

## Early Music: Three Poems by Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin,

My name is Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin, I am a poet, singer, teacher and guide from Ireland. These three poems are from my collection 'Early Music'. Each are a reflection on change, presence and inspiration in our lives. May they help you find the still point in your life today as we search for the Daily Good. Love from Ireland.

### Chinook Sanctuary

Having descended into silence,

I face a wooden structure.

The Sanctuary breathes before me,

so I enter with rain on my skin.

Completely empty

it welcomes the emptiness

in me, called to prayer

the easy prayer

of simple breathing.

This is how a church should be,

the joining of warm wood together  
making walls invisible, calling us  
to join in, not leave behind  
the life outside the door.

A church vulnerable  
to fire and water,  
a prayer vessel  
floating in the forest.

Mesmerized by amber  
tree lines ringing around me,  
I knew courageous prayers  
are said in places like this  
with wood, not stone listening.

I knew utter joy sweeps  
through places like these,  
a shelter, not an escape.  
Unfettered by damp rock and  
twisted metal hidden behind  
stained glass, lead lined  
but a living, breathing  
wild church, for  
wild prayers.

And though the air is still,

a silent gale rows through  
this singing space.

This silent cathedral  
among the moss.

My skin thirsts again  
for rain, my soul  
a falling acorn, a  
hazelnut floating.

Grant yourself refuge here,  
grasp these sacred seconds,  
and call your soul  
your own.

This poem, Chinook Sanctuary, is inspired by a small interfaith chapel on the grounds of The Whidbey Institute on Whidbey Island in the Pacific Northwest of America. I was struck by the fact that the vast majority of human prayer has historically been in wooden churches, long before the amazing stone monuments we have today.

First White Hair

The thought of your eyes

heather brown,  
make my pale blue  
eyes glisten, and  
I wonder how God  
chose which strand  
to grant your first white hair.

You make an artform  
of disappearance,  
and teach me that life  
is second nature.

I reach out at your request,  
finding the strand between  
my thumb and finger.  
Stillness while you wait  
for the pinch of the pluck.

Your eyes widen  
as I rip the strand  
from its root and realise  
you are determined  
to live, be free and  
love what you love  
unabashed, like a baby  
in the shade,  
gurgling.

Oh, most alive thing changing  
before my eyes, let me change  
with you, let your scalp be  
the loom of my life, and  
let your white hairs weave  
a seam of double stitching  
to bind us.

This silver strand  
I hold is momentous,  
for it is the last thread  
I shall ever pluck from your head.

And letting go of this white hair  
in the warm and shining sun,  
I watch it float upon the air  
and turn with time,  
and times begun.

This poem, *First White Hair*, is an ode to aging. The moment in which we cease trying to stem the tide of change in the ones we love and loving them even more in their changing. This acceptance of change in others allows us to embrace change in ourselves.

## Lough Gur / Plunged Through

Two lads cutting rushes  
plunged their sickle through it.

The hollow thud of bronze unearthed  
ceremonial shield and sun sign, offering  
to the Goddess Áine, who lives beneath Lough Gur,  
watching the surface.

My grandmother conceived by this shore  
and my mother was born.

But before that, Paddy and Nora skated  
on the frozen lough only for Nora to plunge through,  
pulled up by the hair by my grandfather  
after she had already given up.

Nora maintained she felt the Goddess Áine,  
dragging her down to her depths.

An enticing urge.

I can feel my grandmother sinking in this lake,  
letting go of her young love and her future family,  
and feeling that it could be  
good to leave this world.

Confident in her savedness.

This prehistoric space,

where each undulation is a hoard,  
and treasure lies among the rushes  
once a holy offering.

Lough Gur beneath Knockaney,  
Lough Gur beneath Knockadoon  
that birthed my mother,  
and spared hers.

This poem, Lough Gur/Plunged Through, entwines ancient Irish mythology and the legend of my own family history. My grandmother, Nora, was the only grandparent I ever met. Though she was a school teacher and not a superstitious woman, I was always struck at her reference to this near death experience in relation to the myth of Áine, one of the main goddesses of my home region of the Golden Vale in Ireland.