

‘I feel like I was born here’

Doria Susi came to Ireland for love - but has since grown in her passion for the arts and culture, she tells **DOMNICA LAZAR**



DORIA SISU'S NEW poetry book Thursday to Wednesday was warmly welcomed by Romanian and Moldavian residents in Ireland during its recent launch at the New Communities Partnership (NCP) in Dublin.

The event was organised by the Itaca Organisation Dublin and hosted by its president, and Doria's partner, Viorel Ploesteanu, who has been fully supportive of her writing since they met in 2011.

Doria found her passion for both writing and painting in her early teens. After graduating from Transilvania University of Braşov in Romania, her first poetry collection, *Bones*, was published in 2009, followed by *Incursion* in the Greek-Latin Novel in 2010. She has published six books to date, and also appears in the first two volumes of prose collection *Swallow the Waste: Memories of Communism*, published in 2014 and 2016 respectively.

The gifted writer and artist also shares her paintings on a Facebook page named Doria's Art. Many of her paintings are donated as gifts to her friends for special occasions, she says.

Doria and Viorel meet online through a literary website on January 2011, and fell instantly in love. Viorel had recently moved to Dublin with his then 16-year-old son Mihai at the time, so he and Doria build up their relationship through video and online chats.

In March 2011, Viorel declared his love to Doria on Romanian radio and asked her to marry him. She accepted.

"I had to come with my daughter [to Ireland to be with] a man who I never have seen

before. It was the best decision I have ever made," she says six years on.

Arriving at Dublin Airport in the spring of 2011, Doria recalls being impressed by people's welcoming attitude, which made her feel straight away that she belonged. The very next day, walking in a park near her new home, she felt the same smiles and warm greetings from the Irish people.

"I feel like I was born here and here I want to die," she remembers saying to herself.

ONCE SETTLED together as a family, Doria and Viorel started to work towards promoting Romanian culture in Ireland. Their first project was the foundation of a Romanian language library *Fanus Neagu*; Viorel donated 1,500 books, Doria 1,000 and many were donated by their friends around the world, bringing the amount of nearly 3,000 altogether.

Their next endeavour was starting *Onix* magazine, which ran for a couple of years, before they teamed up with Emanuel Pope from England to found *The Promotion Centre Itaca* in November 2012.

In January 2013, the centre started a magazine also named *Itaca*, aiming to promote writers and artists in the Romanian diaspora all around the world. From 2017, *Itaca* magazine expanded into the *Itaca Organisation Dublin*, a cultural centre in Dublin registered with the NCP. The organisation and its projects are completely member-driven; they are not affiliated with any political, governmental or other organisation.

The space they run is not

only for promoting Romanian arts and culture – is also a place for children from Romania, and the Irish-born children of Romanian parents, to make friends and discover their heritage as they grow up in an English-speaking country.

"They think in English, speak in English, it's hard for them to write in the Romanian language," says Doria. "But they are still our children."

The centre also holds its own 'book of the year' awards, held annually since 2015. And to cement its intercultural efforts, every issue of the magazine features space for one Irish writer. This spirit of collaboration and integration with Irish poets and writers was largely expressed in the book *Blackjack*, published in the summer of 2016, which collects the work of 20 Irish poets translated into Romanian by volunteers.

Doria describes the collaboration as fascinating — a sentiment echoed at the book launch by one of its contributors, John W Sixton, who said: "Now I have to find a Romanian speaker to read my poetry!"

AS FOR HER own writing, Doria finds inspiration in the wet and grey Irish weather. "The rain brings me in a state of numbness, it withdraws me in my inner soul and that is when I become free of my body and write whatever I feel.

"I think that Ireland has brought with its rainy days many of the greatest Irish poets in the world," adds Doria, whose dream is to buy a small house in quiet place in Ireland to continue with her passion. ■