Their daughter Gwendolyn (pictured, top) is a prominent Irish violinist, artistic director and educator, building on the legacy of her parents. In this milestone year, the organisation that he founded continues exactly as he intended, giving instruments to the young musicians who need them most.

On 17 October, MIFI marks more than 30 years of that work with a concert in the Whyte Recital Hall at the Royal Irish Academy of Music, a fitting home where so many recipients trained. Past and present recipients will perform alongside distinguished guest musicians in a programme of Mozart, Brahms, Mendelssohn, and Borodin, alongside John Kinsella's Elegy for Strings, before the full ensemble closes the evening together.

Michelle Fleming, born in Cork, is a violinist and a member of the Carducci Quartet based in Cheltenham, and she told us that: "I still remember the excitement of receiving a beautiful violin on loan from the Music Instrument Fund of Ireland. At that stage in my musical journey, it opened a whole new world of possibilities, encouraging me to explore a wider variety of tone colours and to project a bigger, richer sound on my instrument. It was so inspiring and came at such an important point in my musical development. I am so grateful to this day."

MIFI has spent thirty years making sure that talent in Ireland is never held back by the cost of an instrument. The impact over the past three decades is simply immense, and this event will be a fitting celebration.

Tickets (€20–€30) are on sale now at https://www.riam.ie/whats-on/over-30-years-of-mifi-a-celebratory-concert.