



Helen Glavin *COMPOSER*

When I was a child *The Secret Garden* was one of my favourite books. It made a powerful impression on me, so writing the music for the opera has been very exciting.

From the age of 8 onwards I went to the opera many times, because my older sister was an opera singer. Sometimes I did not understand the story as it was perhaps in Italian or French, but I enjoyed the music anyway and was amazed by this world where everyone sang all the time.

My family comes from Ireland, so traditional Irish music is very important in my life and I have always been interested in the music of other countries.

The Secret Garden begins in India and in the opera the Indian influence weaves in and out of the story. I have used traditional Indian instruments:

- Sitar—a stringed instrument belonging to the lute family.
- Tabla-banya—drums which can be tuned to the key of the raga.
- Tanpoura—a drone instrument.

From the West I have used:

- Cello—from the string family.
- Flute—from the woodwind family.
- Keyboards.

From Africa I have used African drums and:

- Mbira—a metal on wood instrument played with thumbs.

Because the story of *The Secret Garden* was set in the Edwardian period I have kept that in mind in creating a musical atmosphere and style. When composing the music I would sit at my piano and play and sing. I rarely write notes down without first singing or playing them. Some composers write music straight from their heads onto manuscript! I may repeat a musical phrase 20-50-100 times or a melody may be right the first time. Composing music is a mixture of very hard work and magic!