

# Francesca Simmons

**Madame Ceski**

[francescasimmons@hotmail.com](mailto:francescasimmons@hotmail.com)

[www.francescasimmons.com](http://www.francescasimmons.com)

@MadameCeski

Composer  
Performer  
Multi-instrumentalist



I am a Welsh artist creating work that combines performance, sound & installation. My practice centres around exploring Folk or traditional habits in a multi-disciplinary manner, & distilling that into transformative musical experiences. As a multi-instrumentalist performer my work has broadened from classical training into experimental formats including video, animation, visuals & costume. I work as a solo artist & collaborator.



# MUSICAL TIMELINE

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- **1981** – born in Wrexham **North Wales** and begin the **violin** peripatetically aged 8. By 17 I am playing with the semi-professional orchestra Sinfonia Cymru alongside county and national orchestras & learning at **RNCM**.
- **2000** – **BMus Hons course at University of Manchester**, concentrating on performance and dissertation. **1st Class Honours & Hargreaves Academic Prize** for my dissertation on Afro-American prison worksongs.
- **2004-2006** – **Postgraduate Diploma at TCM-Laban, London**.
- **2007-2011** – performing & teaching in London. Highlights include: commissioning, fixing and performing a piece for violin, chamber orchestra and tabla for **St. Paul's Sinfonia**. Performing with **The Heritage Orchestra and DJ Yoda**. Being a member of **BB6 DJ Tom Robinson's** 'favourite band of the noughties', Orphans&Vandals, touring UK & Europe. Recording and performing at **Abbey Road, Maida Vale, BBC Radio6 and ITV studios**. Being a **street performer** with Abraxas String Ensemble. Performing for immersive theatre company **Secret Cinema**. Being an ad hoc member of experimental female string group **Collectress**. Taking part in performance art works in venues such as the **Royal Academy of Arts** and the **National Portrait Gallery** in pieces 'Sirens', 'Facing the Carynx' and a recreation of Yves Klein's 'Blue'. Working closely with my musical ally and work-dep, **Quinta**.
- **2010-2011** – I join a traditional touring circus **Giffords Circus**. I perform in the 10-piece band for two seasons, working with musicians from all over Europe from an array of musical backgrounds.
- **2012** – I leave London and return to **Wales**. In the autumn I take part in **The Paper Cinema's** UK tour of **The Odyssey**. A 'unique form of live animation with music', the tour included shows, workshops & after-show discussions at venues such as BAC London, Contact Theatre Manchester, and Tobacco Factory Bristol. I am one of 3 onstage musicians performing a live soundtrack; I play violin, musical saw, BVs & foley.
- **2013** – I'm chosen as one of ten musicians from Wales to take part in a collaborative project based on Welsh Folk music, **10 Mewn Bws** ('10 In A Bus'). Appearances at the National Eisteddfod, Swm 2013, Radio Cymru, Hay Festival 2014 double bill with Cerys Matthews, Radio 2 Folk Award & releasing our debut album **10 Mewn Bws Presents...**
- Summer of 2013 I worked with **silent pianist** Stephen Horne for a recording of the Charlie Chaplin film 'The Cure', recorded violin for **Gruff Rhys** for his solo album **American Interior**, & began my cross-artform work with **Literature Wales** for the 'Dylan 100' workshops.
- during Autumn 2014 I undertook a tour with the Welsh theatre group **Dafydd James and Company** for the cult show 'Sue The Second Coming', selling out in Cardiff, London & Bristol. I performed in character as 'Violin Sue' playing musical saw, BVS, recorder & cello.
- from Jan-Spring 2014 I collaborated with North Wales artists from varying mediums in two different projects: **Golau** and **Mapio Madoc Creadigol**. My role was as performer, composer & arts facilitator.
- in July 2014 I was cast by IdeasTap to work with the **Rambert Dance London**, composing as part of their Merce Cunningham celebrations. I wrote a piece for **Piano and Boxing Gloves**, performed by Siwan Rhys & facilitated by Kate Whitley.
- during most of 2015 & early 2016 I toured internationally with **The Paper Cinema's 'Odyssey'**. Destinations included China, Taiwan, Brazil, Kuwait & Europe.
- Musarc's *Field Studies* course with Melanie Pappenheim (April 2015). Holly Stoppit's *Introduction to Clowning Course* (May 2016).
- in Jan 2016 I self-released my **debut album 'Palimpsest'**. The album has received airplay on Radio 3 Late Junction, Radio 6 Music Tom Robinson, BBC Radio Wales and Radio Cymru.
- during 2016-2017 I worked closely alongside **Mercury nominated folk artist Sam Lee**, touring his album 'Fade In Time' at various UK & European festivals, alongside a collaboration in July 2017 for the **PRS Foundation Hull City of Culture** celebrations, performed at Hull Minster & live on R3 at Southbank Centre London. During 2018 & 2020 I am one of his featured improvising artists for his **Singing With Nightingales** project, plus ad hoc work with his new album **Old Wow**.

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- in late Autumn 2016 & early 2017, I began co-writing music for **The Paper Cinema** alongside performing. Our first project 'Ghost Stories' was produced by **SoundUK** & toured rurally. In August 2017 our new show 'Macbeth' performed as part of the **Edinburgh International Showcase** & in Spring 2018 completed a run in London, Paris & Birmingham. I play violin, keys & foot controller, saw, BVs, phonofiddle, tenor recorder & autoharp. During Autumn 2020 we created the show into a film for cinema streaming in Taiwan & Hong Kong
  - Autumn 2018 I work alongside **Radiohead's Phillip Selway** and **Rambert Ballet** for a production of Merce Cunningham's 'Event' as improviser & performer, playing violin, loop pedals, saw, Prophet & xylosynth.
  - from late 2018 I have worked for award winning live animation company **1927** in their new production **Roots** (Spoleto, HOME Manc & Theatre de la Ville co-pro), visiting Charleston USA, Melbourne, Tunisia & Chile alongside UK touring. I helped devise music for their composer Lillian Henley, & I'm an onstage musical performer (violin, viola, saw, phonofiddle & recorders). I also remotely score ad hoc animations.
  - Summer 2019 violin & saw for Welsh folk-jazz-improv AV odyssey '**Cwmwl Tystion**' (**Witness**) alongside Rhodri Davies & Huw Warren, touring Wales & Café Oto.
  - lockdown courses – **Nonclassical's** Build Your Own Synth & Extended Violin Technique with Aisha Orazbayeva. Composition & Performance with **Emma Rice's Wise Children Theatre**.
  - During parts of lockdown 2020, co-composing remotely with **The Paper Cinema** for our new ecological show The Keys of Tobias Brown.
  - **Ty Cerdd's CoDi Abrofol/Experimental** with Siwan Rhys, Angharad Davies & Rhodri Davies. I composed & created a video graphic score based around the archives of Ty Cerdd (Aug-May 2021).
  - **Sound & Music – Covid 19 Composer's Award**. To create an AV piece Covid Ritual Music in part collaboration with Bricks Bristol, working with 3D visual artist Finn Dovey (Jan 2021). Video & costume now part of **Grayson Perry's Art Club** exhibition at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery (2022).
  - **Ty Cerdd's CoDi Mentoriaid/CoDi Mentors** – mentorship with award winning sound artist Kathy Hinde, exploring field recording techniques, DIY instruments, emergent soundscapes & graphic scores (Spring 2021).
  - **National Museum of Wales'** online magazine Cynfas: Art & Music Edition - commissioned to compose an experimental track Ouroboros based upon the Wrexham Tailor's Quilt (July 2021).
  - **WISWOS/HEAR SAY/British Council Collaborative Project**. Chosen as one of 3 female UK composers, to be paired with Taiwanese experimental sheng artist Li-Chin Li, for a collaborative track (Sept 2021.)
  - **Alan James Creative Bursary 2021/22 (EFDSS)** – to create an experimental AV songbook based upon seasonal customs & folk rituals of England.
  - **Arts Council England DYCP** funding – to research & develop sonic-tactile craft sound installation practice (Spring-Summer 2022).
  - **NMC Big Lockdown Survey** – my track King Blackbird is chosen as part of the compilation for SW region interactive listening map (May 2021).
  - **Resident of Pervasive Media Studio, Bristol** – a creative technologies studio in collaboration with Watershed, University of the West of England & University of Bristol (July 2022 onwards).
  - **Will Gregory & Adrian Utley's Arcadia** – part of the 9-piece band for this live film soundtrack premiere exploring rural folk Britain by BAFTA film maker Paul Wright. Violin, voice, synth & electric drumkit, venues include AIFA Festival Amsterdam & Barbican Centre (August 2022 – March 2023)
  - I currently work creatively with asylum seeker & refugee groups within Bristol (Dovetail Orchestra & Stitching Together craft group, Autumn 2022 onwards)
  - **Help Musicians UK Creative Collaboration & Develop Your Skills** funding – collaborating with archaeologists & a mentorship exploring multi-speaker spatial sound to explore stone circles (Autumn 2022).
  - Residency at Bricks, St. Anne's House Bristol - to create **Sound Henge**, an immersive & interactive tufted stone circle sound installation (Winter 2022).
  - Oppenheim-John Downes Memorial Award (Dec 2023).
  - EFDSS Micro-Bursary Award (Jan 2023).
  - **Vale of Glamorgan Festival & Tredegar Brass Band** - chosen as part of this project for non-standard scoring & music creation (Spring & Summer 2023).