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# 10 STRING SYMPHONY

**26th May – 11th June 2021**

A digital tour presented in partnership with **The Dock**,  
**The Courthouse Arts Centre**, **Siamsa Tíre**, **Belltable**,  
**Garner Lane Theatre**, **glór**, **National Opera House**,  
**Riverbank Arts Centre** and **Ionad Cultúrtha (Baile Mhuirne)**.

**Rachel Baiman** (fiddle, banjo, vocals)

**Christian Sedelmyer** (fiddle, vocals)

# Programme Notes

Broadcaster and bluegrass musician Niall Toner spoke to 10 String Symphony's Rachel Baiman and Christian Sedelmyer in advance of their Music Network digital tour.

When we hear the descriptive term 'Symphony', it can conjure up an image of vast numbers of violins, cellos, basses and various woodwind, brass and percussion instruments creating a symphonic wave of sound, filling vast concert halls and auditoria with renditions of works by the great classical composers. The term somehow implies BIG, lots of musicians and their instruments, often conducted by a maestro with a baton, a somewhat *grande* scenario.

Consider then, if you will, the term applied to a two-piece outfit comprised of two five-string fiddle players, Rachel Baiman and Christian Sedelmyer, and it might seem small by comparison. But Rachel and Christian are masters of their instruments. They more than make up for what they lack in numbers with a magic sound created by the carefully-crafted intermingling of two creative geniuses under their collective title 10 String Symphony.

10 String Symphony's *Weight of the World* album was the release that brought them to the attention of National Public Radio in the USA, and presenter Jewly Hight has been quoted as describing the combo as "The newest and best voices in Americana music". High praise, indeed, and no pun intended. Hight again: "Their unique and compelling vocal and string arrangements are at once traditionally informed, yet completely *avant garde*". Their follow-up album, *All Songs Considered*, introduced them to a wider audience, including acceptance into the Bluegrass scene, with a number three hit in the Billboard Bluegrass Charts, in turn leading to a tour which took them all over the US, and included Australia and the UK. Their latest offering is *Generation Frustration*, which was produced by Kris Drever in Scotland. This album demonstrates a deeper experiment into the complexities of string arrangements and highlights the duo's original song-writing abilities. They are pushing the boat out on this one, and the results have been described by critics as being both beautiful and challenging.

Another mark of the success of 10 String Symphony has been the demand for their services in the recording studios on other people's recordings. As their reputation grew around "Music City" [Nashville], they got calls to play on tracks by artists as diverse as Missy Raines and her band, The New Hip, Kelsey

Waldon, Caroline Spence and Bluegrass maestros The Special Consensus, as well as playing live as part of Kacey Musgraves' show at the world famous Ryman Auditorium. The pair have also been opening up for others including Sarah Jarosz and Sierra Hull, and Rachel also played the Kilkenny Roots Festival a couple of years ago with the incredible Molly Tuttle. An occasion I reminded her of when we spoke recently by Zoom from her home in the US. Rachel: "Yes, I remember it well, we had a ball on that little tour. I was mostly backing Molly on Guitar, but she very generously allowed me a few solo slots which were much appreciated. Of course we would love to be playing Ireland "live" in the real sense, but this on-line show will be the next best thing. Your country is so full of great fiddle players, we can't wait".

I also spoke with Christian via Zoom, and I asked him about his origins and influences. Like so many fiddlers, especially in America, Christian began in Bluegrass and Old Time bands, learning the standard repertoire, and of course, he still plays with The Jerry Douglas Band, which could be described as 'progressive Bluegrass based' music. Christian: "I love a challenge, and much as I enjoy the thrill of playing as part of a four or a five-piece band, it's the idea of being dependent on just the two of us that brings out the best in me, and I think I speak for Rachel as well" [Rachel nods in agreement]. Christian tends to stick mostly to fiddle for their live sets, but Rachel swaps between banjo, guitar and fiddle, giving the pair a wide variety of sounds to play with. Both Rachel and Christian are also talented singers and songwriters, giving them an added dimension which they utilise to great effect.



Christian and Rachel are both huge admirers of Scotland's Kris Drever, of folk trio Lau fame. Drever was the 2017 BBC Folk Singer of the Year Award recipient, and was Christian and Rachel's first choice as producer for their latest album. They say: "Lau and Drever have explored a new frontier for traditional music and musicians, and have made people listen to ancient music in a hyper-modern context, it's really incredible".

It was as a result of a visit to Scotland that both Rachel and Christian fell in love with the music of Kris Drever, or rather, his ears. This led to their spending ten days at Pentcaitland's Castlesound Studios, laying down the basic tracks for what became their *Generation Frustration* album. There's a clue in that title, as the new songs, all original, all or mostly, Baiman/Sedelmyer compositions, give voice to the Millennial Generation and their frustrations with politics, racism, privilege and poverty, as overseen largely by governments and politicians that have been voted into power by previous generations. There's a very catchy single called 'Anxious Annie', which deals with the fear of a country seen to be in crisis, and a song called 'Others Must Knock', which deals with privilege. There's hope here too, and it comes across in the title track when they ask, "I wonder if songs ever reach stubborn minds?" Along with great songs, there is impeccable playing

throughout this recording, and a serious attempt, successful in this listener's opinion, to blend the ideas of two singer-songwriters with the modern sounds of a great producer.

I am always advising music fans to see bands live, whenever possible, and I was about to offer my regular advice here! However, we live in different times right now, and what was to have been an actual live concert tour will now be an online experience. However, if the quality of my Zoom conversation with Rachel and Christian is anything to go by, and it was just a Zoom call, you, the listeners are in for a special treat!

When the definitive Encyclopedia of String Band Music comes to be written, the list will include many of the legendary pairings, like Emmylou Harris and Gram Parsons, Béla Fleck and Abigail Washburn, and Alison Krauss and Robert Plant, to name but a few. Vital and honoured members of this esteemed list will, also, no doubt, be a quiet-spoken pair, drawn together by their collective love for great songs and wonderful Instrumental interplay on stringed Instruments. They are Rachel Baiman and Christian Sedelmyer, known collectively as 10 String Symphony.

