

LIFESTYLE

Dominic Bradbury meets **Serena Foyle**, a music designer for firework displays who divides her time between her home in Edinburgh and her family's London apartment, where she lives with her artist brother William





THIS PAGE Serena (pictured on previous page) talks through the firework display with Andrew Wiggins (left and below), head designer of Jubilee Fireworks, with whom she collaborates on the production of elaborate musical displays. Serena discusses the music for a future event with hotelier Abraham Bejerano in his London hotel, The Arch (above). OPPOSITE FROM TOP Serena's soundtrack is linked to fireworks to dramatic effect. Carolside is her family's country house in Scotland. She discusses future projects with Katie Crichton-Stuart of CSA Events



Inventing your own profession may not be the easiest thing in the world, but it can offer a route to happiness. For Serena Foyle that has certainly proved to be true, with Serena shaping a job that she loves from thin air. Combining her love of music and event management, Serena has become a music designer for firework spectacles, crafting the bespoke soundtracks for pyromusical celebrations, displays and parties.

The first spark came during preparations for her own twenty-first birthday party, which she hosted at the family's country home, Carolside, in Scotland. Her parents, Anthony and Rose Foyle, had generously organised a fireworks display for Serena and her sister, Antonia. But when it came to the music, Serena was a little disappointed by the lack of attention to detail offered by the firework-display team.

'I told them the songs that we wanted and they said they'd put it all together, which sounded wonderful,' says Serena. 'But then they showed me the soundtrack and it didn't make any sense. It was all very strange – particularly where they had cut the music. I wanted it to be right, so I ended up doing the music with them and then realised that there was actually a niche for this.' ▸



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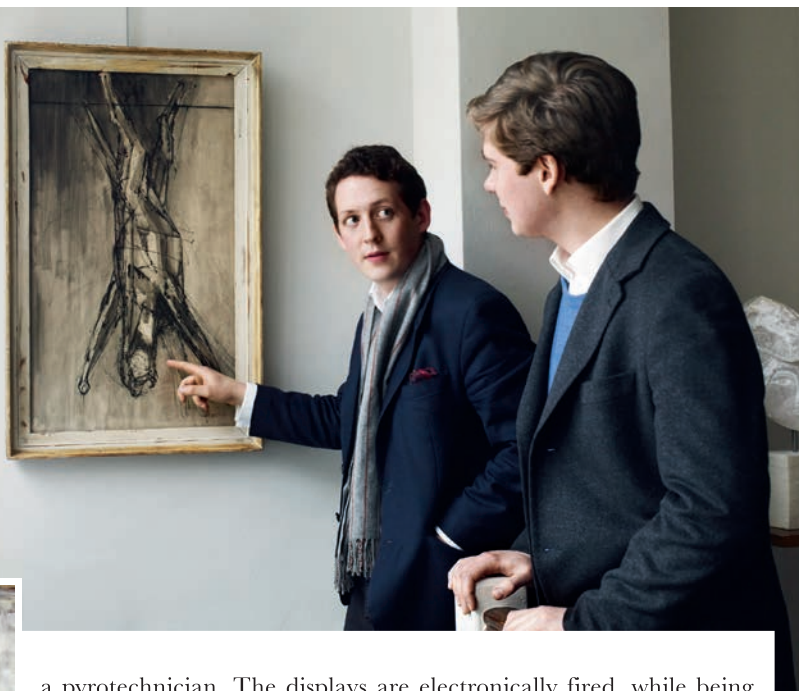
Serena teamed up with respected pyrotechnical company Jubilee Fireworks and its head designer Andrew Wiggins in 2012. Together they have collaborated on many events – both private and public – across the UK and abroad, including winning a first prize in the International Pyromusical Competition in the Philippines. Serena has found not just a positive response to her work but also a growing interest in the fusion of music and fireworks.

‘When you watch an amazing film with a great soundtrack, it really absorbs you,’ says Serena, who is currently planning an event at the Festival of Fireworks at Catton Hall, Derbyshire, in early September. ‘It should be the same with fireworks – you should be completely taken in by the experience. It’s all about the arrangement, the production and the choreography of the music and creating a soundtrack for the fireworks. Each time it’s completely different because there is such a wide variety of music that you can use.’

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CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Serena works with musicians Ed Begley and Will Harvey of Archivist at Soho’s Toolshed music studio. Rupert Newman, who designs image projections for events, meets Serena at Gallery Mess to talk about future projects. Music for displays is edited digitally. Serena chooses sheet music at the ‘family’ London bookshop – Foyles on Charing Cross Road





a pyrotechnician. The displays are electronically fired, while being synchronised to the soundtrack.

'I love to be given free rein with the music as much as possible, so I can create a magical experience that will be a surprise, even to the client. Each firework is linked to the firing system by tiny little wires and the sound and firework systems are connected together, so that once the button is pressed, off it all goes. Firing systems have really progressed in recent years so we can now create incredibly accurate performances.'

Making your own way in the world with an entrepreneurial and creative spirit seems to come naturally to Serena's family. Her great grandfather founded the independent Foyles bookshop, which remains a thriving family-owned business, with a new flagship store freshly opened on Charing Cross Road. Serena's father was intimately involved with running the business for many years and it is now ▷

CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW Serena and her brother William have coffee on their balcony. William sketches at his studio off the King's Road. Many of his paintings are portraits. He meets gallerist Céline Gauld of Gallery 8 in Duke Street, St James's; he is exhibiting there next year. William visits friend and gallerist Matthew Travers at Piano Nobile, the gallery Matthew runs with his father in W11





ALL PICTURES Both Serena and William use the family flat in Cadogan Square as their London base. Serena studied music at university, and often plays the grand piano at the flat (above). A portrait of Serena, her sister Antonia and William as children, by artist Dick Smyly, hangs in Serena's bedroom (top right and reflected, below left). A collection of ceramic vegetables by Lady Aberdeen (below right) makes an attractive display



headed by her uncle, Christopher Foyle, and still continues to expand.

Serena's brother William has also followed his heart and forged a successful career as an artist, with the support of his parents and family. An initial focus on portraiture has evolved with a London exhibition planned at Gallery 8 in St James's in June 2015.

'I didn't decide one day that I wanted to be a painter,' says William. 'It's something that I have always done and love. It gradually became an obsession and is the only thing I have ever wanted to do. Even as a child, I was always painting rather than doing other things. And I have had a lot of freedom to explore my work, so I have been very lucky. There have been a lot of self-portraits, although hopefully I am not self-obsessed. It's about painting the human figure, but now I am working less from life and more from the mind.'

William's studio is a modest space near the World's End just off the King's Road. Although he still keeps a painting studio at Carolside and spends time in Scotland now and again, he really considers himself a London artist.

'I am very fond of the light up in Scotland and I like being in the countryside,' he says. 'But I find the city very invigorating. And I have a lot of work to do for my next exhibition. It will represent two or three years of work – the longer the better. I want it to be the best show that it can possibly be.'

One of the great benefits of William's studio is that it is just a walk away from the family's London home on Cadogan Square and makes for an easy commute in the company of his lurcher dog, Louis. The apartment is also a London base for Serena, who divides her time between here and her home in Edinburgh, which she shares with her new husband, Daniel Balfour, who works in the family property business in Scotland.

'I studied music at Edinburgh University, so I know the city well,' says Serena. 'I am up and down between London and Scotland pretty ▽

much every week or every other week. And Cadogan Square is lovely – it's central but very quiet for London. It's the best of both worlds.'

Cadogan Square is also home to Serena's grand piano, which takes up one corner of the generously sized sitting room; a number of William's paintings hang upon the walls. Serena did study the harp at one point, but the piano has always been her first love. It fits in with a passion for music shared by her parents and Serena's wider family.

'I have always been a soloist, but I like the idea of collaborating with friends and other musicians on firework events,' she says. 'In the future, composition might be a possibility or collaborative work with other composers. It's certainly something I'm interested in, but I think the focus on creating crafted soundtracks synchronised with the fireworks has already taken things to a completely new level. It's very exciting and I have found this niche in the market that I love. With fireworks, you have an entire sky to fill and you need a big and special sound' □

Foyle Fireworks: 020-7235 3766; www.foylefireworks.com

William Foyle: www.williamfoyle.com

RIGHT William makes some preparatory sketches at a desk in the Cadogan Square flat. **BELOW** One of his early self portraits hangs above the chimneypiece in the drawing room, offset by a mixture of traditional and more modern paintings, as well as several eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fans; Louis the lurcher takes up residence beneath his master's portrait

