



JOSEPH CHESTER

LUCIA

for Guitar & Strings

Inspired by fragments of the life of

Lucia Joyce

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People talk of my influence on my daughter, but what about her influence on me?"

James Joyce, 1934

As part of the celebrations marking the centenary of James Joyce's *Ulysses* taking place in Dublin and globally on the 16th of June 2022, Axis Ballymun presented the world premiere of 'LUCIA' - a suite for guitar and strings composed by multi-award nominated musician Joseph Chester.

Lucia Joyce spent 47 years in institutions as a result of mental illness, including long periods in isolation. She died in the notoriously cruel St. Andrew's asylum, Northampton at the age of 75. And yet, in her youth she had shown enormous potential, as a dancer and illustrator. Over the course of two years, Chester took ten key moments from the life of Lucia Joyce, ten facts of her existence, and composed a piece of music for each, to pay tribute to her, to bear witness to her and, in some fantastical, imaginary way, let her speak. The *Paris Times* wrote that, "James Joyce may yet be known as his daughter's father." Some say she was a muse for *Finnegans Wake*. Her father described her as, "A fantastic being with a mind as clear and unsparring as the lightning." However, after undergoing tests, she was diagnosed with schizophrenia and was committed in 1936.

She would never know freedom again.

“I was interested in Lucia’s story for what it tells us about our historic fear and lack of understanding of mental illness and how perhaps creativity and mental illness can be inextricably linked. Silenced in life, Lucia was silenced once again in death when her papers (including her correspondence with Samuel Beckett) were all destroyed by her nephew, Stephen Joyce.

I released my last album, *Jupiter's Wife*, at the very start of the pandemic and so, what would ordinarily have been a very busy time of concerts and promotion became a time of reflection and taking stock. *Jupiter's Wife* and indeed its predecessor, *The Easter Vigil* had been quite lyrically dense albums and, as with every new project, I wanted to move on to a new challenge. And so I thought, 'What could be more challenging than to make an album with no words?' I had already started to expand my musical horizons by beginning to learn to read and write music and teaching myself some classical guitar technique. I made some arrangements of Turlough O'Carolan and some old traditional Irish tunes, adapting them to the classical guitar and was casting around for a theme.

It was around this time that I heard a radio documentary on RTE Lyric FM called "Dancing With Lucia," about the daughter of James Joyce who had been a dancer of great potential before being diagnosed with schizophrenia and spending 47 years in institutions. Her story resonated with me very deeply. The idea came to me very quickly to try and tell Lucia’s story through music. There followed an intense period of research, trying to dig up any reliable information. The problem is that when it comes to Lucia, there is such a whirlwind of rumour and speculation around her, lots of it wild and salacious, most of it completely devoid of evidence, that it becomes incredibly difficult to glimpse the real person.

To avoid adding to the noise and gossip around Lucia, I decided to take ten key moments (I added one later), facts of her life and compose a piece of music for each, with the hope that these pieces would add up to a cohesive whole, both musically, and more importantly as a portrait of Lucia as a real, breathing, living person. No judgement, no speculation, just empathy.

I wanted the music to have a sense and feel of Paris in the early 20th century and as such was influenced greatly by the sound world of Eric Satie and Claude Debussy but also other more modern composers such as Toru Takemitsu, Leo Brouwer, Stephen Goss, Laura Snowden and many other composers of contemporary music. This has been by a mile, the most ambitious, project of my life, at turns seemingly impossible, yet exhilarating, painful, and yet enlightening. At times it felt like an insurmountable challenge. And then I thought, "If not now, when?"

Joseph Chester, Rennes, 2022

Northampton

Lucia is 75 in Northampton Lunatic Asylum reflecting on the unfulfilled promise of her life, her love of dance, her luminous talent, her enduring love of Samuel Beckett, and her 47 years in institutions.

The Little Match Girl

1928 - Lucia gets a small part as a toy soldier in French silent cinema master Jean Renoir's *The Little Match Girl*.

La Princesse Primitive

After a performance in *La Princesse Primitive* at the Vieux-Colombier theatre, the Paris Times wrote of her: "Lucia Joyce is her father's daughter. She has James Joyce's enthusiasm, energy, and a not-yet-determined amount of his genius. When she reaches her full capacity for rhythmic dancing, James Joyce may yet be known as his daughter's father."

The Jury's Verdict

On 28 May 1929, Lucia was chosen as one of six finalists in the first international festival of dance in Paris held at the Bal Bullier. Although she did not win, the audience - which included her father and the young Samuel Beckett - championed her performance as outstanding and loudly protested the jury's verdict.



Beckett

Lucia and Samuel Beckett become lovers. She is devastated when he tells her that he was only interested in her to get closer to her father. Many years later when Beckett died, a photograph of Lucia is found in his desk.

Fragment from Work in Progress

Lucia begins helping her father with his work on *Finnegans Wake*, in fact some say the book is in many ways inspired by or pays homage to her. *Finnegans Wake* is a circular novel, ending halfway through the sentence with which it begins. In the same way, this piece of music is circular, beginning and ending with the same phrase.

Nuvoluccia in her Lightdress

Joyce considered Lucia special, a “fantastic being,” with her own private language and a mind “as clear and as unsparing as the lightning. As he wrote in *Finnegans Wake*, “Nuvoletta in her lightdress, spun of sisteen shimmers, was looking down on them, leaning over the bannistars and listening all she childishly could. Not even her feigt reflection, Nuvoluccia...”

Candlemass, 1932

At her father’s 50th birthday party, on Candlemass 1932, Lucia throws a chair at her mother, Nora. She is sectioned for the first time by her brother, Giorgio.

Asylum

Although Lucia is in and out of institutions for the next four years, including Saint Andrew's Asylum, Northampton, she is finally taken away in a straight jacket from family friend, Maria Jolas' home in 1936. She will never know freedom again.

What's he Doing Under the Ground, That Idiot?

1941 - When Lucia learns of her father's death she says, "What's he doing under the ground, that idiot? When will he decide to come out? He's watching us all the time."

A Flower Given to my Daughter

Frail the white rose and frail are
Her hands that gave
Whose soul is sere and paler
Than time's wan wave.

Rosefrail and fair — yet frailest
A wonder wild
In gentle eyes thou veilest,
My blueveined child.

James Joyce, 1917



Thank you:

This piece was composed with the invaluable help of Axis Ballymun, The Arts Council of Ireland and Dublin City Council to whom I am eternally grateful.

To my amazing wife, Julie whose patience knows no bounds. I couldn't have done this without you.

To Trevor Hutchinson for his crucial help with recording, Steve Wickham, Vyvienne Long and Kenneth Rice.

Photographs of Lucia Joyce are courtesy of the Poetry Collection of the University Libraries, University at Buffalo, The State University of New York.

Niamh Ní Chonchubhair, Ger Kellett, all the Staff and Board of Trustees of Axis without whose unconditional and overwhelming support this piece would not have been possible. You always said, "Yes" and for that I am forever grateful.